

THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

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ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME VIEWING OF ITALIAN RENAISSANCE MASTERPIECE

GATES OF PARADISE AT THE ART INSTITUTE

Lorenzo Ghiberti's Restored Bronze Doors Makes National Tour Stop in Chicago

In 1425, Italian Renaissance sculptor **Lorenzo Ghiberti (1378–1455)** was commissioned to design a pair of bronze doors for Florence's Baptistery. He labored on the task for 27 years, fashioning a masterpiece that Michelangelo deemed "truly worthy to be the Gates of Paradise" for its remarkable beauty and grandeur. In the past 25 years, Ghiberti's gates have undergone an extensive conservation project, emerging now with resonance and



splendor from centuries of grime. To celebrate the conclusion of this exacting process and its stunning results, three relief panels from the left wing of the Gates of Paradise and sections of the doors' frieze are currently traveling to four select American cities. The Art Institute of Chicago will be hosting Ghiberti's masterwork this summer.

The “Gates of Paradise”: Lorenzo Ghiberti’s Renaissance Masterpiece—on view at the Art Institute’s Galleries 216 and 217 from July 28 through October 14, 2007—will afford viewers a truly once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to observe Ghiberti’s work up close before the individual elements are reintegrated with the rest of the doorframe and put on permanent display in a hermetically sealed room in the Museo dell’Opera del Duomo, Florence. This is the only time that the *Gates* have ever traveled to America in their 550 year history.



Three panels depicting the stories of the Creation, Jacob and Esau, and David and Goliath will offer viewers a coherent vision of Ghiberti’s artistic genius and the range of perspectival solutions he invented for the *Gates of Paradise* as a whole. The *Creation Panel* documents Ghiberti’s earliest work on the doors and features a splendid depiction of nude figures in a landscape, set off by angelic hosts. The relief of Jacob and Esau, with its nearly three-dimensional foreground figures, masterful scientific perspective, and impressive architecture, shows that the artist was at the vanguard of Florentine illusionism and storytelling. Finally, the elaborately chased and punched panel of David and Goliath demonstrates the variety of techniques employed by the sculptor to hammer and carve surface patterns that make the scene come alive.

This exhibition also showcases the complex nature of the conservation process through the juxtaposition of two sections of the frieze and two decorative heads: one version of each has been resplendently cleaned, the other is still disfigured by damaging surface

deposits. As can be seen in an accompanying documentary video, the conservation methods formerly included submerging the panels in a solution of Rochelle salts and distilled water and meticulously cleaning some parts by hand. In recent years, conservation has been carried out exclusively using innovative laser technology, which enables the surface dirt to be removed in a non-invasive manner.

Sculptor, painter, draftsman, architectural consultant, stained glass designer, entrepreneur, author of a treatise on the arts, and the first artist to write an autobiography, Ghiberti could honestly declare in his *Commentaries* that “few things of importance were made in our city that were not designed or devised by my hand.” The seven works by Ghiberti in this exhibition, while representing only a small portion of his oeuvre, confirm that Ghiberti had good reason to boast.

The “Gates of Paradise”: Lorenzo Ghiberti’s Renaissance Masterpiece was previously on view at the High Museum of Art, Atlanta, and will travel to The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and the Seattle Art Museum in the coming months. The exhibition is organized by the High Museum of Art, Atlanta, in collaboration with the Opera di Santa Maria del Fiore and the Opificio delle Pietre Dure, Florence. The exhibition is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council in the Arts and Humanities and by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts, which believes that a great nation deserves great art.

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Image Credit:

Lorenzo Ghiberti (Italian, 1378-1455), *Gates of Paradise*, 1425-52. Baptistery of San Giovanni, Florence, Italy. Gilt bronze. H. 5.64 m (18 ft. 6 in.). Opificio delle Pietre Dure, Florence.

Lorenzo Ghiberti. *Jacob and Esau Panel*, from *Gates of Paradise*, 1425-52. Collection of the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo. Image courtesy Opificio delle Pietre Dure, Florence.

SUMMER MUSEUM HOURS FROM MAY 31–AUGUST 31, 2007:

10:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday

10:30 a.m.–9:00 p.m. Thursday and Friday and free after 5:00 p.m.

10:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m. Saturday, Sunday.

Closed Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and New Year's Day. Please check www.artic.edu before your visit.

Admission: Adults, \$12.00; children 12 and over, students, and seniors, \$7.00; children under 12 free; members always free. Ford Free Evenings are free to all, except for certain special exhibitions that may require full or extra admission fee. City of Chicago residents with Chicago Public Library cards can borrow a "Check Us Out" card from any library branch for free general admission to the nine members of Museums in the Park, including the Art Institute of Chicago. To reach the Art Institute on the World Wide Web, contact us at: <http://www.artic.edu/aic>
The Art Institute of Chicago is a museum in Chicago's Grant Park, located across from Millennium Park.