

Self-Guide

Framed

Get the inside scoop on some of the Art Institute's fabulous frames, beautiful borders, and sumptuous surrounds as this tour highlights the edgy art that is anything but marginal.



GALLERY 201

Lunch at the Restaurant Fournaise (The Rowers' Lunch) (1875) by Pierre Auguste Renoir

This plein-air painting by beloved Impressionist Pierre Auguste Renoir was one of several artworks curators were eager to reframe for the opening of the recently renovated Impressionist galleries. The radiant color of the work, composed outdoors in natural light, had been overpowered by an opulent antique frame, the type Renoir actually favored later in his career. Using a facsimile of the painting, curators and conservators auditioned 30 to 40 frames before finding the current frame, which enhances the milky blue palette and luminous space of Renoir's lively after-luncheon scene. Made in Paris at nearly the same time as the painting, this frame still harkens to the past with its revival of neoclassical motifs and gilding.



GALLERY 202

Virgin and Child (1485/90) by Hans Memling

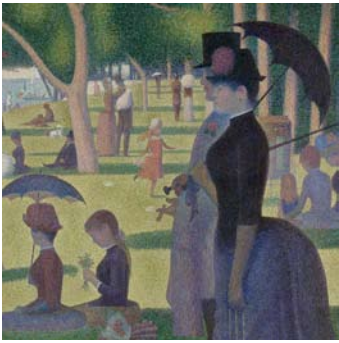
No need to ponder what frame might work best for this Renaissance painting; its frame is permanently attached to the work. In fact, Memling's *Virgin and Child* and its engaged frame were once linked to the artist's *Portrait of a Man in Prayer* by the now-missing hinges, forming what is known as a diptych. The diptych acts as a window, opening into a single domestic space, which connects the holy figures to the man, probably the patron who commissioned the work. The window illusion is furthered by the donor's prayer book and sleeve overlapping the window molding. The Christ Child's drapery likely did the same before the finish on that frame, including the gilding, was removed.



GALLERY 213

The Family Concert (1666) by Jan Steen

Does the frame for this 17th-century painting by Jan Steen remind you of anything? How about if you look closely at the domestic musical scene? Yes, both the actual frame and the depicted one are a style that is called auricular, literally meaning "of the ear." Popular from the 1630s through the 1680s, auricular frames were elaborately carved, free-flowing interpretations of organic forms. Closely resembling contemporary silver work, the fantastically ornamented frames appear almost like molten metal themselves. A reproduction of this highly stylized frame design, this work's current frame even replicates the matte gilding used on the 17th-century auricular frames.



GALLERY 240

***A Sunday on La Grande Jatte—1884* (1884–6)**

by Georges Seurat

In a sense, this world-famous painting by Georges Seurat has two “frames.” One is the border. Added by Seurat two years after he completed the painting, this edging is composed of red, blue, and white dots, complementarily colored to adjacent areas of the main composition. To make space for this border, Seurat increased the size of the work by unfolding canvas that had originally been part of the tacking margins. While no evidence remains as to how Seurat framed this monumental piece after enlarging it with the border, an 1892 photograph of one of the artist’s similarly scaled paintings, *Les Poseuses*, shows a wide, white frame. *La Grande Jatte*’s current frame is a replica based on this frame.



GALLERY 167

***Henry Hill* (c. 1765/70)** by John Singleton Copley

One of colonial America’s greatest artists, John Singleton Copley preferred elaborate rococo-style frames for his American portraits and commissioned many of them from the Boston craftsman John Welch. A master carver who also designed Chippendale furniture, Welch was likely the creator of the frame on *Henry Hill* and that on the companion portrait, *Mrs. Henry Hill*, both of which are original to the works. The pair presents two dramatically different ways that Copley’s frames might have been finished. Most were gilded like that of *Mrs. Henry Hill*, but recent scholarship has revealed that a few had a black finish, like that of *Henry Hill*.



GALLERY 265

***Movement: Boats and Objects, Blue Gray Sea* (1947)** by John Marin

Before John Marin became a painter, he had trained as an architect. In the 1920s, he returned to three-dimensional design, fashioning frames for his pictures. His frames, such as the example on this work, recall the abstract geometric borders he painted around the edges of some of his watercolors. While the paint on the frame picks up the palette of the painting, Marin’s technique in the Art Institute’s oil is so expressive and free that the more regular geometric forms in the frame serve to contrast with the main compositional subject. The frame seems only barely to contain the wild freedom of the sea.

Get a new frame of reference on art!

From February 5 through June 7, Steppenwolf Theatre presents Yasmina Reza’s Tony Award–winning play *Art*, in which the purchase of a new painting challenges the friendship of three men. Plus, join us at the Art Institute on May 7 at 6:00 when Steppenwolf actors present highlights from the play in a free performance.