

Winter TRADITIONS

The winter is no time for hibernation, especially when there are so many opportunities to indulge in parties, holiday festivities, and winter sports. Use this self-guide to travel through the world's winter traditions.



GALLERY 272

Love of Winter (1914) by George Bellows

The weather may be cold, but that's no excuse to stay bundled up inside! Take a cue from George Bellows's *Love of Winter*. Groups of skaters speed across the background as others lace up and prepare to take to the ice. In January 1914, just before painting this work, the artist wrote to a friend: "There has been none of my favorite snow. I must always paint the snow at least once a year." Bellows got his chance on February 13, when a major blizzard hit New York City. His use of thickly applied paint and urban subject matter, combined with his interest in social realism, places him within the Ashcan School, a group of early-20th-century American artists noted for their modernist painting methods.



GALLERY 61

Sideboard and Wine Cabinet (1859) designed by William Burges

It would be hard not to overindulge during winter festivities if your libations were housed in this wine cabinet depicting Bacchus, the Greek god of wine. The images that decorate it are taken from a 14th-century French poem that canonized wine and playfully portrayed Bacchus as a saint martyred by his followers' intemperate devotion. The saint offers goblets of wine to his inebriated companions hoping to sooth his disciples' troubles. But, intoxicated by their desire for further solace, his devotees instead push Bacchus into a cask from which they draw more wine. Pictured inside the central doors, the faces of Sobriety and Temperance encourage moderation.



GALLERY 65

"Elephant Candelabrum" Vase (1757/58) produced by the Sèvres Porcelain Manufactory

From Hanukkah's menorah to Advent wreaths to Kwanzaa's *kinara*, candles play an important role in many holiday celebrations. Although this Sèvres piece functions as a vase, this spectacular object also served as a candelabrum. Candles placed in the upturned trunks of the two elephant heads that flank the vase would have illuminated its spiraling rose and gilt arches, further enhancing its lavish decoration and fanciful form characteristic of the Rococo style. Porcelain vases such as this demonstrated the qualities of refinement, novelty, and imagination popular throughout Europe in the early to mid-18th century.



GALLERY 134

Triangular Five-Tiered Box. China, Ming dynasty (1368–1644), 16th century

The Three Friends of Winter depicted on the top of this covered sweetmeat box highlight the stamina needed to make it through the cold winter months. Bamboo, a traditional symbol of integrity, never breaks, even in strong wind. The plum blossom symbolizes perseverance, as it blooms in late winter, often when the ground is still covered with snow. And the gnarled pine, which remains green throughout the year, represents longevity and endurance. This vessel, with its cool blue and turquoise glazes, is a type of ware called *fahua* or “enamel painting,” as the thread-like borders that enclose the designs resemble the metal cells of cloisonné enamel.



GALLERY 209

Saint Barbara (c. 1520) by Jean Bellegambe

Jolly Saint Nicholas may be the most famous gift giver of the holiday season, but on December 4 many Europeans also celebrate Saint Barbara, depicted in this painting holding a feather and imprisoned in a tower. Her father, who became her warden and executioner, held Barbara captive and then beheaded her for converting to Christianity. He was instantly struck by lightning and reduced to ashes, making Barbara the patron saint of fire, lightning, and thunderstorms. Inspired by the branch from the cherry tree that Barbara tended while imprisoned, cherry branches are often brought into the home on her feast day, where they are watched to blossom on Christmas Day.



KRAFT EDUCATION CENTER

Thanksgiving (c. 1935) by Doris Lee

Some of the best winter memories are created when families gather and celebrate holidays, as depicted in Doris Lee’s *Thanksgiving*. In her painting, Lee found the meaning and joy of Thanksgiving in the ritual of the meal’s preparation rather than in its consumption. Surrounded by generations of family in the warmth of the kitchen, women happily create the day’s feast. Produced during the Great Depression, Lee’s painting expresses the significance of *Thanksgiving* in the early part of the 20th century, when it served as both a reminder of a more prosperous recent past and a part of the nation’s cultural identity.



THORNE ROOMS

Massachusetts Parlor, 1818 (c. 1940) by Mrs. James Ward Thorne

This parlor might look cozy, but a glimpse outside the windows shows the icy chill of winter capping tree branches with snow. One of the most popular attractions at the Art Institute, these miniature rooms were designed by Mrs. Thorne in order to offer a comprehensive look at European and American design that occupied a small space. Enjoy these tiny masterpieces and make sure to see the museum’s larger treasures at Masterpiece of the Day gallery talks that take place December 23 to 31 at noon.