

Self-Guide

Monkeying Around

You might more frequently think of monkeys residing in zoos or traveling with circuses, but here at the Art Institute, we have primates a-plenty. Get in touch with your simian side with a quick trip to our troupe of museum monkeys.



GALLERY 216

Still Life with Monkey, Fruits, and Flowers (1724)

by Jean-Baptiste Oudry

What would happen if a mischievous monkey was let loose on a pristine still life? Probably something like Jean-Baptiste Oudry's *Still Life with Monkey, Fruits, and Flowers*. Trained as a portrait painter, the French artist drew an enthusiastic following in the early 1720s for his exquisite still lifes, hunting scenes, and animal portraits and indeed took over from Alexandre-François Desportes as the most sought-after painter of such subjects in France. While Desportes's scenes were naturalistic, Oudry enhanced his paintings with elements taken from his study of human portraiture—dramatic lighting and rich coloring as well as character-enhancing gestures and pose. No doubt the playful personality of this painting's rascally grape thief is richly developed.

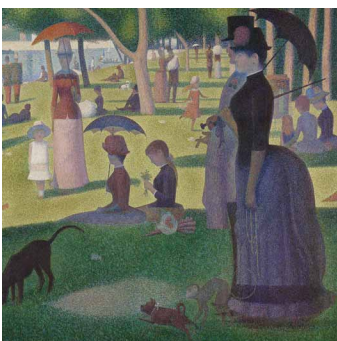


GALLERY 233

Monkey Band (c. 1765)

produced by Meissen Porcelain Manufactory

“Hey, hey, we’re the Monkees!” Okay, it’s not that monkey band, those goofy Beatles wannabes from 1960s television, but these musicians are just as silly. The 20-member troupe, which includes a conductor, bassoon player, guitarist, flutist, vocalists, even a hurdy-gurdy player among others, followed the 18th-century fashion for *singerie*, or images of fashionably dressed monkeys engaged in everyday human pursuits. The painted *singeries* of Antoine Watteau and Christophe Huet were the inspiration for these porcelain figures first produced by Germany’s Meissen Porcelain Manufactory in the 1750s. Popular and mildly satirical table decorations, a set of these figures was owned by Madame de Pompadour, Louis XV’s official mistress.

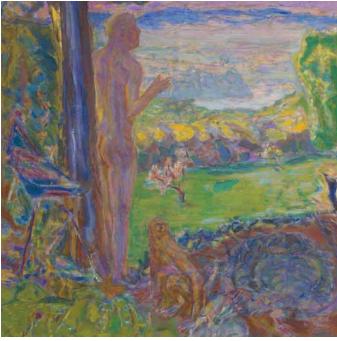


GALLERY 240

A Sunday on La Grande Jatte—1884 (1884–86)

by Georges Seurat

Pot-bellied pigs, pocket-sized pups, digital hamsters—every age has its trendy pet du jour. In Georges Seurat’s beloved painting, the leashed monkey as well as the yapping pug make stylish accessories to the *au courant* attire of the promenading woman on the right. Some scholars have suggested that the monkey, often associated with promiscuity and lust, might have indicated that its owner was a *cocotte*, or a high-class prostitute, but recent theorists argue that no other evidence for this association appears in either in the woman’s manner or pose or in the letters or diaries of the artist or his friends. As with the rest of the work, Seurat took great care in getting the details of the exotic pet right; the artist made five sheets of monkey sketches in the year before starting his pointillist masterpiece.



GALLERY 393

***Earthly Paradise* (1916/20) by Pierre Bonnard**

What Edenic vision would be complete without a representative from man's closest cousin in the animal kingdom? The simian specimen in Pierre Bonnard's luminous large-scale work sits close by the man's feet among birds of paradise, a rabbit, and a profusion of vegetation. Despite this lushness of foliage and fauna, the brilliant color, and radiant light of the scene, there also exists a discordant note—the separation of and contrast between the Adam and Eve figures. Adam stands aloof and rigid, looking and even gesturing into the distance, while a languorous Eve immerses herself in the fertile forest floor. This less-than-paradisiacal vision of human harmony is perhaps due to Bonnard's experiences during the devastating destruction of World War I.



GALLERY 141

***Hanuman, the Monkey God* (9th century)**

Madhya Pradesh, India

Monkeys have a reputation for being curious and playful creatures, but Hanuman, the Hindu monkey god, is revered as a heroic devotee and helpful mediator. Most famously, as recounted in the epic *Ramayana*, Hanuman fearlessly assisted Rama in saving the god's wife Sita from a demon king. Statues of Hanuman are colored red due to the legend that the monkey god covered himself in the red vermilion powder that Sita applied to her part and forehead as a symbol of her devotion to Rama, figuring more red meant more devotion. While the face of this red sandstone sculpture may not be the most monkey-like, the long coiled tail on the back of the head, a distinctive trait of Hanuman, clears any doubt that this work represents the monkey god.



GALLERY 142

***Simian Mother and Child* (13th century) Java, Indonesia**

The only thing more adorable than a fun-loving monkey might be a baby monkey, so this sculpture of a mother hugging her infant tightly packs a double punch of cuteness. While it is difficult to determine the original purpose or date of this sculpture, it's clear that this simian pair was meant to be viewed in the round and is not an architectural fragment. The animals' rather human-like natures are convincingly expressed through their eagerly curious expressions and the tender bond between the mother and child, even while the monkey anatomy remains slightly inaccurate. Regardless, this charming piece is quickly becoming a visitor favorite!

Looking for more monkey business?

Continue to commune with primates at the Lincoln Park Zoo's Regenstein Center for African Apes. Free and open 365 days a year, the zoo is an international leader in animal health and welfare and has one of the largest zoo-based conservation and science departments in the country. For more information, visit www.lpzoo.org.