

THE **MY FAVORITE FIRSTS** VISIT

This museum self-guide of personal favorites honors retiring Executive Director of Museum Education Robert W. Eskridge.



GALLERY 392A

***Painting with a Green Center* (1913) by Vasily Kandinsky**

Imagine a boy walking into the Art Institute as a high school student on his first school field trip. He goofs around with his peers a bit on the bus, shuffles along the museum's corridors at teenager pace, and affects cool-guy disinterestedness until the docent leading the tour makes the very first stop in front of Vasily Kandinsky's *Painting with a Green Center*. All of a sudden he can't help but become drawn into the vibrant color, vital movement, and intriguing abstract qualities of this evocative painting. Collected by one of the Art Institute's early benefactors, Arthur Jerome Eddy, the painting was part of an exhibition entitled *Movement* when Bob Eskridge first encountered it. It made such a significant impression that he has remembered it ever since. What about this work do you think made such an indelible impression on a young man?



GALLERY 395B

***Leda* (c. 1920) by Constantin Brâncuși**

At first glance, many visitors puzzle over this sculpture, as Bob and his University of Chicago classmates did on a visit to the museum in the fall of 1966. One can only imagine their first impressions about what the large stone forms might represent. Might it be, as one visitor once speculated, a giant golf club, or maybe a large foot on a pedestal? Museum educators often solicit these first interpretations from visitors as a starting point for a rich discussion about the work of art. Questions or prompts then direct viewers to consider materials, textures, size, and shapes as well as historical or biographical information. In this case, Brâncuși wanted to suggest a story about the beautiful and mortal Leda being abducted by the god Jupiter in the guise of a swan. Do you see a swan? What do the rough and smooth surfaces of the stone and the use of abstracted and simple shapes tell us about this swan? Why do you think the artist chose to tell us the story in this way?



GALLERY 211

***The Assumption of the Virgin* (1577-79)**

by Domenikos Theotokopoulos, called El Greco

If you had to write your first college essay, as Bob did, about El Greco's *The Assumption of the Virgin*, where would you start? You might start by noting the artist's use of primary colors to create balance and movement in his composition. You might note the postures and expressions of the figures in the lower and upper parts of the painting. You might spill some ink over El Greco's use of open, loose brushwork, which contributes to the sense of dynamic motion of the forms. The subject of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary was represented often by artists, but El Greco's treatment of the theme is striking. He used bold colors and figural arrangements to arouse a spiritual fervor in the viewer and impart the deep sense of faith he himself felt. It is not hard to imagine why a young college student would select such a dramatic depiction for his first writing assignment.



GALLERY 215

Rinaldo and Armida in Her Garden (1742/45)

by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo

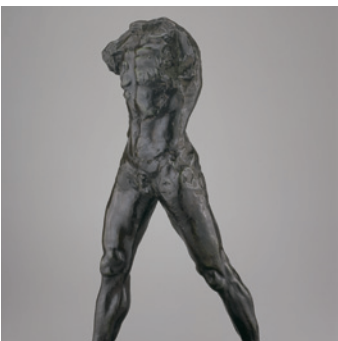
Many first-time visitors to the Art Institute are overwhelmed by the amount of art on display and need help deciding where to start. Among the ways to become oriented to the galleries, along with self-guides, are gallery talks given by a museum educator. As a new lecturer in the museum in 1981, Bob was immediately charged with giving public gallery tours and, in fact, his first tour was scheduled for his second day on the job. Bob selected this suite of four paintings by the 18th-century painter Giovanni Battista Tiepolo as a stop on his tour, and these works have been among his favorite in the museum ever since. Why might he have chosen this suite? Why not! There is drama, passion, and intrigue as the story of the ill-matched and ill-fated lovers Rinaldo and Armida unfolds. Their story asks us to question the great choices of life, such as those between love and responsibility or passion and virtue. As you walk through the museum today, consider what works of art you might choose for a tour.



GALLERY 243

Water Lilies (1906) by Claude Monet

Art has an incredible power to affect one emotionally. As part of a life-long engagement with the Art Institute's collection of art, particular works of art have spoken to Bob in times of joy while others, like Claude Monet's *Water Lilies*, have provided him solace. Painted late in the artist's career, *Water Lilies* gives us the open, loose brushwork that Monet used to suggest forms and surfaces awash in light. Poet Robert Hayden wrote of this painting: "O light beheld as through refracting tears. / Here is the aura of that world each of us has lost. / Here is the shadow of its joy." What works of art have brought joy or solace to your life?



GALLERY 243

Walking Man (c. 1900) by Auguste Rodin

There is a beginning in every end, right? Momentous life changes, such as retirements, can signal both the conclusion and start of great things. A 30-year career in education yields to new things—hiking, running, reading, and relaxation. Rodin, sculptor of *Walking Man*, was an artist who resisted the idea of "finishedness" and who always found the start of something new in works that he had already completed. *Walking Man* was born out of a sculpture of *St. John the Baptist* and a small torso fragment he had created decades earlier. In 1900, Rodin combined parts of these two previously exhibited sculptures to create a wholly new work, itself an incomplete and rough-hewn human form. How else might this sculpture express the idea of unfinishedness?

Over the decades, Bob shaped the Department of Museum Education into a world-class leader in the field. Please join us in thanking him for his years of service and devotion and know that the Art Institute of Chicago is better for his efforts.