

Self-Guide

500 Ways of Looking at Modern

This year, we celebrate the opening of the Modern Wing with 500 Ways of Looking at Modern, a yearlong season of exhibitions and events featuring the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, and the Poetry Foundation. Get a glimpse at our season partners and other collaborators through modern masterpieces in the collection.



GALLERY 391

***Bathers by a River* (1909–10, 1913, 1916–17) by Henri Matisse**

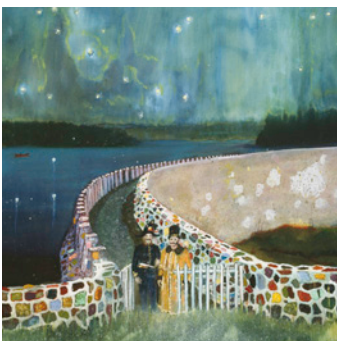
Though labeled by Matisse himself as one of his most “pivotal” paintings, the monumental *Bathers by a River* has been traditionally viewed as an anomaly in the artist’s practice. Begun in 1909 as a pastoral scene of five graceful nudes, Matisse reworked the painting over eight years into this banded composition of predominantly gray and stiffly sculptural forms. Discover how this painting reveals this eight-year period to be critical to the beloved modern master’s development and his entire career with the groundbreaking exhibition *Matisse: Radical Invention, 1913–1917*. Encompassing over 100 works, this exhibition premieres at the Art Institute of Chicago in March 2010 before traveling on to the Museum of Modern Art.



GALLERY 392

***Spanish Dancer* (c. 1916) by Nathaliya Gontcharova**

A leader in the Russian avant-garde, Nathaliya Gontcharova became renowned in the West through her exquisite costume and set designs for Serge Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes. Combining elements of Russian folk art and icons with aspects of Cubism and Futurism, Gontcharova brought a unique vision to the troupe’s productions. This painting, one of many the artist produced after an influential 1916 trip to Spain, captures the voluminous movements of dance through the dramatic position of the dancer’s arms, regal carriage of her head, and diagonal upward sweep of the dress. Get swept up in the connections of art and dance as Hubbard Street Dance Chicago offers engaging events at the museum this season culminating in the company’s choreographic workshop in June 2010.



GALLERY 291

***Gasthof zur Muldentalsperre* (2000–2002), by Peter Doig**

Scottish-born and Canadian-raised artist Peter Doig is known for his atmospheric, romantic, and often mysterious landscapes. This dreamy painting was inspired by his student years spent working backstage at London’s Covent Garden. After a performance of Stravinsky’s *Petruschka* one evening, Doig and a friend slipped into some of the production’s costumes and posed for a photograph. Doig later used the snapshot to create a figure study and then transferred the two figures to this starry scene, inspired by an antique postcard of an old German tavern. Learn more about the dynamic dialogue between theatre and visual arts with *Disturbing the Universe*, a series of readings by actors from Goodman Theatre and “Staging Modern,” a reading by Steppenwolf actors of renowned modern playwrights on September 3 at 6:00.



GALLERY 288

***In Lovely Blueness No. 2* (1955–56) by Sam Francis**

This at once airy and expansive composition by Sam Francis brilliantly demonstrates the artist's unique combination of Abstract Expressionist and late Impressionist influences. With its soft pastel palette, the monumental abstract work creates the sensation of standing before a vast and boundless space. Francis, who often found his inspiration in literary sources, titled the painting after a poem by the German Romantic writer Friedrich Hölderlin which begins with the narrator looking to the sky: "In lovely blue the steeple blossoms/ With its metal roof. Around which/ Drift swallow cries, around which/ Lies most loving blue." Discover more lyrical expressions in the museum as the Poetry Foundation presents C. D. Wright, Derek Walcott, and scholar Helen Vendler discussing Robert Lowell.



GALLERY 265

***Portrait of Virgil Thomson* (1930) by Florine Stettheimer**

Composer Virgil Thomson's best-known work, *Four Saints in Three Acts*, premiered in 1934, featuring a libretto by Gertrude Stein, sparkling cellophane and lace sets by artist Florine Stettheimer, and a cast made up of Harlem gospel singers. Four years earlier, Stettheimer had captured Thomson in the ecstatic act of composing his modern opera with this fantastically imaginative portrait. Emphasizing both Thomson's mystical motivation and the opera's religious subject, the painting shows Thomson showered in celestial light radiating from a theatrical mask that bears a strong resemblance to Stein. A bank of clouds, lettered banners, and fluttering doves reinforce the heavenly effect of this creative collaboration. Take a look at the decidedly more devilish link between art and opera as the Lyric Opera of Chicago presents "Faust in Modern Mode" this January.



GALLERY 271

***Blue and Green Music* (1921) by Georgia O'Keeffe**

A great music lover and lifelong student of violin, Georgia O'Keeffe was highly influenced by Russian Expressionist Vasily Kandinsky's theories that encouraged visual artists to strive for the pure expression of musical composition. Exploring, as O'Keeffe put it, "the idea that music could be translated into something for the eye," she created a series of abstract paintings, including *Blue and Green Music*. With its strong diagonals and undulating forms, this captivating work harmoniously suggests both natural forms and the experience of sound. Continue to explore the intriguing interplay of music and art with performances presented with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra—a Sunday afternoon concert series and Thursday night preview concerts.

Discover more ways to see modern!

Join us nearly every Thursday at 6:00 to explore modern from the perspective of actors, artists, curators, dancers, museum directors, musicians, poets, and scholars. Find a full listing of the season's events at www.artinstituteofchicago.org.