

Dance Fever

There's no better time than summer to kick off your shoes, let your hair down, and dance! Whether you like to shake your tail-feathers on a crowded dance floor, elegantly glide beside a partner, or go solo, you can draw inspiration from these works, each of which involves dance in a slightly different way.



GALLERY 124

Headdresses (Ci Wara Kunw) (mid-19th/early 20th century).
Mali, Bamana people

A headdress like one of these can turn a dancing fool into a farming animal, or *Ci Wara*, the mythical being who is said to have introduced agriculture to the Bamana people of central Mali. The smooth lines and strong angles of these headdresses accentuate the combined figures of the antelope and anteater, who embody the prized characteristics of strength, grace, determination, and endurance. In the 19th century, *Ci Wara* was an important part of rituals that promoted agricultural fertility. Today, the performance has taken on a more secular role, encouraging young men as they work communal fields or simply reaffirming cultural identity.



GALLERY 208

Head of Saint John the Baptist Brought before Herod
(1455/60) by Giovanni di Paolo

While some may employ the skill of persuasive rhetoric to get what they want, those who are not born with two left feet can dance. In Giovanni di Paolo's series of panel paintings narrating the life of Saint John the Baptist, he depicted the enthralling dance of Salome, whose slender form and compelling moves completely seduced King Herod. Salome had so pleased Herod with her dance that when she asked for the head of Saint John the Baptist, he granted her wish. In this painting, the horrified reactions of Herod and his courtiers as the head of Saint John is brought before them contrast with that of Salome, whose dance now is one of joy.



GALLERY 202

Dancer Putting on Her Stocking (c.1900/12) by Edgar Degas

The best ballerinas make dance look effortless, but have you ever seen their poor toes? Unlike many artists, Degas did not romanticize the dance but concentrated on the physical and practical effort that goes into creating the illusion of beauty and grace dancers must achieve onstage. This bronze sculpture, one of three versions made by Degas, depicts a dancer putting on her costume for a performance. Consumed with her preparations, the figure unselfconsciously strikes an arguably awkward and ungainly pose, which is exaggerated by the rough handling of the surface.



GALLERY 237C

Homage to the Romantic Ballet (1940) by Joseph Cornell

After seeing Joseph Cornell's quirky but evocative constructions of bric-a-brac, you'll never view the dollar store in the same way again. Cornell's assemblage-boxes draw their themes from the artist's obsessions, of which ballet was the strongest. This work is based on an apocryphal story of the ballerina Marie Taglioni. While traveling, Taglioni was stopped by a highwayman who agreed not to rob her of her jewels in exchange for a solo performance. Later, she was said to drop pieces of ice on top of her jewelry collection to recall the magical night when she danced for an audience of one on the moonlit snow. Here, Plexiglas ice cubes (supposedly purchased at Woolworth's!) rest on a piece of blue-violet glass with shattered glass underneath, and text placed inside the box lid recounts the tale.



GALLERY 135

Shiva Nataraja (10th/11th century, Chola Dynasty). India

While learning the Electric Slide might be complicated, there's no real message behind the moves. The gestures of this dancing figure are meaningful, though, as any practicing Hindu would know. Here Shiva, the embodiment of the unfathomable, ever-changing life force, is engaged in a cosmic dance that generates the cyclic movement of the universe and sets the rhythm of life and death. The position of each of the divinity's hands and limbs is symbolic. The foot planted on the back of the demon-dwarf, for example, stamps out ignorance. Makes you think about what you might be communicating as you twist your extremities to the latest tunes.



GALLERY 263

Nightlife (1943) by Archibald John Motley Jr.

Just looking at Archibald John Motley Jr.'s colorful and lively depiction of urban nightlife makes you want to get up and move. *Nightlife* creates the sensation of high energy through the artist's use of strong diagonal lines that convey a sense of motion, high-keyed neon colors, and the exaggerated gestures of the nightclub's patrons. The setting of Motley's juke joint is Chicago's legendary Bronzeville neighborhood, which was home to 90 percent of the city's African American population when *Nightlife* was painted.

Gotta Dance

The Joffrey Ballet's 50th anniversary celebration, Come Dance With Us, takes place in Millennium Park June 13–18. The series of free public events includes a full-length performance at the Harris Theater for Music and Dance and three concerts with the Grant Park Orchestra at the Jay Pritzker Pavilion. Call (312) 386-8905 or visit www.joffrey.com. Still got the rhythm? Check out

Chicago Summer Dance, an 11-week festival beginning in June that features an eclectic and international selection of live music and dance instruction on a 4,600-square-foot, open-air dance floor located at the Spirit of Music Garden, just down the street at 601 S. Michigan Avenue. Go to www.citysummerdance.org for more information.