Greyed Rainbow
Jackson Pollock
Gallery 291

In the 1940s, Jackson Pollock developed a revolutionary style of Abstract Expressionism by dripping, pouring, and splashing paint onto canvases. Greyed Rainbow is a quintessential example of his “action painting”—one of his last purely abstract canvases before his death in 1956. While the canvas is predominantly black, white, and gray, Pollock thinly concealed various colors in the lower third, perhaps giving the work its title.

“John Hughes admitted the friends’ trip to the museum was a self-indulgent scene. In high school, the Art Institute was a place of refuge for Hughes. This was a chance for him to go back and show the paintings, like this Pollock, that were his favorites.”

Improvisation No. 30 (Cannons)
Vasily Kandinsky
Gallery 392

In his 1912 book Concerning the Spiritual in Art, Vasily Kandinsky advocated for an art that could move beyond imitation of the physical world, inspiring, as he put it, “vibrations in the soul.” Between 1910 and 1914 he produced a series of “improvisations,” which he described as unconscious, spontaneous expressions. This painting—one of his first improvisations—is a standout work within the museum’s modern art collection.

“During the scene when Ferris, Sloane, and Cameron are admiring this Kandinsky, we hear an instrumental cover of a Smiths song by the Dream Academy. Hughes’s film soundtracks were crucial to their success—pulling heartstrings at all the right moments.”

Be Like Ferris Bueller

Follow the museum tour Ferris Bueller took with his friends in John Hughes’s iconic 1986 film.
Lion (One of a Pair, South Pedestal)
Edward Kemeys
Michigan Avenue entrance/steps

Iconic guardians of the museum, Edward Kemeys’s bronze lions have stood on Michigan Avenue since 1894: An essentially self-taught artist and the nation’s first great animalier (sculptor of animals), Kemeys chose for the Art Institute larger-than-life African lions; the one north of the steps is “on the prowl,” while the one to the south is “in an attitude of defiance.”

“Strike a pose. Ferris, Cameron, and Sloane did—and of all the distinctive poses they found in the Art Institute’s collection, it was the pompous cross-armed, wide-legged stance of Rodin’s Balzac that struck their fancy.”

Portait of Balzac
Auguste Rodin
Gallery 240

In 1891 Auguste Rodin was commissioned by a literary society to produce a posthumous monument to the French writer Honoré de Balzac. Over the course of seven years, the sculptor created numerous studies, including this deliberately ungainly nude portrait. A departure from the idealized classical bodies typical of public statuary, this study stresses Balzac’s vitality and candor through its bold modeling, imposing torso, and confident stance.

“Director John Hughes closed the museum scene with Cameron entranced by the little girl in this painting. Hughes remarked, ’The closer [Cameron] looks at the child, the less he sees. I think he fears that the more you look at him, the less you see.’”

A Sunday on La Grande Jatte — 1884
Georges Seurat
Gallery 240

For his largest and best-known painting, Georges Seurat depicted Parisians enjoying all sorts of leisurely activities—strolling, lounging, sailing, and fishing—in the park called La Grande Jatte on the River Seine. He used an innovative technique called Pointillism that was inspired by optical and color theory, applying tiny dabs of different colored paint that viewers would see as a single, and Seurat believed, more brilliant hue.

America Windows
Marc Chagall
Gallery 144

At the end of World War II, Marc Chagall sought new avenues for artistic experimentation and turned to the medium of stained glass, which allowed him to explore intense color on a monumental scale. This six-panel work, a gift from the artist, merges symbols of American history, the Chicago skyline, and the arts: music, painting, literature, architecture, theater, and dance.

“The tender moment between Ferris and his girlfriend, Sloane, is highly memorable, due in part to the backdrop of America Windows. Chagall’s intent was for these windows to offer ’a place where people can reflect . . . and have a good feeling.’”