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Dissertation

**LURELLE GUILD'S HISTORICAL MODERNISM:
AMERICANA AND INDUSTRIAL DESIGN**

by

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ABSTRACT

Lurelle Van Arsdale Guild (1898–1985) was an author and illustrator of interior decorating literature; a collector of Americana; a pioneering industrial designer; and an amateur architect. Both a popular antiquarian and a modernist, his diverse interests often intermingled in his industrial designs. This dissertation uses Guild's multifaceted and at times contradictory career, which lasted from the 1920s to the 1960s, to explore how modernism drew upon the legacy of colonial American design to create objects that appeared contemporary but were grounded in tradition. This study positions Guild as the archetypal "historical modernist" while creating a larger framework for exploring the intersection of historicism and modernism in American design.

The dissertation's introduction and chapter one explore the stylistic plurality that existed in the 1920s and 1930s and introduce the term "historical modernism" as a way to define the aesthetic and ideological overlaps between the era's dominant styles: the Colonial Revival and modernism. Chapters two and three focus on Guild's early career as an author and illustrator promoting traditional taste. The persona he created of the "Itinerant Antiquer" reflected his interest in early American decorative arts and architectural elements,

which he and his wife collected and installed at Milestone Village, their property in Connecticut. Chapter four looks at how Guild's personal collection informed his work as an industrial designer. In the 1930s, Guild became a leading figure in the nascent field of industrial design. He drew upon his knowledge of Americana to create objects that appeared modern but were informed by the past and reflected the ambivalence many American consumers felt towards modernism. Chapter five explores the postwar years when Guild began to retreat from modernism. Instead, he focused on historicist design projects and became an amateur architect, building a series of historical fantasy houses.

Most histories of American modernism have disproportionately focused on forward-looking designs. This dissertation uses the work and biography of Lurelle Guild to reintroduce the idea of aesthetic pluralism into the historiography of modernist design and explores the legacy of the Colonial past on modernism in America.