

*A Self-Guide to the Collection*

# MARCH MADNESS

*Where would art be without madness? Feelings of alienation, mythical stories of insanity, or simply the refusal to follow the crowd have provided the creative spark for some of the world's greatest artworks. This guide is filled with pieces of art that we're sure you'll go crazy over.*



## GALLERY 105

***Phoenix-Headed Ewer.*** China; Tang dynasty (618–907), first half of the 8th century

At least 2,000 years ago, an observant Greek noted, “Lead makes the mind give way.” Nonetheless, this toxic element was a major component of ceramic glazes throughout the ages. During the Tang dynasty, Chinese artists developed fluid lead glazes, which were boldly colored with metallic oxides. Although known by the modern term *sancai* (three-color), polychrome vessels display varied combinations of colors: typically, green, amber, white, and blue. Ewers like this phoenix with closed beak were non-functional and probably made exclusively for burial.



## GALLERY 220A

***Self-Portrait with a Visor*** (c. 1776)  
by Jean Baptiste Siméon Chardin

“This old oddity,” said the French novelist Marcel Proust about Chardin’s self-portrait, is “...so intelligent, so crazy... above all, so much of an artist.” Dressed in casual attire with a visor protecting his eyes, Proust summed up the eccentricity of Chardin’s pose. Chardin turned to pastel after years of using lead-based oil paints afflicted him with mysterious “infirmities.” Many materials traditionally used by artists were harmful, and in some cases could even cause brain damage. Chardin, however, was relatively lucky as his mental faculties seem as keen as ever in this observant and insightful self-portrait.



## GALLERY 211

***Hercules and Lichas*** (c. 1600/25), Italy

After three years of wedded bliss with his wife, Dejanira, Hercules’ bride became obsessed with the prospect of her husband’s infidelity. She attempted to forestall such a breach by giving Hercules a robe saturated with a potion that she believed would ensure his undying love. The garment instead had been soaked in poison and, once worn, caused him unbearable agony. In a fit of pain-induced mania he seized Lichas, who had brought him the robe, and threw the hapless man into the sea. In its muscled, twisting forms, this work exemplifies the dynamism of Baroque sculpture.



#### GALLERY 205

### *Madame Roulin Rocking the Cradle (La Berceuse)* (1889) by Vincent van Gogh

The close conditions of Van Gogh and Paul Gauguin's studio in Arles placed more strain on the artists' friendship than it could bear. Distraught by the collapse of his artist haven, Van Gogh threatened Gauguin with a knife and then cut off part of his own ear. This portrait of Madame Roulin—the wife of Van Gogh's friend in Arles, postman Joseph Roulin—was painted five different times, and The Art Institute owns the second in the series. Van Gogh conceived the original portrait as part of a triptych, flanked by paintings of sunflowers. The nurturing and supportive image of this maternal figure holding a rope used to rock a cradle provided a source of solace for Van Gogh during this trying time.



#### GALLERY 244

### *Inventions of the Monsters* (1937) by Salvador Dalí

Salvador Dalí famously stated, "The only difference between me and a 'madman' is that I am not mad." This work, painted before World War II, reflects the anxiety foreshadowing this devastating conflict. In a telegram sent to the Art Institute upon the museum's acquisition of this painting, Dalí makes reference to the "prophetic character" of the work and describes the ominous monsters that populate its landscape. Disembodied hands cradling objects that serve as reminders of death, a chatting cat angel and horse-headed bust, and a flaming giraffe combine in hallucinatory intensity to show the fear and chaos surrounding the threat of war.



#### GALLERY 155

### *Wine Jar (Stamnos)*. Greece; by the Chicago Painter (c. 450 B.C.)

The three women depicted on this vase are probably Maenads, or devotees of the cult of Dionysos, who would often be driven to frenzy during the drunken feasts celebrated in his name. Often depicted in ecstasy devouring the raw flesh of animals, the Maenads represent a thirst for excess and limitless pleasure. In contrast to these rites of indulgence, the Maenads on this vase exude a calm elegance. One woman upholds a wine jar such as this as another prepares to place a garland around the vessel's neck—a common ritual in Dionysian festivities. This vase was created by an artist known as the Chicago painter, so named because of the vessel's place in the Art Institute's collection.



#### REGENSTEIN HALL

### *Crazy Woman with Cats* (1901) by Pablo Picasso

This work, painted quickly on artist board, was shown at Picasso's first exhibition in Paris, hosted by legendary art dealer Ambroise Vollard. Inspired by Toulouse-Lautrec's Montmartre scenes, Picasso likely chose one of the bohemians that he encountered in that section of Paris as his subject and playfully titled his piece *Crazy Woman with Cats*. See this painting in the exhibition *Cézanne to Picasso: Ambroise Vollard, Patron of the Avant Garde*. College students and faculty can view this exhibition for free at University Night on March 7. Meet new people and enjoy refreshments, gallery talks, and music. To register, send your name, e-mail address, and school to [unight@artic.edu](mailto:unight@artic.edu) or call (312) 857-7182.