Mini-Tour

Comic Art and Fine Art: Connecting the Dots

Narrative panels, graphic shorthand, starkly delineated forms, storytelling—everything comics and graphic novels today are known for has been transformed by artists throughout time. Connect the dots—from Pop artists of the 20th century to paintings of the 16th century—in the Art Institute’s galleries.

GALLERY 219

*El Maragato Threatens Friar Pedro de Zaldivia with His Gun (c. 1806)* by Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes

Though he may be best known for his painting of the Spanish royal family, Goya was also a man of the people and knew the value of a good story. The tale of the poor Franciscan friar Pedro de Zaldivia getting the drop on the bandit Maragato, wounding him, and holding him for the authorities was the sort of popular tale that delighted a broad audience who could “read” the narrative easily in Goya’s six small panels. Goya had learned of this sensational story through the illustrated newspaper accounts, songs, and prints that had circulated within a month of Maragato’s capture, all of which may have been colorfully exaggerated. Goya took those various accounts and painted these panels within a year of the incident’s occurrence. He maintained the Maragato series in his personal collection.

GALLERY 296

*Screamin’ Jay Hawkins (1968)* by Karl Wirsum

Influenced in equal parts by Chester Gould’s *Dick Tracy*, Mexican folk art, and *MAD Magazine*, Karl Wirsum’s *Screamin’ Jay Hawkins* is an homage to the Maxwell Street R&B icon. Colors jangle noisily against one another, and lines vibrate like sound waves in this sensation-packed image. Wirsum participated in multiple exhibitions at the Hyde Park Art Center with the Hairy Who, a group of artists who routinely produced comic books as exhibition catalogues to accompany their shows. Featuring new work, faux advertisements, and hand-drawn miniaturized reproductions of the artworks on display, the comic-book format married well with the group’s sophomoric word play, pictograms, and exquisite corpse–style comics and functioned as a cheeky send-up of typical art monographs.

GALLERY 293

*Bad Times (1970)* by Philip Guston

While well known for his abstract canvases, Philip Guston went through a period of reinvention in the late 1960s when he felt his work was disconnected from the politically turbulent times. He moved toward a more personal, immediate expression and began introducing objects and characters into his paintings, often treating them in an intentionally crude, cartoonish way. This allowed his paintings to expand and include elements of wit and the grotesque, components he thought were missing from the purely abstract work. Guston cited the comic work of Robert Crumb and George Herriman’s *Krazy Kat* among his artistic influences, and the graphic line work in his paintings are a testament to this inspiration.

Please note that this is an archived mini-tour. Some works may no longer be on view or may have been moved to a different gallery.
GALLERY 236

Emperor Heraclius Slays the King of Persia (1460/80), Netherlandish

This panel painting belongs to a group of at least four scenes and is one of many works in the museum that spreads a storyline over multiple pieces, much like a comic. The panels, likely part of an altarpiece dedicated to the Holy Cross, depict the adventures of the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius, who rescued the True Cross and returned it to Jerusalem after its capture by Chosroës, King of Persia. The painting dramatically crowds figures into the frame, and the centerpiece of action is the graphic beheading of the King of Persia. The exciting, heroic narrative provides an excuse for a vivid display of armor and weaponry. One can see similar examples of arms and armor in this gallery and appreciate the intricate draftsmanship employed by graphic artists at the time.

GALLERY 392

Longueil, Normandie (1909) by Lyonel Feininger

Lyonel Feininger began his career as a cartoonist and illustrator, creating both the comic strips The Kin-Der-Kids and Wee Willie Winkie’s World in the early 20th century for the Chicago Tribune. These strips, as well as Winsor McCay’s Little Nemo contributed to the gradual evolution of comics through a combination of skillful drawings, vibrant color palettes, and experimental panel design, allowing fantastic continuous storylines to be brought to the public in each Sunday edition. Feininger later shifted his career focus towards the fine arts. As a proponent of German Expressionism, Feininger painted his morphologic figures and charmingly dilapidated structures in the same vivid palette of his early newspaper strips.

GALLERY 107

The Fourth Month (Uzuki), from the series Popular Poets of the Four Seasons (Fuzoku shiki kasen) (1768) by Suzuki Harunobu

Manga, or the modern Japanese form of comics and graphic novels, are rooted in Japanese culture and have a complex history, which can be traced back to the prints of ukiyo-e (pictures of the floating world), not only in the stark yet expressive line work of the Japanese woodblock print but also in that the printing methods made affordable distribution of the works possible. The placement of kanji (writing) within the cloud bubble in The Fourth Month (Uzuki) designed by the ukiyo-e artist Suzuki Harunobu is curiously not unlike what you would find in modern shōjo, or girls’ manga, where the subject matter is often young love in spring.

REGENSTEIN HALL

Roy Lichtenstein: A Retrospective
May 16–September 3

Lichtenstein is an artist whose work is widely known, reproduced, and imitated—he is an artist that we seem to know well, but in fact, the true diversity and complexity of his oeuvre is little understood. Presenting over 160 paintings, sculptures, and works on paper—some never-before-seen—this exhibition gives full consideration to all periods of Lichtenstein’s career.