Art: Milles' Bernini-Bauhaus Connection

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...In the mid 20th century, a preservationist cause made worldwide excursions. It moved through Europe, arm in arm with the artistic movements of expressionismo and its permutations. The Bauhaus, the German institute that advanced decorative art forms such as painting, sculpture, and architecture, as well as the equally revolutionary Futurist movement, were among its many proponents. The Bauhaus was founded in 1919 and produced many important artists, including Paul Klee, Wassily Kandinsky, and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. The movement continued to have a lasting influence on art and design, and its principles are still evident in modern architecture and furniture design.

Bernini of Cranbrook

Carl Milles' sculptures steer clear of the extremes that so deeply influenced him.

Art Review
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SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

Located in the small town of Bloomfield Hills, Mich., and inspired by the arts and crafts teachings of William Morris, the Cranbrook Academy of Arts was often called the American Bauhaus. From 1931 to 1951, Carl Milles (1875-1955) served as resident sculptor and head of the sculpture department. He was known as "the Bernini of Cranbrook."

Although it's hard to imagine more unlikely bedfellows than Milles and the Bauhaus, it's easy to see how the two movements influenced Milles. His bronze sculptures, 41 of which are displayed at the Pomona Millard Sheets Gal alongside 17 sketches by the Swedish artist who became an American citizen in 1945.

From the 17th century Italian Baroque sculptor Giovanni Lorenzo Bernini, Milles borrowed a sense of enlivened line, spiraling motion, and athletic bodies in motion. In 1910, he wrote a letter to Bernini's grandson, the then-80-year-old artist, expressing his admiration for Bernini's work. "I have been trying to understand and absorb everything Bernini has done," Milles wrote. "His work is a timeless masterpiece of artistic genius."

"Wild Boar" (1940), one of Carl Milles' later works, transforms blunt muscle into an abstract pattern.

"Sunshine" (1917-19) depicts a mermaid riding a frisky dolphin.