Birth of the Cool: California Art, Design, and Culture at Midcentury

Guides to the Exhibition

ADDISON GALLERY OF AMERICAN ART

Exhibition organized by the Orange County Museum of Art

ADDISON GALLERY OF AMERICAN ART EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
Phillips Academy, Main Street, Andover, MA
Julie Bernson, Director of Education & Amy Freedberg, Education Fellow
Contact 978.749.4037 or afreedberg@andover.edu

FREE GROUP TOURS for up to 55 students are available on a first-come, first-served basis: TUESDAY-FRIDAY, 10AM-4PM

PUBLIC MUSEUM HOURS:
TUESDAY-SATURDAY 10AM-5PM & SUNDAY 1-5PM
What makes it COOL?

What does the word cool mean?

How can a chair, a song, a house, or a painting be cool?

Can something that was cool years ago still be cool today?

What makes something remain cool through the ages?

In the late 1950s and 1960s, various artists, musicians, architects, filmmakers, and designers in California contributed to the development of a unique cool style that can all be seen—and heard—in this dynamic, interactive exhibition. Considered cool at the time that they were made, some remain in style and have inspired other cool things in the decades that followed.

But, what is the style of cool?

How can cool be understood and described, and how is it different in a painting, a song, a building, or a chair?
Cool PAINTING

Do you think this painting is cool? Why or why not?

How does the arrangement of shapes make this painting cool?

What about the colors make this painting cool?

Cool MUSIC

You will have the opportunity to listen to a sampling of jazz music while in the exhibition. For a preview, you can listen to Miles Davis’ Moon Dreams from the album Birth of the Cool (available from iTunes and on CD) – or songs by other musicians/singers such as Chet Baker, June Christy, Ornette Coleman, and Art Pepper.

What about the rhythm and pattern of notes makes the music cool?

How do the instruments make this music cool?

Do you consider this music cool? Why or why not?
Cool FURNITURE and DESIGN

How do the lines and shapes of this chair make it cool?
What about the materials and colors make it cool?
Can you imagine sitting in this chair? How would you feel?

Charles and Ray Eames, RAR rocking chair, c. 1950, Boyd Collection

What is COOL?

What do these objects from the exhibition have in common?

How is a cool painting similar/different from a cool song, toy, or dance?

Why do you think these things from the 1950s and 1960s are still considered cool today?
What is cool **NOW?**

Who decides?

What is **cool** to YOU?

How long do things stay **cool**?

Takashi Murakami, *Flower Ball (2-O), Kindergarten*, 2007, acrylic and silver gold leaf on canvas mounted on board, 39-1/2 in. diameter

Bratz™ dolls

Image for Flo Rida, "Low" from Poe Boy Music Group/Atlantic Records

Lava® lamp
Explore a Cool Element

Choose a cool color and a shape—a yellow circle, a blue stripe, a red crescent, etc.—and incorporate it into a variety of projects.

Make a painting, build a model piece of furniture, design a house, write a song!

Use your color and shape in different ways to explore how these elements can appear in different media to create a cool style.

Your Cool Painting

Artists from this time period used bold shapes, colors, and lines in different combinations to create their cool paintings.

Using a variety of shapes and lines in different colors, create a cool painting or a collage with cut out paper, felt, fabric, etc.

Put on some cool jazz tunes while you work!

Design a Cool Room

Design a room using your own unifying cool style.

Furnish your room with cool furniture made with cool materials—and create cool art for the walls.

Make a model for your room, and don’t forget a cool playlist in the background.
A Cool TIMELINE Activity

What happened in 1993?

January 20:
Bill Clinton is sworn in as the 42nd President of the United States.

February 19:
Swedish band Ace of Base releases their #1 hit single *The Sign*.

What political and historical events took place in the year 1993?
What were some of the trends in popular culture?
What were the cool toys, movies, music, and television shows?
A TIMELINE of one year...

June 11: Jurassic Park shows in theaters.

The World Wide Web, just two years old, grows by approximately 341,000 percent.

Mighty Morphin Power Rangers becomes a popular line of toys and television series.

Your Cool Timeline

What happened in the year you were born?
What political and historical events took place in that year?
What was cool in popular culture?

Research some of the events and trends from the year of your birth.
Make your own timeline with images and text—and perhaps even music.
The ideas and questions in this Guide are intended to simulate the teaching approach of the Addison education staff. All group visits are organized according to the specific grade, subject, and interests.

Visits are inquiry-based and shaped by teacher objectives and student interests. Students and teachers are encouraged to engage with the artwork they see in the museum by discussing and sharing ideas, responding to and posing questions, and making connections with their own lives.

How to Arrange a Visit

At least two weeks in advance, contact Amy Freedberg at 978.749.4037 or afreedberg@andover.edu with possible dates for your visit (Tuesdays through Fridays, 10 AM – 4 PM). Visits range from 45 - 90 minutes. We can accommodate up to 55 students at one time. Group tours are always free of charge.

Before your visit, mention that students will need to keep in mind:
• stay with the group
• raise hands to ask or answer questions
• no touching the artwork or the walls
• no running
• no food or gum

A catalogue to accompany the exhibition is available for purchase at the Addison Gallery.

Lorser Feitelson, Dichotomic Organization, 1959, oil on canvas, 60 x 60 in., Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art, Utah State University, Logan, Utah, Marie Eccles Caine Foundation Gift. © Feitelson Arts Foundation