

Self-Guide

The Eyes Have It

Inspired by Tony Tasset's giant eyeball sculpture in Pritzker Park, this tour treats your peepers to some of the museum's most ocularly oriented artworks.



GALLERY 396

Object (1936) by Claude Cahun

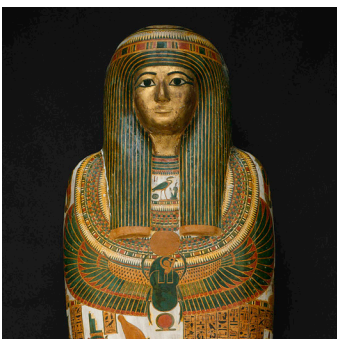
Along with dreams and the unconscious, the Surrealists were fascinated with sight and drawn to disembodied body parts, so eyeballs were a perfect fit. Case in point—the hard-to-watch and hard-to-forget image of an eye being sliced by a razor in *Un Chien Andalou* (1929), the Surrealist film classic by Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí. Another artist affiliated with the Surrealists, Claude Cahun took up ocular anatomy with her sculpture *Object* in which an eyeball is merged with a cut-out cloud shape and a doll hand atop a platform inscribed with a phrase referencing the French national anthem.



GALLERY 289

Cyclops (1947) by William Baziotes

While William Baziotes's painting is named after the one-eyed giant of Greek and Roman mythology, it was the haunting eyes of a rhinoceros encountered at a zoo that inspired the work. The artist explained: "I had some peanuts, and as I gave them to the rhino, he sucked my hand and held it. My wife got scared, but I was terribly interested. He was playful and cute and toy-like, but at the same time he chilled me. He seemed prehistoric and his eyes were cold and deadly." The resulting ponderous creature set amid misty ground evokes the primeval aspect Baziotes sought in his paintings, a unique fusion of the artist's great admiration for classical sculpture's gods and monsters and Surrealism's automatic drawing and biomorphic imagery.



GALLERY 154

Coffin and Mummy of Paankhenamun (c. 945–715 B.C.), Egyptian

The eye of Horus, the symbol seen flanking the column, or djed pillar, on the lower sections on this mummy cover, is quite literally an eye for an eye. This protective ocular symbol, also known as a wedjet eye, was used to ward off the evil eye both on the amulets of everyday wear and in mummy case decoration for the afterlife. According to Egyptian mythology, Horus, the sky god whose eyes were the sun and the moon, had one of his eyes ripped out by Set, the god of chaos. When the moon god Thoth returned the eye to Horus and healed him, the eye was given the name "wedjet," meaning the whole or sound one.



GALLERY 243

Water Lilies (1906) by Claude Monet

Some critics might have joked that Monet's sketchy Impressionist style was the result of fuzzy vision, but indeed the artist did develop cataracts and eye problems beginning around 1905 at age 65. However, it was not blurred vision that the artist complained of; in fact, he found the "complete fog" from which he viewed the world as "very beautiful.... it's this which I'd love to have been able to convey." It was rather his declining perception of color that plagued him, and eventually in 1923 he underwent three eye surgeries and began experimenting with corrective lenses. Coincidentally, the palette Monet used in his water lily paintings during 1918–1922 changed from the previously used brilliant, light-infused shades of this 1906 work to somewhat darker, muddier tones. A conscious artistic decision or the result of ocular degeneration?



GALLERY 211

Cupid Chastised (1605/10) by Bartolomeo Manfredi

"Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind, and therefore is winged Cupid painted blind," writes Shakespeare in his comedic tale of mismatched lovers, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. And while it might not always be the mind with which love looks, it is true that Cupid was often painted blind or blindfolded as he is in this luminous painting by Bartolomeo Manfredi. The sightless archer of amour might actually be happy not to witness the wrathful Mars and the flailing he receives for causing the god of war to fall for his mother, Venus. Adopting Caravaggio's dramatic lighting and dynamic action, Manfredi makes the scene not only a sight to behold but an almost palpable experience.



GALLERY 216A

Self-Portrait with a Visor (1776) by Jean Siméon Chardin

Today, we're all pretty well trained to steer clear of lead due to its numerous ill health effects, but French painter Jean Siméon Chardin learned the hard way, suffering lead-caused vision loss. Chardin became one of the most successful painters of the 18th century with his still lifes and domestic genre scenes. However, the pigment with which he created such brilliant accents in his paintings, lead-based white, began to cause such severe eye problems that the artist traded in his oils for pastels in the 1770s. Chardin did not return to his previous subjects with this new medium but embarked on a new project of portraiture, many of them self-portraits like *Self-Portrait with Visor*, employing bold new coloration and distinct, unblended strokes.

Looking for more?

Don't miss Tony Tasset's 30-foot, three-dimensional *Eye*, on view July 7–October 31 in Pritzker Park on the corner of State Street and Van Buren. Part of the Chicago Loop Alliance's first streetscape project, the giant eye is sure to prove a popular photo op for Chicagoans and tourists alike. Take inspiration for your own art project from *Eye* and artworks in the Modern Wing with July's free family program, The Artist's Studio. Drop by the Modern Wing's Ryan Education Center Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays between 11:00 and 3:00.