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Cabinet
Herter Brothers
Gallery 273

Herter Brothers, one of New York’s foremost decorating firms during the 1870s and 1880s, followed the lead of English designers intent on reforming an industry that produced poorly conceived and constructed work. Advocates for beautiful and functional designs, the Herter Brothers created bold, rectilinear shapes whose exquisite surface decoration was inspired by Japanese art, an influence prevalent throughout the West at this time.

Relief Fragment Depicting Meret-Teti-iyet with Offerings
Ancient Egyptian
Gallery 50

This pair of panels (along with 1910.223) was part of a painted offering niche designed for a woman named Meret-Teti-iyet. The fragmentary upper scenes depict people bringing offerings to sustain her in the afterlife. Meret-Teti-iyet sits behind piles of food at the bottom of each panel, facing approaching visitors. On the other panel, she holds a closed lotus blossom on her lap; on this one, she sniffs an open lotus flower. The lotus, which opens...

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Art in Bloom

During spring and summer, the Art Institute’s gardens are bursting with blossoms. See this blooming bounty year-round in the museum’s galleries.

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Magnolias on Light Blue Velvet Cloth
Martin Johnson Heade
Gallery 173

This painting dates from the later part of Martin Johnson Heade’s long, varied, and peripatetic career. After traveling through the United States, to England and continental Europe, and three different times to Brazil, Heade settled in Saint Augustine, Florida, at the age of 64. There he began painting detailed arrangements of native flowers, including the Cherokee rose, orange blossom, and, as in this work, magnolia.

“Here, Heade has his magnolia stretched out like an odalisque (a reclining nude woman) on blue velvet cloth. Meticulously rendered in pale, subtle hues, the flower is illuminated by a light so sharp that the image evokes the hyperintensity of a dream.”

Flower Girl in Holland
George Hitchcock
Gallery 175

After studying in London, Paris, and at the Hague, Hitchcock settled in 1884 in the Netherlands, living and working for twenty years in Egmond. Attracted to the region’s landscape and peasant communities, the artist specialized in scenes featuring women in traditional dress set among voluptuous, blooming flowers. Here, Hitchcock revised the environment behind the Dutch flower seller, editing out other houses nearby in favor of a bucolic vista.

“Hitchcock’s focus on flower-filled scenes perhaps led him to earn a reputation as a daring colorist. Brilliant hues and open brushwork characterize his idyllic compositions.”

Red Hills with Flowers
Georgia O’Keeffe
Gallery 265

Fascinated by contrasts in scale, O’Keeffe often juxtaposed enlarged still-life elements with distant landscapes. Here, vibrant blossoms are magnified against the dry, steep hills surrounding her New Mexico home. She admired the land’s colors, later equating them with paints: “All the earth colors of the painter’s palette are out there.... The light Naples yellow through the ochers—orange and red and purple earth—even the soft earth...”

“Famous for her flower paintings, O’Keeffe equated the hues of the land with paints: 'All the earth colors of the painter’s palette are out there. . . . The light Naples yellow through the ochers—orange and red and purple earth—even the soft earth greens.’”

Pitcher
Tiffany and Company
Gallery 273

An asymmetrical water scene wraps around the body of this pitcher. The vignette was almost certainly inspired by the work of Katsushika Hokusai, a Japanese artist known for his dynamic woodblock prints of the natural world. Tiffany and Company’s design library included three volumes of Hokusai’s work, many featuring the same graceful irises, enlivened dragonflies, and splashing carp visible on this pitcher.

“This pitcher's elegant irises—and other designs—were realized through a combination of hammering, engraving, and applied metal elements.”