

Self-Guide

ART
INSTITUTE
CHICAGO

Here Comes the Sun

The sunny days of summer are upon us, but not every day can be a bright, beautiful day—unless you're at the Art Institute, that is. Bask in the summer sun year-round with this tour of some of our most spectacular solar works.



GALLERY 141

Sun God Surya Standing on His Chariot (10th/11th century), Bangladesh

Today, “sun worship” has a different connotation—grease-slathered bodies baking in the sun—but sun worship, the sort that paid homage to a solar deity, was practiced on the Indian subcontinent as far back as the Vedic age (1500 B.C. and earlier). The sun god, Surya, was a major Hindu deity and had many temples built in his honor up until the 13th century. Like the Greek god Apollo, Surya is often depicted in a chariot, here driven by seven horses for the seven days of the week and accompanied by his scribe Danda and bodyguard Pingala. Because Surya's iconography likely originated in ancient Iran, he is often depicted as a central Asian warrior with a breastplate, dagger, and boots. In this relief, only the boots remain from this earlier depiction.



GALLERY 154

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

A quick quiz: how many symbols of the sun can you find on this Egyptian mummy case? If you guessed three (which, of course, you did), you're right. Perhaps most obvious is the scarab beetle with the hawk head of the sun god Re on the chest section. His spread wings indicate that Paankhenamun would be reborn everyday with the rising sun. Immediately below, a flat-bottomed circle, the hieroglyph for eternity, again connects the deceased with the sun's cycle and rebirth. Perhaps a less obvious solar symbol is the gilded face of the mummy, gold representing the brilliance of the sun. Not only does the gold associate Paankhenamun with the solar cycle of rebirth (a third time just for good measure), but it also ties him to the gods who had flesh of gold—certainly a sunny prospect.



GALLERY 161

The Sun Vow (1901) by Hermon Atkins MacNeil

Sometimes the sun just puts a more positive spin on life, and in some cases, on bronze sculptures as well. American sculptor Hermon Atkins MacNeil tried that tactic with this revision of one of his earlier works, *The Vow of Vengeance* (in Gallery 163). Not only is the title of this later work, *The Sun Vow*, decidedly less violent, but the naturalistic figures of the emaciated old warrior and youthful archer become more idealized and classical, the boy's gracefully twisting torso now the focal point. This sunnier version proved quite popular; a plaster model of the work won a silver medal at the 1900 Paris Exposition Universelle, and Chicago architect and museum trustee Howard Van Doren Shaw bought the first bronze cast and installed it on the front lawn of his Lake Forest home to shimmer in the sun.



GALLERY 265

Silver Sun (1929) by Arthur Dove

Silver is not likely the first thing that comes to mind when thinking of the sun, but in this unconventionally colored work, American artist Arthur Dove conveys the sun's immense power and brilliance with various shades of metallic silver paint as well as other innovative techniques. Concentric circles of shimmering paint expand from the sun's black center to evoke the radiance of the sun. Likely mixed with wax, the viscosity of the paint used to create these surrounding rays further enhances the force of the emanating light. The awe-inspiring potency of the sun is additionally heightened by the striking disparity between the massive hovering sun and its tiny reflection in the water. And yet this diminutive watery reflection forcibly draws the viewer's eye, as it is here where the most undiluted silver paint is used.



GALLERY 247

Two Sisters, Valencia (1909) by Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida

Warming, dazzling, glaring—the sun's brilliance is almost palpable in this beach scene by Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida. Indeed, the Valencia-born Spanish artist earned international acclaim for his exquisite sunlit seaside scenes. Painting mostly outdoors, Sorolla combined the daring color experiments of the Post-Impressionists with lessons learned from the Macchiaoli, the group behind Italy's response to French Impressionism, which used patches of color, or *macchie*, to create impressive naturalistic effects. After making a successful debut in New York and being commissioned to do a portrait of President Taft, Sorolla purchased a beach house in Valencia, on the Mediterranean shore, where he painted *Two Sisters*. The girls' playful delight is captured with perfect intimacy and informality, but it is the sun's incomparable effect that truly sparkles.



GALLERY 395

Forest and Sun (1927) by Max Ernst

Of course, the sun is not always, well, sunshine-y. Sometimes (think disturbing science fiction), it can be rather ominous. Take German Surrealist Max Ernst's forest paintings of the late 1920s and early 1930s. Adapting his frottage technique—rubbing pencil or chalk over paper to pick up the texture of what lies underneath—to oil paint, Ernst created a dense tactile forest, scraping the paint off canvases laid over wire mesh, chair caning, leaves, buttons, or twine. Amid these forest scenes, Ernst often placed a very flat and abstracted solar disk, one that did not bring any light or warmth to the unsettling scene. The result effectively conveyed Ernst's feelings about forests: "They are, it seems, savage and impenetrable, black and russet, extravagant, secular, swarming, diametrical, negligent, ferocious, fervent, and likeable, without yesterday or tomorrow. " Likeable? Maybe. But sunshine-y? Not so much.

Lunch in the sun!

Enjoy the real sun at our newly opened North Garden Bistro. Serving up gourmet sandwiches, salads, and desserts in convenient to-go packaging, the bistro is open every day, 11:00–2:00 (weather permitting). Stop by the lushly blooming garden at the southeast corner of Michigan Avenue and Monroe Street for your alfresco lunch today.