



Smithsonian American Art Museum

## **Hooked Rugs and American Modernism**

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Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, hooked rugs were appreciated and collected by a wide variety of Americans, from wealthy individuals such as the DuPonts to middle class and low income American families. The pervasive interest in hooked rugs for home decoration is clearly demonstrated in a 1925 *House Beautiful* article which advised its readers that hooked rugs were the most “suitable rugs” for the American home. The “hooked rug craze,” as it was described in a 1928 *House Beautiful* article, was driven by a complex web of interests, including the fascination with Americana as a vehicle for constructing an American national identity, modernist preoccupations with the so-called primitive, and a celebration of the handmade at a time of increased industrialization. This research is an attempt to reconstruct the history of the “hooked rug craze,” including the social and historical conditions that were driving this interest in the hooked rug. Specifically, the project will focus on the fascination that hooked rugs held for American modernist artists and the efforts by these artists to position hooked rugs as part of their contribution to the modernist project. I will also consider the relationship between the production of hooked rugs as individual artworks and as functional objects for the home, including the efforts by artists themselves to establish cottage industries that manufactured hooked rugs for the general public. In addition, I will consider the reception of hooked rugs by the art establishment, from individual galleries that chose to exhibit hooked rugs along with paintings and sculptures to the rug exhibitions held by the Museum of Modern Art in 1937 and 1942. Overall, this research is an effort to contribute to the history of the fiber arts in early twentieth-century America.