

Self-Guide

Seeing Things

What better way to celebrate Seeing Things, our object-oriented season of concerts, lectures, performances, and symposia, than with some of the very artworks that have inspired us to look closer at the history, meaning, and importance of things?



GALLERY 394

The Red Armchair (1931) by Pablo Picasso

As one of the most well-known modern artists, Picasso is widely recognized for seeing things differently. In this painting of his young lover Marie-Thérèse Walter, for instance, he translated her three-dimensionality to a two-dimensional surface, portraying her face in both frontal and profile views. But he also saw materials differently, using everyday items such as newspaper, wallpaper, and even studio scraps as art materials. In *The Red Armchair*, he innovatively employed Ripolin, an industrial house paint, which offered an almost brushless finish. Mixing Ripolin with various amounts of oil, he produced a range of surface effects—from the crisp brushmarks in the yellow background to the thick but leveled look of the white face. Start to see things a little differently yourself as president and director James Cuno launches the Seeing Things season with a lecture on September 23.



GALLERY 397

Homage to Romantic Ballet (1942) by Joseph Cornell

Perhaps one of the truest devotees of things, Joseph Cornell had collected various and sundry items since childhood and spent 30 years combining his found objects into poetic and mysterious assemblages. Many like this one celebrate his passion for the Romantic ballet of the 1830s and 1840s. Inscribed on the lid of the box is a legend of the ballerina Marie Taglioni encountering a Russian highwayman and being blackmailed into dancing on rugs spread across a muddy road. This adventure somehow became intertwined in Cornell's imagination with his own vision of a load of ice spilling from a truck at Grand Central Station, the combination coming together in this hauntingly lovely assemblage. Delve deeper into the spectral dimension of the Surrealist object in a lecture by Dartmouth College professor Katherine Conley on October 14.



GALLERY 292

Hinoki (2007) by Charles Ray

This massive sculpture may simply look like a beautifully decaying log but there were, in fact, several steps, molds, and models that took artist Charles Ray from the object of inspiration to completed artwork. The Chicago-born sculptor was sparked to create *Hinoki* after seeing a deteriorating and yet beautiful fallen tree in a meadow and spent years searching for a model for the work. After studying many other logs as possible sources, he returned to the original tree that had fascinated him. With several assistants, Ray cut the tree into several sections and transported them to his Los Angeles studio. There they constructed a fiberglass version and shipped it in five pieces to Osaka where master woodcarvers used Japanese cypress to render the stunning final piece. A contemplation on the permanence of things, *Hinoki* at once extends the life of the original inspirational tree and will one day follow its predecessor, eventually—in hundreds of years—beginning to rot and decay. Learn more about this fascinating sculpture with a lecture by Bernhard Mendes Bürgi of Kunstmuseum Basel on March 24.



GALLERY 155

Coin showing Mithradates VI (90–89 B.C.) Greek

Coins can certainly buy you things, but this one tells us things—the sensational story of the cunning and ambitious Mithradates. Though just a boy when he inherited joint rule with his mother and brother, Mithradates took sole ownership of the throne when he came of age, imprisoning his mother, killing his brother, and marrying his sister. Coins such as this were minted by the king as he enlarged his empire through a series of bold conquests of the Black Sea region, his triumphs welcomed by the Greeks and feared by Rome. Mithradates’s depiction on the coin as an idealized Greek with the facial expression and tousled hair that are reminiscent of Alexander the Great was meant to further rally the Greeks, suggesting that Mithradates was the new Alexander. Discover how close he came on November 20 when Adrienne Mayor of Stanford University chronicles the tale of Rome’s formidable enemy.



GALLERY 265

Movements: Boats and Objects, Blue Gray Sea (1947)

by John Marin

While the two-dimensionality of painting can make it seem less of “a thing,” American modernist John Marin really approached his paintings as objects. Before Marin became a painter, he had trained as an architect, and in the 1920s, he returned to three-dimensional design by fashioning frames for his pictures, some painted in metallic shades while some, such as the example on this work, filled with abstract geometric designs. With this painting, he also very physically manipulated the work, re-stretching the canvas a couple times to change its shape as well as recrop the image. On January 23, Marin’s more practiced and well-known medium becomes the subject of extensive exhibition *John Marin’s Watercolors: A Medium for Modernism*. Slip in to the syncopated rhythms of Marin’s innovative work with a lecture by Ruth Fine of the National Gallery on January 27 and a jazz concert by the Orbert Davis ensemble on February 24.



GALLERY 225

Jousting Helm (Stechhelm) (c. 1490) German, Innsbruck

If a man and horse in armor were charging at you, a ten-foot lance positioned to unseat you with one well-delivered thrust, you might want some “things”—gear—to protect yourself, perhaps, a *stechhelm*, the German term for a jousting helm. This fine 16th-century example is a “frog-mouthed” helm. It may look if the craftsman who made it forgot some important elements like eyeholes, but the high, recessed horizontal slot was actually positioned thus to protect the face and eyes. The wearer would lean forward looking up through the eye slot as he rode toward his opponent; then just prior to the moment of impact, straighten back up to take advantage of the helm’s faceless shield. See even more wonders of the joust and battle when *Arms and Armor: Highlights from the Permanent Collection* opens November 1, and find out about the glory and gore of jousting with a lecture on December 10 by Stuart Pyhrr of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

So Many Things to See!

These are but a few objects and programs included in the Seeing Things season; there’s a new artwork, a new program every Thursday and Friday evening. Be sure to check out the full list of events, presented in collaboration with our season partners—the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, and the Poetry Foundation—on our website at www.artic.edu/calendar.