

# *Pathways of* HERITAGE

*Africa's diverse cultures and rich artistic traditions are felt around the world. Follow the far-reaching pathways of the African diaspora with this month's self-guide.*



#### GALLERY 124

*Mask for Sande Society (Sowei), Guinea Coast,  
Early/mid-20th century*

Masquerading is an important tradition in many African cultures. The powerful, all-female Sande society, however, is one of only a few to allow women to participate in the ritual. Senior members wear masks at funerals, to honor important visitors, or to initiate young women into the society. As part of the arduous initiation process to become a Sande member, young women learn complex *sowei* songs and dances. The masks are made by men but worn in such performances by women dressed in costumes of blackened raffia fibers.



#### GALLERY 124

*Diviner's Board (Opon Ifa) by Areogun of Osi-Ilorin.  
Nigerian, Yoruba, c. 1880–1954*

The Yoruba of Nigeria make up the largest immigrant African population in Chicago, and their traditions have traveled across the Atlantic with them. This board is crowned in the center with the face of Esu, divine messenger and mediator between the human and spirit realm. A diviner spreads wood dust on the board and casts cowrie shells in the center, using their arrangement to relate oral traditions to the client who can then apply them to his or her situation. Esu is also well known as a clever trickster, a familiar figure in African American folklore whose mischievous nature can create havoc for people who are not wary.



#### GALLERY 138

*Big Boy (2002) by Yinka Shonibare*

Born in England, raised in Nigeria, and currently working in London, Yinka Shonibare is a citizen of the world. This global heritage is reflected in his artwork, as it often uses humor and irony to confront cultural, racial, and political identities. In *Big Boy*, Shonibare adorns a larger-than-life male figure in printed fabrics that are widely associated with Africa. In fact, the textiles are products of the global economy, originally inspired by Indonesian batik and produced in Holland and England for export to West Africa. The use of the cloth to fashion late 19th-century-styled dress raises questions about the authenticity within the history of the British Empire and in contemporary culture.



GALLERY 169

*Mrs. Andrew Bedford Bankson and Son,  
Gunning Bedford Bankson (c. 1803/05)* by Joshua Johnson

Joshua Johnson was the first African American artist to gain prominence in the United States. He came to America as a slave from what is now Haiti sometime after 1770, but by 1798 he had gained his freedom and resided in a Baltimore neighborhood friendly to free blacks and popular with members of the Maryland Abolitionist Society. Unlike white portrait painters, Johnson could not travel to seek out commissions because of the threat of being kidnapped and sold back into slavery. Nonetheless, he was able to attract local patrons through his close ties to Baltimore Abolitionists and depicted many members of the city's artisan and middle classes, such as the Bankson family, represented here.



GALLERY 262

*Self-Portrait (1944)* by Beauford Delaney

In this self-portrait, Delaney's use of bright red, blue, and yellow conceals the doubt and anguish he felt as he battled racial prejudice in his artistic career. Recalling an artist such as Van Gogh who had used thick brushstrokes and intense feeling to create his own likeness, Delaney composed his face using expressionistic brushwork, creating a mask that attempts to hide the artist's inner turmoil. Delaney commented that his portraits served as "defenses against the inner demons." In 1953 he left the United States and joined fellow African American expatriates Richard Wright, James Baldwin, and Ralph Ellison in Paris.



GALLERY 263

*Train Station (1935)* by Walter Ellison

This painting, split into three sections, depicts social conditions common to the period of the Great Migration, a time of massive resettlement of African Americans from the rural South to the industrial North in search of jobs and freedom from discrimination. The depiction of black porters attending only white passengers and a sign designating an entrance for "colored" illustrates the realities of segregation. On the right, African Americans travel toward the cities of the North, while on the left white travelers embark toward vacation locales in the South. Referencing the Underground Railroad, Ellison used the train to symbolize freedom, mobility, and the ability to choose a better life.



GALLERY 272

*The Two Disciples at the Tomb (c. 1906)*  
by Henry Ossawa Tanner

This painting illustrates the decisive moment from the Gospel of St. John in which the disciples Peter and John learn that Jesus' body was no longer in the tomb. Tanner's depiction of the discovery of Christ's resurrection can be interpreted as a modern allegory of the salvation of African Americans from slavery. Learn more about this work and the artist at the museum's panel discussion "**Tanner: An American Legacy**" on March 29 at 6:00. And enjoy rare films, informative lectures, and lively discussion at **African American Auteurs**, a 14-week lecture series at the Gene Siskel Film Center that highlights the work of African American directors. Visit [www.siskelfilmcenter.org](http://www.siskelfilmcenter.org) for more information.