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Dear Educator,

The Art Deco Society of New York (ADSNY) is delighted to present *Documenting Deco* to you and your students, a free outreach program for New York City students in either classroom based, extended day, or community-based settings.

Students in New York City live in neighborhoods rich with residential and public buildings that are examples of Art Deco, a unique architectural style from the 1920s and 1930s with stunning façades, ornamentation, and interiors.

Documenting Deco provides students with the tools to understand, appreciate and take pride in their surroundings; to discover Art Deco gems in their own neighborhoods; to learn to see and understand the built environment with new appreciation.

The program includes a photography component, in which students are challenged to find and photograph Art Deco buildings in their neighborhoods and throughout New York City.

Documenting Deco consists of:

- A series of three lesson plans plus one optional lesson for use in classrooms and community based settings
- A PowerPoint presentation
- Reproducible handouts for students
- A video featuring Richard Berenholtz, architect, photographer and author of *New York Deco*, a book highlighting Art Deco architectural photography with tips on taking architectural photographs
- Links to the Art Deco Society of New York's website artdeco.org which includes:
 - Enrichment materials about the history and culture of the 1920s and 1930s
 - The New York Art Deco Registry & Map of Art Deco buildings in the five boroughs which students can use to locate examples of Art Deco buildings near their school and in their own neighborhoods.

Instructors are encouraged to work with the ADSNY teaching artist to adapt these materials to the specific needs of their students, curriculum, and time constraints. With an ADSNY team member, instructors should select those materials and lessons that best fit their curriculum and schedule. This program is adaptable to your needs. Just as New York is a melting pot of many cultures, so too is the Art Deco style, an eclectic blending of influences from many cultures.

Documenting Deco is a perfect way to expose students to the richness and beauty of New York City's multicultural heritage as expressed in its architecture, landmarks, and culture. The program will encourage students to learn how to see and appreciate the visual world and to take increasing ownership as caretakers of their own neighborhoods and surroundings.

We look forward to seeing examples of your students' work in *Documenting Deco*! For more information on the materials in this program please contact us at Info@ArtDeco.org. or call us a (212) 679-DECO (3326)

DESCRIBING DECO

Activity One Lesson Plan

Purpose

- Introduce participants to Art Deco architecture
- Explore the context and history of Art Deco architecture in New York City and around the world
- Examine the Art Deco aesthetic in other areas of design

Implementation Notes

As it is likely most of the participants will not have any working knowledge of the Art Deco era, nor the features of Art Deco architecture, decoration or fashion, these lessons are designed to provide a basic knowledge, basic Art Deco vocabulary, and tools to recognize some of the most identifiable features of Art Deco architecture and design.

Background Knowledge and Materials

Art Deco is an aesthetic style that became popular after World War 1, and flourished throughout the 1920s and 1930s. While the style extended to many elements of design (clothing, graphics, jewelry, advertising, etc.), it was also a popular architectural style that produced many famous buildings in New York City during its heyday. It is a style that combined the arts with technology, blending modern and avant-garde aesthetics with ancient and exoticized decorative elements from many global cultures. Art Deco was also known for its use of luxurious materials and aesthetics, including new metals and plastics.

Presentation Notes

Guide participants through the presentation, taking note of the following:

- Added information and context are present throughout the presentation in the notes below each relevant slide.
- During warm-up questions, leave presentation on the question slide and take note of their answers.
- Allow time for participants to ask questions between slides, and provide additional context or information about images when relevant.
- While discussing famous Art Deco skyscrapers in New York City, instructors can take time to discuss how important the style was for the city and the historical context of its era.
- Participants should fill out their vocabulary worksheets during the presentation; during this section, allow additional time for them to finish their work before moving to the next term.
- While discussing Deco's global influences, emphasize that while the design style was very influential in New York City, it also has a large presence in cities and countries throughout the world.
- Throughout the presentation, note that key terms and vocabulary featured on the accompanying worksheet are highlighted in red.

Adaptations

Consider the following optional adaptations when adjusting lessons for time, age level, and participant interest.

- Remove or add more example slides to demonstrate common design motifs, influences, or international examples.
- Require older participants to fill out 2 of the 3 boxes in the vocabulary worksheet, instead of just 1.
- Ask participants to use ADSNY's Art Deco Registry and Map to find local examples of Art Deco architecture as a homework assignment.

Presentation Steps

Warm-Up

Open with introductory questions for participants: what do architects do? What kinds of factors do they need to consider when designing a new building? Keep a list of participant responses on a whiteboard, smartboard, etc.

Instruction

Instructor will use the PowerPoint to guide participants through the history of Art Deco architecture, its features and aesthetic components, global examples, and its presence in other design areas. Note that the presentation coordinates with participant worksheets, so allow time for writing and questions throughout.

Activity

Throughout instruction, participants will follow along on their guided vocabulary worksheets, filling in basic definitions and examples as prompted. These worksheets contain three boxes for each new term; these are labeled "definition," "example," and "picture." Participants will fill in at least one box for each term, choosing the method which helps them understand each concept the best.

Wrap-Up

Allow participants time to finish their guided vocabulary worksheets and ask any remaining questions after concluding the primary sections of the PowerPoint. Conclude lesson with the final slides, which demonstrate other examples of the design. Invite student discussion into the familiarity of such examples, and ask them to share other examples from their memory and knowledge.

Materials

Instructor materials available at ArtDeco.org/Learn:

- PowerPoint presentation
- Guided vocabulary worksheets
- Pencils/pens

Name: _____ Date: _____

VOCABULARY OF ART DECO ARCHITECTURE

Throughout today’s presentation, follow along with the following Art Deco vocabulary words. Each term contains a box for a definition, an example, or a picture. Complete at least one box for each term.

	Definition	Example	Picture
Architecture			
Architect			
Massing			
Vertical Accentuation			
Parapet			
Sculptural Relief			
Spandrels			
Terracotta			
Avant-Garde			

DOCUMENTING DECO

Activity Two Lesson Plan

Purpose

- Encourage participants to examine buildings more creatively and in more detail
- Demonstrate the breadth and diversity of Art Deco architecture across New York City
- Allow participants to gain new skills in photography
- Reinforce knowledge about Art Deco's architectural aesthetics and history through a practical application of that knowledge

Implementation Notes

"Documenting Deco" is a walking trip to see and photograph details of a local Art Deco building, and as such requires some prior organization and planning time. First and foremost, the instructor must identify an appropriate building for the trip. This building should ideally be within 10-15 minutes walking distance so that groups can visit and return within a reasonable timeframe. Instructors can use ADSNY's New York Art Deco Registry & Map to locate Art Deco buildings in their desired neighborhood, either by zooming in on relevant areas or by entering appropriate search terms. The map can be found here: <https://www.artdeco.org/old-new-york-art-deco-registry-map>

Instructors should also decide upon a list of "scavenger hunt" items for participants to look for and photograph in the building. These items can include specific design motifs (parapets, geometric patterns, etc.) as well as overall goals for the photograph (a full building shot, just an entrance, etc.). Examples of these items can be found in Appendix A. Plan on tailoring a class's specific list to whichever building they are photographing.

Background Knowledge and Materials

There are many resources online about photography techniques and insights that may be beneficial to both instructors and participants. For example, Richard Berenholtz (renowned architectural photographer and author of *New York Deco*) has a video called *Photography with Richard Berenholtz* that offers insights into the techniques and principles that inform his work. Instructors may choose to show this video as a warm-up or homework assignment prior to this project.

Instruction Notes

During the walk, ensure that participants are following basic safety guidelines by crossing streets together at safe times, staying together as a group, and remaining to one edge of the sidewalk. Find a safe place, preferably with a wide sidewalk, to stop and spread out for the actual photography portion of the trip.

Adaptation Notes

If an in-person trip is not possible, consider the following adaptations to complete this project as a homework assignment.

- Provide participants with a list of Art Deco buildings nearby that they can visit on their own time. Instructors can use the New York Art Deco Registry & Map to locate such places.
- For older participants with more freedom and ability to travel, open the possibility to photograph any building they can easily access in the city.
- Provide participants with a list of "scavenger hunt" items to photograph, much like instructors would for an in-person class.
- Participants will then take photos outside of school, and bring them in on the assignment's due date.
- If this project takes place as a homework assignment, instructors can choose to offer ADSNY's bonus lesson "Displaying Deco" as a third in-person lesson.
- In either version of the trip, in-person or as a follow-up assignment, participants can work individually or in small groups, depending on the needs and preferences of the group.

Presentation Steps

Warm-Up

Tell participants a little bit about the history and context of their destination today. This information can include background knowledge about the building's neighborhood, as well.

Instruction

Ensure that each participant or group has a copy of their scavenger hunt items, and explain that they will be photographing an Art Deco building today. Prepare participants for the walk by gathering supplies, then walk with the class to their designated location.

Activity

Once the group arrives at the building, participants will use their lists to photograph it. Participants should take at least one photo for every scavenger hunt item, paying attention to both the building's overall form as well as its details and decorations. Encourage participants to be creative in their photography, using angles and light to their advantage.

Participants should always be mindful of their own and others' safety during the exercise; refrain from standing in the street or blocking nearby entrances.

Wrap-Up

Instructors should give participants a 5-minute warning before returning.

Materials

Instructor materials available at ArtDeco.org/Learn:

- Smartphone or camera
- Scavenger hunt list (Appendix A)



APPENDIX A

Sample Scavenger Hunt Items, “Documenting Deco”

Art Deco Architectural Features

Take a photo that shows...

- Geometric patterns
- Sculptural relief
- Spandrels
- Parapets
- Terracotta decoration
- A flat roof
- A roof with stepped levels
- Decoration influenced by avant-garde art
- Decoration influenced by Ancient Egypt

Overall Design Features

Take a photo that shows...

- The building’s overall massing
- Vertical accentuation in a building
- An entrance
- A window

Note: these sample sets are examples only. Feel free to use, modify, or change them to best fit your class! If instructors know which building students will be photographing, feel free to add specific features or designs unique to that structure they wish students to find.

DECODING DECO

Activity Three Lesson Plan

Purpose

- Encourage participants to thoughtfully reflect on their own photographs and artistic choices
- Build critical observation skills by identifying Art Deco elements in peer work
- Practice giving and receiving constructive feedback in a respectful and supportive setting
- Strengthen visual storytelling by considering composition, light, and design details

Implementation Notes

This lesson should take place after “Documenting Deco,” once participants have created photographs to share. Instructors should ask participants to select 1–2 of their best images in advance and prepare them either as digital files for projection or as printed copies for display. At the start of the session, review critique guidelines and model how to give constructive, respectful feedback. Organize the critique so each participant presents at least one photo, receives peer responses, and has time to reflect. Instructors should guide discussion to ensure balance, inclusivity, and productivity, closing with a short, written reflection from participants on what they learned..

Background Knowledge and Materials

The critique process is a central part of learning in the arts. It provides participants with the opportunity to practice close observation, reflect on their own creative choices, and learn from the perspectives of others. In the context of Decoding Deco, critique helps participants develop a stronger understanding of how Art Deco elements—such as geometry, symmetry, line, and decorative detail—can be emphasized through photography. By engaging in structured feedback, students strengthen both their technical skills and their ability to communicate ideas about visual storytelling.

Basic materials may include printed participant photos, poster board, cork boards, magnets, or tape for display, as well as pens and paper for note-taking and reflection. For digital critiques, ensure access to a projector, screen, or online collaboration tool.

Instruction Notes

Begin by reviewing the critique guidelines with participants, highlighting the use of “I notice...” and “I wonder...” statements. Display the selected photos and have each participant present one image with a short explanation, followed by peer feedback. Facilitate the discussion by prompting observations on composition, lighting, and Art Deco details, and ensure everyone participates. Conclude with a whole-group reflection or a short, written takeaway on what was learned.

If time allows, close the session with a short whole-group reflection or ask a few volunteers to share what they learned from the critique. Encourage participants to record a takeaway in writing before leaving the session.

Adaptation Notes

- This lesson can be adapted for both in-person and virtual settings. For in-person sessions, printed photographs allow for physical display and movement around the room. If printing is not possible, images can be projected digitally. For virtual sessions, an online platform can be used for sharing and critique.
- In-person: Display printed photos on poster board, cork boards, or tables for walk-around viewing.
- Digital/in-person: Project images in a slide deck or from a shared folder.
- Virtual: Use online tools such as Google Slides, Padlet, or a class folder for uploads and group discussion.
- Group size: Small groups allow deeper feedback for each participant; large groups may focus on one image per participant.

Presentation Steps

Warm-Up

Begin with a quick discussion by asking participants what they noticed while photographing Art Deco buildings or details. After this warm-up, show two or three iconic Art Deco photographs and invite the class to consider what makes each image effective. Guide the conversation toward ideas of composition, the use of light and shadow, and the choice of subject.

Instruction

Establish the parameters for the assignment by explaining that participants will be sharing and discussing the photographs they created during Documenting Deco. Review the critique guidelines and then display the selected images. Each participant should present one photograph with a brief explanation, followed by peer feedback. Guide the discussion toward composition, lighting, and Art Deco details, ensuring everyone takes part. Conclude with a brief group reflection or written takeaway on what students learned from the critique.

Activity

Students begin by selecting one or two photographs from their shoot that they feel best represent Art Deco. Before starting, the instructor should briefly review the critique guidelines, reminding students to be specific in their feedback, to remain respectful, and to use “I notice...” and “I wonder...” statements. Each student’s chosen photo is then displayed, either on screen or as a print, and the student offers a short explanation of their choice. Peers respond with observations about composition, line, light, and detail, ask questions about artistic decisions, and suggest possible improvements. Throughout the process, the instructor facilitates discussion to ensure that feedback remains constructive, balanced, and inclusive.

Wrap-Up

After the critique, bring the group together for a short discussion about what they learned from seeing one another’s work and hearing different perspectives. Ask participants to write a brief reflection identifying one strength in their own photography and one area they would like to improve. Conclude with closing comments that highlight themes from the session—such as strong use of geometry, interesting lighting choices, or opportunities to explore new angles—and encourage participants to carry these insights into their next photographs.

Materials

Instructor materials available at ArtDeco.org/Learn:

- Participant photographs (printed or digital)
- Critique guidelines handout
- Paper and pens for reflections



APPENDIX A

Decoding Deco: Critique Guidelines

Critique is an important part of learning in the arts. It helps us reflect on our own work, see new possibilities through others' perspectives, and strengthen our skills as photographers. Use the following guidelines to share feedback in a respectful, constructive, and thoughtful way.

Guidelines

- Be specific: Explain what you notice about composition, lighting, or subject matter.
- Be respectful: Focus on the work, not the person.
- Balance your feedback: Point out strengths as well as areas for improvement.
- Use 'I notice...' to describe observations.
- Use 'I wonder...' to ask questions or invite reflection.

Helpful Prompts

- I notice...
- I wonder...
- One thing that works really well in this photo is...
- One suggestion I have is...

Reflection Questions

- What is one strength in your work?
- What is one thing you want to improve after today's critique?
- How did someone else's photo inspire you to think differently about your own work?

DISPLAYING DECO

Activity Four Bonus Lesson Plan

Purpose

- Create a curated exhibit of photography from “Documenting Deco” with contextualizing captions
- Deepen participants’ understanding of Art Deco’s presence in local architecture
- Explore skills related to curation and interpretation of architectural photography

Implementation Notes

This lesson should follow “Documenting Deco,” which can either take place as an in-person session or a follow-up assignment.

Instructors should prepare physical copies of participants’ photography ahead of time. Ask participants to select and send their best photos, and print these using a pharmacy photo printing service, or else with a high quality printer. Participants will physically display their photos during this project, and a variety of different materials and methods can be used to achieve this (physically attaching photos to poster board or poster sized paper, pinning them to cork boards, using magnets to secure them to whiteboards, etc.). Instructors should coordinate ahead of time to see what materials are available and decide on a best course of action. See Adaptation and Materials notes for more information.

Background Knowledge and Materials

As part of their curated display, participants will write captions for their photographs, explaining the shots themselves as well as appropriate context about Art Deco’s history and aesthetics. They will therefore use knowledge gained in previous “Describing Deco” and “Designing Deco” sessions.

Participants should also include basic background information about the building they photographed, including the year it was built, its architect, and any other relevant history. Instructors may choose to prepare that information ahead of time, or else provide participants with resources for performing their own basic research. ADSNY’s New York Art Deco Registry & Map is a great resource in this regard: <https://www.artdeco.org/old-new-york-art-deco-registry-map>

Instruction Notes

Instructor should begin by explaining the guidelines for this activity: participants will create a curated display of their photographs by arranging pictures with accompanying captions that explain their work. Help distribute materials, ensuring that each participant group has their physical photographs and any needed supplies for putting them together.

While participants are working, the instructor can provide help and answer any questions. Ask participants to finish their projects with enough time left in the period for groups to circulate around the other exhibits. Instructors should adjust that time based on group size and the number of exhibits, but can aim for 10-20 minutes.

Adaptation Notes

Consider the following optional adaptations when adjusting the lesson for time and participant interest:

- Implementation of this project will likely differ from each group. Always coordinate to decide upon the best method for making exhibits. For example, groups with ample whiteboard space may decide to display photos and captions with magnets instead of using separate supplies. Others may have leftover posterboard or papers from other projects that can be reused. In other cases, the instructor can bring display materials with them.
- Supply participants with visual examples of photography exhibits as inspiration for their own layouts.
- As an optional wrap-up or homework activity, instructors can ask participants to write a brief reflection about the other exhibits they toured during the gallery walk.

Presentation Steps

Warm-Up

This lesson contains no wholly separate warm-up activity. Instead, give participants the physical copies of the photographs that they submitted. If participants worked in groups to take pictures during “Documenting Deco,” they should work with that same group on the exhibit. If participants took photos individually, divide the class into small groups; each group will then collaboratively choose which photos to display from each of their collections. Ensure each participant group has the other materials they need to begin.

Instruction

Establish the parameters for the assignment by explaining that participants will be creating a classroom gallery walk by turning their Art Deco photographs into a curated exhibit. They should select their favorite pictures, physically arrange them, then write and attach captions to provide context. While participants are working, circulate among groups to provide any needed assistance.

Activity

Participants will spend the majority of the period working on their exhibits. Working collaboratively, participants should agree how to arrange and display their pictures. Each group will also create captions for the photos and overall exhibit where needed. The captions should contextualize the pictures within Art Deco history and design. Their text can include basic history of the building or buildings in question, descriptions of the different Art Deco forms featured, and any other desired language. If time allows, groups can add any other desired decoration to their exhibit.

Wrap-Up

To culminate the project, participants will participate in a gallery walk to view the completed exhibits of all the participants. Allow groups several minutes at each station as they rotate through the classroom.

Materials

- Printed photographs from “Documenting Deco”
- Paper for captions
- Pencils/pens
- Options for exhibit displays: posterboard, poster sized paper, cork boards, whiteboards
- Options for attaching photographs: tape, glue sticks, staples, pushpins, magnets