

THE *ROUTE 66* VISIT

From Chicago to Los Angeles, Route 66 runs right through the heart of the country. Take a road trip through the museum's collections, and place your finger on the pulse of Americana.



GALLERY 136

War Shirt (1830/1840), Upper Missouri Tribe

With colorful attire, horseback bison hunts, and the high drama of armed battle with US forces, the tribes of the Great Plains captured the American imagination during the 19th century. This emblematic war shirt speaks to the highly ordered societies and complex systems of obligations, honors, and rewards observed by the mobile tribal encampments. Although this way of life was deeply rooted in an ancient, settled agricultural and hunting culture, great changes rapidly evolved with the introduction of horses from Spanish Mexico during the 17th century. With diverse ornaments, charms, and talismans, the shirt not only recorded the accomplishments and status of the warrior who wore it, but also connected him to the animal powers and sacred forces of nature. Made by an Upper Missouri tribe, the shirt is fashioned of buckskin and decorated with black and white beadwork and porcupine quills. Dangling ermine tails, loose-hanging fringe, and the flowing, untailed hide add a sense of motion and panache, echoing equestrian life on the Plains.



GALLERY 163

The Advance-Guard, or The Military Sacrifice (The Ambush) (1890), by Frederic Remington

Few painters depicting the American West at the end of the 19th century enjoyed as much success as Frederic Remington. Born to a wealthy family in New York, he attended Yale University for a year before striking out for the frontier. He spent just four years in the Wild West, moving first to Montana, running an ill-fated sheep ranch in Kansas, and then traveling briefly through Arizona and Mexico. Upon his return, Remington found immediate success as an illustrator for periodicals like *Harper's Weekly* and *Outing Magazine* depicting the heroic adventures of American soldiers in Indian country. *The Advance-Guard* shows a cavalry scout at the moment he has been shot by the unseen enemy. Presumably the sacrifice suggested in the title belongs to the scout and his horse, both being killed so that others can live to fight another day.



GALLERY 161

Abraham Lincoln (1916), Daniel Chester French

Many monumental sculptures of the 16th president can be found across the United States; Illinois alone sports one in Springfield and two in Chicago. Of course, the most famous Lincoln sculpture can be found at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC. Working with his collaborator, the architect Henry Bacon, Daniel Chester French crafted his first sculpture of Honest Abe in 1912 for the city of Lincoln, Nebraska. Bacon, for his part, was so passionate about the Great Emancipator that he had already begun working at this point, unpaid, to develop the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC. When the commission finally came through almost twenty years later, Bacon tapped French to be the sculptor once again, and in 1919 the iconic sitting Lincoln was finally unveiled. The Art Institute collection holds bronze replicas for both of French's Lincoln sculptures, and a replica of this sitting Lincoln can also be seen at Lincoln's tomb in Springfield, Illinois.



GALLERY 170

Spindle Cube Chair (1902/06), by Frank Lloyd Wright

In Oak Park, Illinois—about twenty minutes away from what would become Route 66—Frank Lloyd Wright built a Shingle Style house for his family. He eventually added an attached studio space where he experimented with a variety of bold new forms and designs. Among his furniture prototypes were heavy, solid cube chairs, some of the first known examples of their kind. Wright had long since been enamored with Japanese architecture and he borrowed the strong, spare look of his chairs from the reticulated ceilings and walls of Japanese homes. Made from leather and poplar, the spindle chair suggests equal parts sophistication and simplicity, with its gently curving legs and tapering crest rail. This particular chair in the Art Institute’s collections once belonged to Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., whose family commissioned Wright’s Pennsylvania masterpiece, Fallingwater.



GALLERY 297C

American Collectors (Fred and Marcia Weisman) (1968), by David Hockney

An Englishman by birth, David Hockney moved to California in 1964 and lived there for over forty years, drawing much inspiration from the sunny climate of the West Coast. This double portrait of contemporary art collectors Fred and Marcia Weisman showcases the couples’ sculpture garden at their Los Angeles home. In a sort of visual gag, Hockney matches the Weismans’ characteristics to artworks in their garden. Fred’s stiff posture mirrors the William Turnbull sculpture that his shadow is cast upon. And Marcia’s toothy grin can be seen in the totem piece to the far right of the painting. Hockney makes use of the bright California sun to flatten and abstract the composition, making the couple seem all the more isolated from one another.



GALLERY 265

Black Cross, New Mexico (1929) by Georgia O’Keeffe

Georgia O’Keeffe once got her artistic kicks on Route 66 as a student of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. The famous highway begins at Michigan and Adams, right in front of the museum. However, it was her experience in the deserts of the Southwest that directly inspired her best-known work. O’Keeffe first visited New Mexico in the summer of 1929, staying at an artists’ colony in Taos, just a few hours from Route 66. On her late evening walks, she was impressed by the large crosses she found dotting the desert landscape. The Penitentes, a devout lay Catholic brotherhood, erected crosses throughout the Southwest dating back to at least the early 19th century. O’Keeffe was inspired not just by these imposing monuments but also by the way they interacted with the stark surrounding environment. The cross in this painting stands close enough that the nail heads are visible, and yet it serves to abstractly segment the rich desert background. The Art Institute would acquire this painting, and several others, in 1943, when O’Keeffe became the first female artist to have a solo retrospective show at the museum.

Looking for more Americana?

Kick off your own trip down Route 66 this summer by visiting the Art Institute. Stop by for the noontime gallery talk, “American Art,” on July 28.