The House That Sam Built features thirty-five examples of Maloof’s furniture, shown beside paintings, sculpture, ceramics, fiber, enamels, and wood by his Pomona Valley friends and colleagues. Presenting Maloof’s work within the context of his times not only is consistent with the Huntington’s commitment to juxtaposing artworks in disparate media but also sheds new light on the contributions of California artists to the history of art in this country in the postwar era, the period when Los Angeles exploded as an internationally significant cultural center.

The Huntington is extremely grateful to the Getty Foundation for supporting this endeavor as part of Pacific Standard Time, its communitywide collaboration. Involving more than sixty Southern California institutions engaged in a variety of exhibitions, performances, seminars, and related activities, Pacific Standard Time marks—in no uncertain terms—the extraordinary dynamism of the postwar Los Angeles art scene. We are honored to participate and particularly pleased to be able to do so by exploring what was happening not in L.A. but in a place just beyond its borders—and with a beat all its own.

All of Southern California experienced a boom after World War II, but the Pomona Valley enjoyed a creative renaissance unlike any other. Postwar living meant breaking with tradition, and for any number of young people and college faculty looking for something different, that translated into a search for alternatives to the East Coast Ivy League. Some of them found what they were looking for in Claremont’s high-quality private colleges and graduate school. The Claremont colleges looked and felt like New England: old ivy-clad buildings, a small town established in the 1880s, neighborhoods with leafy Tudors and stately craftsman homes. But these colleges were set in wild Southern California. A short drive west took you to the Sunset Strip or the beach—physically and psychologically a world away from New England. Just what a creative spirit needed.

Claremont’s colleges attracted people like the Art Students League–trained sculptor Albert Stewart, who brought his Vassar-educated wife, Marion (“Hoppy”), from New York City. She joined her husband on the faculty of Scripps College, mentoring young women in weaving and textile design for almost thirty years.

The relative quiet of Claremont nurtured creative development. Artistic hubs around UCLA or in Venice Beach were there if you needed them. The Pomona Valley attracted people like Karl Benjamin, who was a family man and a schoolteacher when he began an MFA program at Claremont Graduate School (now Claremont Graduate University). He worked quietly in his Claremont home, building a career that mushroomed; he eventually became acclaimed nationally as one of Southern California’s “abstract classicist” painters.

The low-pressure Pomona Valley provided artists with small-town camaraderie, exactly the environment they needed to explore their own directions. Sam Maloof and his artist friends gathered to shoot the breeze at Walter’s Restaurant or the Village Grille. Sure, artists were getting together near their studio classes at Otis or Art Center—then both in downtown Los Angeles—but nowhere else was there the perfect storm of proximity, isolation, and college-town community that could have created the “House That Sam Built” phenomenon.

It is in this context that we have the opportunity to examine the career of Sam Maloof, among the most important of American woodworkers. His refusal to make furniture for the mass market and his insistence on maintaining a direct relationship with his clients are as much about community as they are about craftsmanship. It is this notion of community that permeates the exhibition for which this catalogue was produced—the understanding that, at this particular time and in this particular place, it was about who ended up there and how they influenced one another.


The House That Sam Built features thirty-five examples of Maloof’s furniture, shown beside paintings, sculpture, ceramics, fiber, enamels, and wood by his Pomona Valley friends and colleagues. Presenting Maloof’s work within the context of his times not only is consistent with the Huntington’s commitment to juxtaposing artworks in disparate media but also sheds new light on the contributions of California artists to the history of art in this country in the postwar era, the period when Los Angeles exploded as an internationally significant cultural center. The Huntington is extremely grateful to the Getty Foundation for supporting this endeavor as part of Pacific Standard Time, its communitywide collaboration. Involving more than sixty Southern California institutions engaged in a variety of exhibitions, performances, seminars, and related activities, Pacific Standard Time marks—in no uncertain terms—the extraordinary dynamism of the postwar Los Angeles art scene. We are honored to participate and particularly pleased to be able to do so by exploring what was happening not in L.A. but in a place just beyond its borders—and with a beat all its own.

Steve Koblik
President, The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens
leading figure in the postwar studio furniture movement in the United States, the mid-twentieth-century woodworker Sam Maloof was also a voracious collector with an abiding generosity toward other artists and a remarkable sense of inclusiveness. The home that he built in Alta Loma, California, in which he placed the work of his friends and colleagues alongside his finely crafted furniture, embodies who Maloof was both as a human being and as an artist. Within this house—a hand-built environment in which the warm textures of natural wood were enlivened by the bold patterns of folk art and the brilliant colors of contemporary textiles—artists working in disparate mediums and from widely divergent points of view were shown together in a happy, if perhaps quirky, harmony.

Maloof’s expansive vision for his home and collection—which embraced the work of more conservative practitioners as well as that of some of the twentieth century’s foremost pioneers—reflects the rich mix of artistic voices in and around Southern California’s Pomona Valley in the period following World War II. In this way and in many others, “the house that Sam built” served as a gathering place for this enormously talented and highly influential community of artists.

Today the foundation that Sam Maloof created—the Sam and Alfreda Maloof Foundation for Arts and Crafts—celebrates the spirit of that community. This extraordinary house, as well as its equally extraordinary contents, represents the living legacy of a man who believed in the primacy of the artist’s hand and in the importance of bringing creative vision and beauty to even the most humble moments in everyday life.

**As long as there are men who have not forgotten how to work with their hands, there will remain for the heritage of the craftsman a bright light of hope that began at the dawn of civilization.**

**SAM MALOOF**

---

**The House That Sam Built**

**SAM MALOOF AND ART IN THE POMONA VALLEY, 1945–1985**

*Harold B. Nelson*

A leading figure in the postwar studio furniture movement in the United States, the mid-twentieth-century woodworker Sam Maloof was also a voracious collector with an abiding generosity toward other artists and a remarkable sense of inclusiveness. The home that he built in Alta Loma, California, in which he placed the work of his friends and colleagues alongside his finely crafted furniture, embodies who Maloof was both as a human being and as an artist. Within this house—a hand-built environment in which the warm textures of natural wood were enlivened by the bold patterns of folk art and the brilliant colors of contemporary textiles—artists working in disparate mediums and from widely divergent points of view were shown together in a happy, if perhaps quirky, harmony.

Maloof’s expansive vision for his home and collection—which embraced the work of more conservative practitioners as well as that of some of the twentieth century’s foremost pioneers—reflects the rich mix of artistic voices in and around Southern California’s Pomona Valley in the period following World War II. In this way and in many others, “the house that Sam built” served as a gathering place for this enormously talented and highly influential community of artists.

Today the foundation that Sam Maloof created—the Sam and Alfreda Maloof Foundation for Arts and Crafts—celebrates the spirit of that community. This extraordinary house, as well as its equally extraordinary contents, represents the living legacy of a man who believed in the primacy of the artist’s hand and in the importance of bringing creative vision and beauty to even the most humble moments in everyday life.

**THE POMONA VALLEY**

Although he built his home in Alta Loma, a more rural and affordable community east of Claremont, Sam Maloof and his immensely talented wife, Alfreda, were a central part of the lively Pomona Valley arts community. In the years immediately following World War II, Claremont emerged as an influential center of artistic and cultural activity. Located in the heart of the inland Pomona Valley, east of Los Angeles, this charming college town was
home to a large community of artists, designers, and craftspeople working in a wide variety of mediums and styles. Among them were the painter, designer, and muralist Millard Sheets; the British-born sculptor Albert Stewart; the ceramists William Manker, Richard Petterson, and Harrison McIntosh; the enamelist Arthur and Jean Ames; and the weaver Marion “Hoppy” Stewart. Solidly grounded in the traditions of their respective disciplines, these artists, many of whom were also prominent educators, played an important role in advancing art and craft in California in the postwar period.

The presence in Claremont of three nationally known educational institutions—Pomona College, Claremont Graduate School (now known as the Claremont Graduate University), and Scripps College—furnished a rich intellectual context for this community. More practically, the Claremont colleges also provided employment for this disparate group of artists both before and after the war. The faculty of the three institutions, along with their students, many of whom stayed in the Claremont area after graduation to pursue careers in the arts, formed the foundation of a multifaceted artistic community in the Pomona Valley, one that continues to flourish today.

THE CLAREMONT COLLEGES

For more than one hundred years, Claremont, California—now home to no fewer than eight internationally recognized educational institutions—has been an important center of higher learning. Founded in 1887, Pomona is the oldest of the Claremont colleges, and from the school’s inception the visual arts have formed a fundamental part of its liberal arts curriculum. As early as 1888 Clarbey Stiles was listed in the college catalog—the school’s first—as a teacher of drawing and painting. By 1893 Pomona College had established the School of Art and Design in partnership with a Los Angeles–based organization of the same name. In 1914 the Department of Fine Arts, dedicated to both the visual arts and music, was established, and in the same year, Rembrandt Hall was completed, providing studio space for art instruction and a gallery. One of the art department’s high points in Pomona’s early history occurred in 1930, when, at art instructor José Pijoan’s urging, the college invited the Mexican artist José Clemente Orozco to create a mural for the dining commons in Frary Hall. This mural on the subject of the myth of Prometheus was the artist’s first work in this country, and it is considered today to be one of his finest compositions. While art history has always been a strong component of the art department at Pomona, noted studio faculty members over the years have included the watercolor artist Milford Zornes, the painters James Grant and Karl Benjamin, and the sculptor Charles B. Lawler.

Less venerable but equally well regarded, Scripps College was founded in 1926 as a private liberal arts institution for women. Under the leadership of its first president, Ernest Jaqua, the college established an art program by hiring a young painter named Morgan Padelford to “inaugurate its work in the fields of plastic, pictorial and decorative art.” In 1932 Padelford was replaced by the twenty-five-year-old artist Millard Sheets. Under Sheets’s dynamic and visionary leadership—and with generous financial support from Florence Rand Lang and the Scripps College Fine Arts Foundation—the department grew over the next two decades to include painting, sculpture, ceramics, fiber, design, and architecture in its curriculum. Among the leading faculty members during these early years were William Manker, Richard Petterson, Jean Goodwin Ames, Phil Dike, Alfredo Ramos Martinez, Henry Lee McFee, Albert Stewart, and Marion Stewart. Later faculty members include Paul Soldner and Aldo Casanova. While Scripps was founded as a women’s college, men from the other Claremont colleges were allowed to enroll in art classes and in the graduate program launched in the 1920s as the Claremont Graduate School. Karl Benjamin, Paul Darrow, Rupert Deese, Robert Frame, Susan Herrel, James Huster, Roger Kuntz, Douglas McClellan, Harrison McIntosh, James Strombotne, and John Svenson are among the artists who attended Scripps or Claremont Graduate School in the postwar period. This multigenerational group of artists, students, and faculty formed the core of the Pomona Valley arts community.

“LIKE A GOLDEN AGE”: CLAREMONT IN THE POSTWAR YEARS

Claremont has always been a very special place. Nestled in the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains, the city combines the best qualities of a small college town in the eastern United States with Southern California’s majestic mountains, expansive vistas, and salubrious climate. Over the years numerous individuals have commented on the community’s unique attributes and on the efflorescence of artistic activity in Claremont in the postwar period. David Scott, director of the Smithsonian American Art Museum from 1964 to 1969 and a former Scripps student and faculty member, attributed the rich cultural and intellectual environment to the presence of two extraordinary individuals at Scripps, Harry Bier Alexander, a founding faculty member who taught at the college from 1927 to 1939, and Millard Sheets.

“There was an explosion of art activities in Claremont during the thirties, forties and early fifties which had an impact throughout Southern California and, in addition, some significant effects nationally. Two forces, in particular, set this in motion: first, the liberal, humanistic philosophy which brought a unique spirit to Scripps at its founding and was embodied particularly in the creative enthusiasm of Professor Harry Bier Alexander, who influenced the young Millard Sheets; secondly, Millard himself, amazingly dynamic, enthusiastic, gifted, and versatile.”

In his multiple roles as chairman of the art department at Scripps, curator of the annual art exhibitions at the Los Angeles County Fair, architect, designer, and entrepreneur, Sheets was a veritable force of nature. Widely admired for his brilliant watercolors of the California landscape, he provided encouragement, support, and commissions to a generation of California artists living and working in the Claremont area. For the young Sam Maloof, who worked for Sheets in the late 1940s, his mentor provided an introduction to a fascinating new world and to the dynamic community of artists in the Pomona Valley.

In 1947 Sheets hired Petterson to run the ceramic program at Scripps. In an unpublished essay titled “The Early Days in Claremont Seem to Glow, in Retrospect, Like a Golden Age,” Petterson described an artistic community characterized by collaborative endeavors and mutual respect. “Especially in the 1940s, Millard Sheets, Albert Stewart, Jean and Arthur Ames, and others formed a group of artists capable of working together to create projects—community and architectural—that were uniquely successful, and in the spirit of the times, optimistic and constructive.” He attributed much of this spirit of optimism and cooperation to the progressive nature of the academic community and to an environment in which faculty and students were learning, looking, and growing together.

Claremont’s environment had a great deal to do with this movement. Young artists and faculty alike learned from the examples of Ramos Martinez and Jose Clemente Orozco, whose mural paintings done at Scripps and Pomona Colleges, are quite properly world famous. Watching these great artists at work was the opportunity of a lifetime, and encouraged other projects on Scripps campus especially the Seal Court mosaic murals, the Stewart Foundation sculpture, the Lang Gallery bronze doors, and the sunken garden grilles are among many. . . . No wonder Claremont became known as an art Mecca in the 1930s, ‘40s and ‘50s!’
The extraordinary nature of this community was well understood by a younger generation of artists who had studied at the Claremont colleges. The painter James Strombomme, who graduated from Pomona College in 1936 and received his MFA from the Claremont Graduate School in 1959, particularly appreciated the community’s support of bold and independent new visions. He observed:

There was a period of time, from about 1950 to 1970, when Claremont was a Mecca for art and artists. The 50s and 60s were sort of a golden age for art especially for painting. America in the 50s was like a tightly bound cocoon of conformity. As a culture, as a people, we were suffocating in mediocrity. Anyone who stood out from the crowd because of talent or brains was looked on with suspicion (think Joe McCarthy). The artists rebelled in the late 50s—the Abstract Expressionists in New York, the Beats in San Francisco. The 60s saw a cultural explosion directed at the 50s conformity. Art led the way. To be fiercely independent was a new way of life. To rebel was the answer for many, for blacks, for women, for artists. Artists in Claremont were gloriously independent, no two of us alike. The common denominators were great talent and courage and brains and dedication.  

Sam Maloof’s own account of his many friendships in the Claremont community was equally rhapsodic. While he had no formal training in art, Maloof was a lifelong friend of many of the Claremont-trained artists, and his comments underscore the importance of these relationships—and the stimulating cultural environment—to his development as an artist and as an individual.

It was not until I was out of the army that I turned to the arts. I had made furniture for my parents, I had drawn and all, but I really did not know what the art world was all about. Thanks to the artist Millard Sheets and to the designer Millard Sheets and to the designer Harold Graham, whom I have always considered my mentors, I was introduced to a completely new world. Millard opened up the world of art to me, talking about painters and sculptors. There was a sculptor, Albert Stewart, who was a protegé of Paul Manship. I would go to Albert's studio and watch him work. Or I would sit and talk with my friend Phil Dike, the painter. Another good friend, a minister, would sit by the hour just talking, not about objects, but about life itself.

All these people and these experiences were important in my life. So here I had an architect who talked to me about his houses. I had a painter who talked about his paintings, an industrial designer who talked about industrial design, a sculptor who talked to me about sculpture (the sculptor's wife was a weaver; so I even learned a little bit about weaving), and they all talked to me about the most important thing: life.

Having been given so much in his youth by friends and colleagues, Maloof spent a lifetime giving back to this community, a community that had nurtured his career and reinforced his commitment to beautiful objects made by hand.

SAMBALOOF AND THE CLAREMONT COMMUNITY: ARTISTS AS CLIENTS

From his earliest years as a graphic designer and woodworker, Maloof knew and was friendly with many of the artists who taught at Scirps or who lived and worked in the region. Throughout his career he produced furniture for many of these friends, often trading his beautifully handcrafted chairs and tables for his colleagues’ paintings, sculpture, ceramics, enamels, drawings, or turned-wood vessels. In addition to their practicality—particularly for younger cash-strapped artists just embarking on their careers—these barter exchanges reflect the spirit of mutual respect that existed among this group of artists, who explored diverse media and pursued widely differing approaches to art making but nevertheless had great admiration for one another's work.

As described in splendid detail in Jeremy Adamson’s essay in this volume, several colleagues played an especially important role in the development of Maloof’s work early in his career. Both Millard Sheets and the internationally prominent industrial designer Henry Dreyfuss helped Maloof articulate a unique new vision for contemporary furniture. Later support and commissions from artists such as Emil Kosa, Karl Benjamin, Harrison McIntosh, James Hunter, Bob Stocksdale, and the musician Jan Hlinka encouraged him to experiment with new forms and techniques.

Maloof served as Sheets’s assistant from approximately 1946 to 1949, helping his mentor with many of the extracurricular projects in which Sheets was involved, from the design and fabrication of architectural murals to his curatorial work at the Los Angeles County Fair. Maloof also made frames for Sheets’s watercolors, and because of his training in graphic design and printmaking, he was also asked to produce silk-screen prints after Sheets’s widely popular paintings. Through his association with Sheets, Maloof became acquainted with a great variety of artists, collectors, and art dealers throughout the region, and as a result, his world expanded immeasurably. In a 1989 tribute to his mentor, Maloof reminisced, “What does one say about Millard Sheets? What words? In 1946 I was asked by him to come to Claremont and work for him in his studio. Because of this, a whole new world was introduced to me. Millard was generous to me as he was to hundreds of people, sharing his many thoughts and experiences. Our friendship has endured over these many years and I shall always be indebted to him as a friend, teacher, painter, designer, and builder.”