Stamnos (Mixing Jar)
Chicago Painter
Gallery 151

Among the first objects purchased for the museum’s collection, this ancient Greek jar was originally used to mix water and wine. Painted in the red-figure style (so called because the figures remain the natural red of the clay), this vessel portrays the women followers of Dionysos, the Greek god of wine. Remarkably this millennia-old vase retains its original lid.

“The ancient Greek painter who painted this vase is referred to as the Chicago Painter because this work, long part of the museum’s collection, showcases all the hallmarks of his style: calm, elegant figures and a soft, free form.”

Africa Restored (Cheryl as Cleopatra)
Kerry James Marshall
Gallery 295

Kerry James Marshall describes this work as “the shape of Africa reconfigured as a cubist sculpture.” The attached laminated images and texts refer to figures within the black freedom movement in America as well as to Egyptian iconographies championed by African Americans in the 1970s. Marshall adds new elements each time the sculpture goes on view, treating it as a living and continually evolving work.

“Chicago-based artist Kerry James Marshall’s Africa Restored formally references the nkisi nkondi, or power figures, of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Examples of such works can also be seen in the Art Institute galleries.”

Chicago Connections

Take a tour of works intrinsically linked to the Windy City, or made by artists who call or called Chicago home.

6 artworks
from 6 artists
across 5 galleries

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“Hunt was born and raised in Woodlawn on Chicago’s South Side and attended the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. This sculpture was made just one year after he graduated, a hero made to suit modern times.”

Richard Hunt made Hero Construction in 1958, a year after he graduated from the School of the Art Institute. He welded together found objects—old pipes, bits of metal, and automobile parts—that he discovered in junkyards and on the street. The resulting figure assumes a stance that recalls past heroes, from ancient Greek sculptures of gods and champions to more recent monuments of generals and political leaders.

“The room is precisely rendered, as if painted from direct observation, Abercrombie no longer lived there. When she made this work, she was living in the Chicago row house portrayed in the painting on the back wall.”

Chicagoan Gertrude Abercrombie painted deeply personal works, using objects, motifs, and references knowable only to herself and her social and artistic circle. This painting is a spare rendering of an apartment where she once lived on the South Side, while the framed picture on the wall depicts the pink rowhouse where she lived when she made the painting. It’s a puzzle box of personal histories.

“This painting by Jules Adolphe Breton was among the first to enter the Art Institute’s collection when the museum opened in 1893. It quickly became one of the most popular paintings at the museum. By the 1920s, reproductions were hanging on classroom walls across the United States. In 1934, it was named “America’s Best Loved Picture” in a contest sponsored by the Chicago Daily News.”

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Charles White believed art could be a force in promoting equality for African Americans. This painting draws its title from a 1936 novel about a rural white miner who experiences a political awakening and joins the proletarian struggle against capitalism. White transformed the protagonist into a Black man who breaks free from a mountain of rubble, a hopeful image of the possibility of social change.

“Like many artists of his generation, Chicagoan Charles White believed that art could be an influential force in the struggle to promote racial equality for African Americans. He stated, ‘Paint is the only weapon I have with which to fight what I resent.’”

“Song of the Lark is a favorite of actor Bill Murray. He claims it saved his life when he was still a struggling young comic in Chicago.”

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