These expanded galleries of American art, on two floors of the Rice Building, display a portion of the roughly 3,500 works in the Art Institute’s American permanent collection and are enhanced by nearly 50 paintings lent by the Terra Foundation for American Art. These two collections complement one another in remarkable ways. The survey starts on the lower floor with 18th- and 19th-century painting, sculpture, and decorative arts, and continues on the top floor, with painting and sculpture from 1890 to 1950; 20th-century American decorative arts are on display in McKinlock Court.

GALLERY 160B: Introduction to the Terra Foundation for American Art collection
GALLERIES 161–179: American painting, sculpture, and decorative arts, 1700–1920
GALLERIES 262–273: American painting and sculpture, 1890–1950
GALLERIES 158–159: 20th-century American decorative arts


BELOW: Winslow Homer. The Herring Net, 1885. Mr. and Mrs. Martin A. Ryerson Collection.
The Roger McCormick Memorial Court houses a selection of the Art Institute’s 19th-century American sculptures, many by expatriates who lived in Rome or trained in Paris. Allegorical sculpture was an important teaching tool in the Victorian age, and so the moralizing stories of Jeptha’s Daughter, Nydia (from Edward Bulwer-Lytton’s *Last Days of Pompeii*); Pocahontas; Zenobia, Queen of Palmyra; and other historical and literary figures abound. The collection also contains personifications of Amor Caritas (Angel of Charity), Solitude, and Truth. The courtyard is bathed in natural light, which allows the white marbles to take on hues of blue, pink, or yellow at various times of day. Other small-scale sculptures are placed throughout the galleries of American art.

Works by the nation’s first generation of landscape painters—the Hudson River School—fill the large, center galleries. Some New England landscapes are replete with nostalgia for the vanishing wilderness and Native American peoples. Others capture a sense of the sublime, instilling viewers with feelings of awe and transcendence. Frederic Church’s exotic subjects, painted in the mid-19th century, reflect his interest in landscape and travel. Later canvases by George Inness include more abstract, symbolic content. The Art Institute’s collection of Inness’s work is one of the largest and most complete in the world, surveying the artist’s career from his descriptive landscapes of the 1840s to his mystical paintings of the 1890s. American Impressionist works by Childe Hassam, Willard Metcalf, and others are on display in GALLERY 171 and continue upstairs in GALLERY 273.

From the 1830s to the 1890s, many American painters favored indigenous themes, and pictures by William Michael Harnett, William Sidney Mount, William Ranney, and Thomas Waterman Wood explore such topics with charm and humor. The uniquely native subjects on view in GALLERIES 171, 172, and 173 explore American everyday life in genre and still-life compositions. Mid-19th-century American sculpture also often addresses contemporary themes. John Quincy Adams Ward’s *The Freedman* commemorates the Emancipation Proclamation, issued in 1863 by Abraham Lincoln, Illinois’s most famous citizen-statesman, whose portrait by Daniel Chester French is also on display.
The museum’s representation of Winslow Homer’s oeuvre is particularly strong. Works in GALLERY 171 capture the variety of paintings that he executed over a 30-year span, from Civil War–period canvases that reflect childhood and the new leisure and wealth of the budding Gilded Age to later, monumental seascapes that represent a symbolic struggle against nature. Psychological realism is present in the portraits of Thomas Eakins, who depicted his subjects with an introspective intensity that surpasses mere physical description. Paintings by Eakins are on view in both the lower and upper level Rice galleries.

GALLERY 163 features realism at the turn of the 20th century in painting and sculpture of the American West. From Elbridge Ayer Burbank’s jewel-like studies of Native Americans in full tribal costume to Frederic Remington’s dramatic renderings of Mexican vaqueros and American cowboys at work or in combat, the adventure, romance, and vibrant colors of the old West come alive. The Art Institute’s collection is especially rich in western sculpture by James Earle Fraser, Edward Kemeys, Hermon Atkins MacNeil, Alexander Proctor, and Remington.

Throughout GALLERIES 163 to 179, painting and sculpture appear alongside decorative arts to offer a broad understanding of how these objects relate to one another—and to American history. For example, the furniture of the early colonies and Dutch-influenced New York silver are on view in GALLERY 165; 18th-century portraits by John Singleton Copley are exhibited in GALLERY 167, which also contains Rococo furniture and silver. Paintings by Gilbert Stuart and the Peale family—Charles Willson, Raphaele, and Rembrandt—are shown with American Neoclassical glass, silver, and furniture by Charles-Honoré Lannuier and Duncan Phyfe in GALLERIES 168, 169, and 172. GALLERIES 174 and 175 display 19th-century upholstered furniture in various revival styles. Small-scale pictures by James McNeill Whistler hang in the Aesthetic-period galleries near furniture by Lockwood de Forest, Herter Brothers, and Daniel Pabst. (Whistler’s large-scale marine subjects are on view in GALLERY 273.) GALLERIES 177, 178, and 179 contain Arts and Crafts objects from the 1880s to 1920, highlighting works by Chicago’s Prairie School architects and craftsmen, including George Grant Elmslie, Robert Riddle Jarvie, George Washington Maher, George Mann Niedecken, Jessie Preston, and Frank Lloyd Wright.


Upper Level

AMERICAN MODERNISM

The survey of American art continues upstairs in a clockwise pattern, beginning on the left in GALLERY 273. This room contains exceptional landscapes, portraits, and city scenes by expatriates Mary Cassatt, John Singer Sargent, and James McNeill Whistler, all of whom remained in France or England during their working careers. Painted in the late Gilded Age, these works form a prelude to early-20th-century modernism. Works by William Merritt Chase, Theodore Robinson, and John Twachtman, among others, show how the tenets of French Impressionism were applied to American subjects. Contemporary urban themes later inspired a loose-knit group of painters centered in New York and Philadelphia, who were sometimes referred to as the Ashcan school because of their often gritty realism. In their works, on display in GALLERY 272, George Bellows, William Glackens, Robert Henri, and John Sloan explored working-class life and the world of public entertainments.

In GALLERY 271, a range of early modernist pictures shows the influence of American artists traveling in Europe—and particularly to Paris—before, during, and just after World War I. There, many were exposed to the new ideas of Fauvism, Cubism, Expressionism, Dada, and other avant-garde movements. Returning home, these artists often adopted such European approaches to color, content, and design in their search for uniquely American themes. Influenced by modern developments from advertising and automation to skyscrapers and jazz, their vision of contemporary life was startling and fresh. A new, organically flowing, yet streamlined aesthetic pervaded the period, even in the sculpture of Gaston Lachaise, which treated more traditional subject matter.

The careers of many early modernists were promoted by the photographer Alfred Stieglitz, who ran art galleries in New York City from 1905 to 1946. His stable of artists included Arthur Dove, Charles Demuth, Marsden Hartley, John Marin, John Storrs, and Stieglitz’s wife, Georgia O’Keeffe, who eventually moved to New Mexico in her pursuit of American art drawn from the western landscape. Through her friendship with Daniel Catton Rich, then director of the Art Institute, a major portion of Stieglitz’s collection of modernist art came to the museum after his death. O’Keeffe added to that gift from her own holdings, and many of these works are displayed in GALLERIES 271 and 265.

Other artists, whose work is on view in GALLERY 263, also looked to America’s geographic regions for specifically native inspiration. John Steuart Curry and Grant Wood, for example, chose midwestern subjects in their nostalgic depictions of a disappearing rural way of life. African American artists created works related to their own experiences, histories, and rituals—scenes of the harvest, of jazz and blues clubs, and of weddings and funerals. In Mexico, as in the United States, nationalism served as an inspiration for artists. In his Zapata, for instance, José Clemente Orozco rendered the hero of the Mexican Revolution with slashing, expressionist brushwork, while Diego Rivera’s depictions of working women constitute a formal statement of human dignity. Adjacent to this gallery, in the sculpture loggia (GALLERY 264), are small-scale modernist sculptures.

American artists pursued many directions in the 1940s and 1950s as seen in GALLERY 262. Some loosely adapted the psychological tenets of Surrealism—disassociation and an emphasis on the unconscious—and their work became increasingly nonrepresentational. Others used a fastidious hyperrealist technique to increase the emotional gulf between reality and fantasy. Edward Hopper expressed the quietude and separateness of the human condition in his urban scenes, which he orchestrated through realistic, highly structured compositions. Stuart Davis, who adopted a loosely Cubist approach in his early canvases, used imagery from popular culture and later embraced the pure, colorful energy of abstraction, linking his vision to the emerging New York School of Abstract Expressionist painters, whose work is featured in the museum’s galleries of contemporary art.

Finally, upon exiting the Rice Building, we invite you to view a sampling of 20th-century American decorative arts on display in McKinlock Court (GALLERIES 158 and 159). Art Deco furniture by Donald Deskey and Paul Frankl; ceramics designed by Otto and Gertrud Natzler, Russel Wright, and Eva Zeisel; seating by Wendell Castle, Charles and Ray Eames, George Nelson, Eero Saarinen, Robert Venturi, and Edward Wormley; and Steuben glass designed by Paul Manship provide a survey of American design from 1900 to 1990.