

Whirligigs are wind-powered mechanisms created solely for amusement, as opposed to windmills or weathervanes, which have practical uses. First recorded in Europe in the 15th century, whirligigs appeared in the American colonies during Revolutionary times. This elaborate creation is crafted of more than fifty moveable wood and metal pieces, which are designed to be set in motion by the wind, aided by a system of gears. *America* was created in Tomahawk, Wisconsin by Frank Memkus, a Lithuanian immigrant who worked in a tannery. Standing over six feet tall, this red, white, and blue contraption features a battalion of patriotic images, including a seaman, an airplane, and two dozen flags. While the seaman salutes, the plane's propeller whirls and the flags flutter round and round. Created for pleasure, as diversions rather than commercial products, whirligigs stood proudly atop roofs or in gardens and front lawns. *America* was created to express a sense of patriotism during the era of World War II. It is a 20th-century example of American **folk art**, part of a long tradition of works created by untrained, often anonymous artists and artisans.

THEME:**Identity**

Image 23

**Frank Memkus**

(American, 1895–1965)

Whirligig, entitled "America," 1938/42

Painted wood and metal

205.1 x 73.7 x 101.6 cm (80 3/4 x 29 x 40 in.)

Restricted gift of Marshall Field, Mr. and Mrs. Robert A. Kubicek, Mr. James Raoul Simmons, Mrs. Esther Sparks, Mrs. Frank L. Sulzberger and the Oak Park-River Forest Associates of the Woman's Board of the Art Institute of Chicago
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