

Self-Guide

ART
INSTITUTE
CHICAGO

360 Degrees: Art beyond Borders

In anticipation of our new season's globe-spanning array of lectures, concerts, readings, symposia, and performances, this guide explores some of the museum's early acquisitions from across the world—the very beginnings of our encyclopedic collection.



GALLERY 107

“A Picture of Prosperity: America” (Amerika shin no zu) (1861) by Utagawa Hiroshige II

Without peeking at the title, you might not guess that this vibrant Japanese print was intended to depict an American city. However, many Japanese artists produced such fantastic visions of America after Japan officially opened its ports to trade in 1859, following more than 200 years of isolationist foreign policy. For this print, Hiroshige II worked from an engraving of a Danish castle that appeared in *The Illustrated London News* and created an image of a bustling city square surrounded by baroque-style buildings, mountains, and palm trees. The Chicago collector Emily Crane Chadbourne was particularly interested in Japanese artwork that captured this moment of cultural exchange and gave the Art Institute approximately 200 prints from her collection in 1926.



GALLERY 131B

“Tripod Caldron” (Ding) (c. 1600–c. 1050 b.c.) Shang dynasty, China

Before this bronze ritual vessel found its home at the Art Institute in 1928, it belonged to Duanfang, a Qing dynasty government official and art collector who had his own unique Chicago connections. In 1906 Duanfang led a delegation of Chinese officials to Chicago and other U.S. cities to investigate various American practices for the Empress Dowager. The visitors toured the Chicago stockyards, State Street department stores, the Board of Trade, and Jane Addams's Hull House. They were honored at a dinner where Chicago's mayor toasted the Chinese emperor and a University of Chicago professor radically recommended the U.S. end its exclusionary laws on Chinese immigration. Duanfang's experiences in Chicago, however, did not see realization in China. He was assassinated in late 1911, the year that marks the end of that country's last imperial dynasty.



GALLERY 50

“Reliquary Figure” (Nlo Bieri) (late 19th/early 20th century) Fang, Gabon

Though the Art Institute acquired artworks from Africa as early as the 1920s, the museum did not have a department that specialized in African art or a gallery dedicated to its display until 1957. That year the museum gathered together African, Oceanic, and Amerindian artworks with guidance and gifts from a dedicated group of local private collectors. Notable among these early supporters was Raymond Wiegus, known for setting an exceptionally high standard of excellence for the works that he purchased. In 1958 he gave the museum this Fang reliquary figure. Made to sit atop a box that held the relics of a venerated ancestor, the figure's composed features project a sense of inner calm.



GALLERY 176

“The Artist in His Studio” (1865/66) by James McNeill Whistler

American-born painter James McNeill Whistler’s experiences and influences spanned the world. After spending part of his childhood in St. Petersburg, Russia, he returned to America to attend West Point and then headed to Paris to study art and design. Though the globetrotting artist eventually settled in London, his influences continued to defy borders, as this self-portrait reveals. Whistler’s admiration of the Japanese aesthetic, or Japonisme, is seen in the central woman’s yellow kimono and fan and Whistler’s collection of oriental blue-and-white porcelain displayed on the wall. The painting, an early gift from the Friends of American Art, came to the museum in 1912.



GALLERY 155

“Stamnos (Wine Jar)” (c. 450 b.c.)

Attributed to the Chicago Painter, Greek, Attica

How does an ancient Greek vase painter become known by the name of a modern midwestern American city? This artist and many other Attic vase painters did not sign their work, so when Oxford University professor and archaeologist John Beazley began to identify hundreds of individual styles among the vase painters, he assigned new names, often based on the museum in which the most important work of that artist was displayed. This vessel is referred to as the Chicago Painter’s “name vase” because it is regarded as the finest example of his style, characterized by an affinity for Dionysian festival scenes and tall, slim figures with graceful faces, angular noses, and long eyelashes.



GALLERY 215

“The Assumption of the Virgin” (1577-79)

by Domenikos Theotokopoulos, called El Greco

When the Art Institute acquired this work in 1906, El Greco was a rather obscure artist. After an initial success in Spain, the Crete-born artist’s innovative style gradually fell out of favor. Yet, in 1904 when this painting reemerged in Paris, it captured the praise of avant-garde artists, including American Impressionist Mary Cassatt. Cassatt, in fact, petitioned American museums to purchase the work, and after 19 months of deliberation, the Art Institute agreed. In time, the work regained its original lauded status, all the while continuing to win notable admirers. Ernest Hemingway, who visited the museum often as a boy, recalled the *Assumption* inspiring him to write as boldly as El Greco painted.

An Artistic Exploration of Global Proportions

With 360 Degrees: Art beyond Borders, the Art Institute joins the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the Poetry Foundation, and the Chicago Council on Global Affairs to celebrate cultural, social, and political life around the world. Preview the panoramic scope of the season with free admission for all on opening day, September 27. Check out a full listing of the day and season’s offerings at www.artinstituteofchicago.org.