

THE *MAN'S BEST FRIEND* VISIT

If our pets could talk, what would they have to say about their masters? Not content to let sleeping dogs lie, we take a trot through the museum's collections to dig up the stories behind these canine compositions.



GALLERY 217A

Miss Cunningham Holding Her King Charles Spaniel (1770) by Robert Healy

Can a pet be a fashion statement? We humans can sometimes put on the dog when choosing our animal friends. Named for its most famous master, King Charles II, the titular spaniel in this atmospheric grisaille portrait was a breed symbolic of wealth and nobility in the early 16th century. Originally, a long snout characterized the spaniel, but as the pug became the pet *du jour* of Dutch nobility, the British aristocracy followed suit, causing the King Charles to fall out of favor by the end of the 17th century. The two courtly breeds were eventually interbred, thereby creating the short snout for which the modern spaniel is known. In point of fact, Miss Cunningham's lapdog would be more aptly known today as the Cavalier King Charles Spaniel.



GALLERY 213

The Music Lesson (1670) by Gerard Terborch

Dogs are much more than meets the eye, as any pooch lover will tell you. Gerard Terborch often used meticulous and intimate depictions of everyday life in 17th century Holland to create a layered psychological subtext. In this painting, the instructor guides his pupil as she plays a complex stringed instrument, the double-headed lute. Music-making was a common 17th-century metaphor for love, and the partially opened door and four-poster bed may imply such a liaison. Dogs, for their part, could represent fidelity or, just as easily, base desires. While the sleeping spaniel on the chair may indicate his owner's faithfulness, combined with Terborch's other suggestive details it may imply a more illicit sort of love instead.



GALLERY 206

Gian Lodovico Madruzzo (1551/52) by Giovanni Battista Moroni

What does our choice of dog say about us? Though uncredited in the painting's title, Madruzzo's companion looks to be a Segugio Italiano, a popularly depicted pup during the Italian Renaissance known for its agility in chasing game. Hunting was a common symbol of nobility during this period, so given the sitter's social standing and choice of companion, it should come as no surprise that the young Madruzzo would eventually become cardinal and prince-bishop of Trent in 1567. He succeeded his uncle, Cardinal Cristoforo Madruzzo, who commissioned this portrait of his nephew during the Council of Trent. Cristoforo played an important intermediary role between the pope and the Holy Roman Empire. It is perhaps fitting then that Moroni's portrait should owe as much to the works of fellow Venetian, Titian—who painted Cristoforo's portrait—as it does to the naturalistic paintings of the Habsburg court.



GALLERY 154A

***Statuette of a Jackal* (664–525 BC), Egypt**

Though a close relative to the dog, the jackal does not often share the honor of being called man's best friend. This ancient Egyptian statuette's depiction of a jackal—most likely the jackal-headed god Anubis—served the friendly purpose of protecting the dead on their journey through the netherworld. Said to be the son of Osiris, Anubis served as the god of mummification and the body's remains but also presided over the Scales of Justice, which weighed the heart of the deceased against the weight of an ostrich feather. If the heart was lighter than this Feather of Truth, the person's spirit was free to live forever in the afterlife. A heavier heart, however, indicated a wicked life, and Ammit, the crocodile-headed demon, would then devour the heart, banishing the soul for all eternity.



GALLERY 172

***Rail Shooting* (1856/59) by William Tylee Ranney**

Self-taught painter William Tylee Ranney made a career of depicting frontier life and scenes from the early history of the United States. When recreational hunting emerged as an American pastime around the mid-19th century, Ranney was one of the first artists to choose such rural sporting themes. In this painting, the hunter shoots a duck out of the distant sky with the aid of his servant and two bird dogs. Certain characteristics, like their orange and white coats and fringed ears, suggest these dogs are Brittanys, a gun dog originally from the French province of the same name. Many of the modern hunting breeds emerged from this era when canine bloodlines were first documented and breeding for traits became a widespread practice. Ranney's work is known for its subtle social contrasts. The servant steadying the boat, featured prominently in the foreground, and the bird dogs so raptly attentive to their master's catch, serve to highlight the different layers of power relations at play.



GALLERY 134

***Covered Urn* (AD 960–1127), China**

Its ears perked and tail upright, a little dog sits at attention atop this vessel's umbrella-like cover, which is formed as an inverted lotus leaf. The stoneware urn's pale greenish-blue glaze is known as celadon in the West and is one of China's most enduring ceramic traditions. Originating in the city of Longquan, the history of celadon production dates back to the 3rd century but came into its own as a prosperous industry at the beginning of the Northern Song Dynasty (AD 960–1127), from which this urn dates. Added flourishes like our dog friend were later replaced with simpler designs and a crazed (cracked glaze) finish during the Southern Song Dynasty (AD 1127–1279), the era when celadon became one of China's most important exports.

Looking for more tales to wag the dog?

Feed your animal urge with the noontime express talks, "Beauty and the Beast" on April 13 and "Animal Families" on April 19, or take a trip to the circus with *Color and Rhythm: Henri Matisse's Jazz* in the Ryerson and Burnham Libraries. See the first set of colorful prints on display through April 12, with a second set going on view April 12–May 10.