



the

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The Art Institute of Chicago



The Art Institute of Chicago. *Michigan Avenue Entrance*. Photo courtesy of The Art Institute of Chicago.

Among the many things that Illinois has to be proud of, the Art Institute of Chicago (AI) ranks high. This grande dame of visual arts is a must-see for more than one million visitors each year. It regularly appears on or tops lists of best American museums and best art museums in the world.

The AI aims to collect, preserve, and interpret the “highest quality” art that reflects the world’s many artistic traditions. But it knows how to have fun, too. Its iconic lion statues that stand by the front steps are regularly adorned to reflect the seasons, special events, or a win by one of the city’s sports teams.

However, the Institute isn’t just a museum. The School of the Art Institute dates back to 1866 and offers nationally accredited undergraduate, graduate, and post-baccalaureate programs. In 1879, each of its students paid \$2 so the AI’s library could buy books. Today, the AI has two libraries and they have more than 500,000 print titles, 100,000 auction catalogs, 1,200 current serial subscriptions, and extensive digital collections. Institute staff, art scholars, and researchers rely on those materials for information about art and architecture.

Here are some interesting facts about the Institute. All information is from the AI or the School of the Art Institute unless otherwise stated.

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Edward Hopper, American, 1882-1967. *Nighthawks*, 1942
Photo courtesy of The Art Institute of Chicago.

How long have the lions stood in front of the entrance?

The lions have guarded the entrance to the Art Institute since its main building was constructed in 1893. The bronze lions were made for the Art Institute's opening there. They were a gift from Mrs. Henry Field (her husband was an art aficionado, an early AI board member, and brother to Marshall Field, owner of the store chain by

the same name). Mrs. Field's lions have unofficial "names" given by their sculptor, Edward Kemeys, based on their poses. The south lion stands "In an Attitude of Defiance," while the north lion is "On the Prowl."

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When was the Art Institute created?

The Great Fire of 1871 that nearly wiped out Chicago can be partly thanked for the existence of the Art Institute. In the years following, Chicagoans' civic spirit was energized and focused on improving the city. In 1879, the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts was created as a museum and fine arts school. In 1882, it was renamed the Art Institute of Chicago. The Encyclopedia of Chicago, however, traces the Institute's history back to 1866, when local artists created the Chicago Academy of Design as a place to hold classes and exhibitions.

The Academy's first collection was plaster casts used for teaching, according to the Encyclopedia, but Art Institute leaders began collecting what were then considered "masterpieces" in 1890 because they believed that was the role of a city museum.

Has the AI always been at its current location?

Before 1893, the AI was located at various sites in downtown Chicago. Its current Beaux Arts style building at Michigan Avenue and Adams Street was constructed by the Institute and the 1893 World's Fair leaders as an auxiliary building for the Fair. The Art Institute moved into the building at the end of that year, after the Fair ended, and has had eight major expansions since. The Institute's newest expansion is its Modern Wing, which opened in 2009 after a decade of planning, and holds the museum's 20th and 21st century art.



Grant Wood, American, 1891-1942. *American Gothic*, 1930.
Photo courtesy of The Art Institute of Chicago.

How many people visit annually?

Between 1.4 and 1.5 million people from around the world visit each year, which is more than the number of annual visitors to the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, D.C., according to that Museum's website.

How many pieces of art does the Art Institute have?

It has approximately 300,000. They include vastly diverse objects such as: a 1st-century Roman marble ram statue; a mid-1900s, 24-foot long painting by American artist Georgia O'Keeffe; 5th-century Syrian mosaic panels; six, 1977 stained glass windows by American artist Marc Chagall; shelled and beaded spiritual masks from the Congo; 17th-century European swords; and heavy, stone Egyptian sarcophagi.

How does the Art Institute compare to other art museums?

With 300,000 pieces, it has the third largest collection of art in the country. The museum with the biggest collection is the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, which has more than two million items.

In terms of physical size, the 264,000 square feet addition of the AI's Modern Wing in 2009 made it the second largest art museum in the U.S., with a total square footage of nearly one million.

What are the AI's best-known pieces?

Some of its best-known pieces are: Grant Wood's 1930 *American Gothic* painting, Edward Hopper's 1942 *Nighthawks* painting, Gustave Cail-



Art Institute of Chicago, *Gallery of African Art*. Photo courtesy of the Art Institute of Chicago.

lebette's 1877 *Paris Street; Rainy Day* painting, George Seurat's *A Sunday on the Isle of La Grande Jatte* – 1884 painting, Pablo Picasso's 1903-1904 *The Old Guitarist* painting, Jasper John's 1961 *Target* canvas, and Andy Warhol's 1963 *Liz #3* portrait.

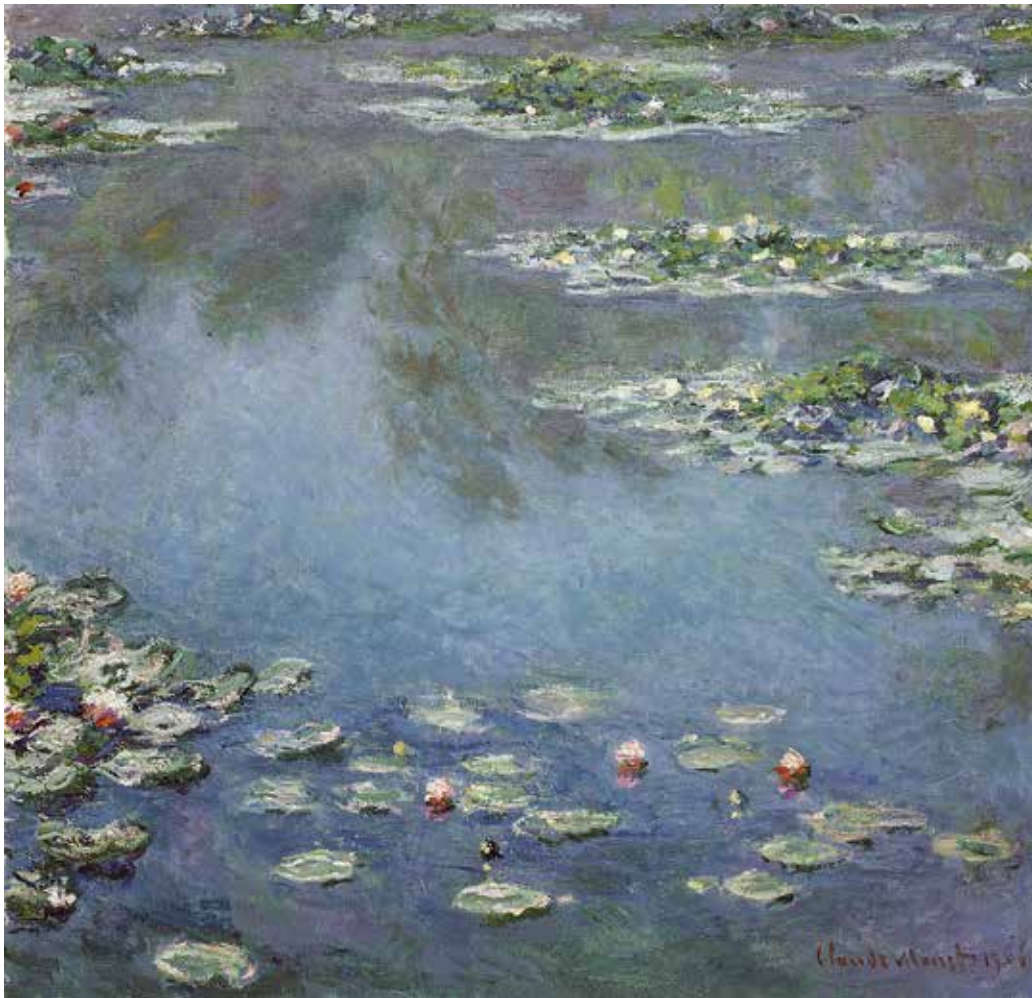
Was the AI ever the first museum to do something?

In 1913, it was the first American museum to exhibit the work of Pablo Picasso, who became a world-renowned artist. The Institute began collecting his works in the 1920s and decades later, it helped arrange Picasso's creation of a sculpture for Daley Plaza. "When the Daley Center (formerly the

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Want to learn more?

If you can't visit the Institute in person, visit its extensive and highly interactive website: www.artic.edu.



Claude Monet, French, 1840-1926. *Water Lilies*, 1906.
Photo courtesy of The Art Institute of Chicago.

Chicago Civic Center) was completed in the early 1960s, architects met with administrators at the Art Institute to discuss plans for a monumental work by ‘the world’s greatest living artist,’” according to the Institute.

Does the AI ever remove a piece of permanent art?

Its experts remove pieces to protect, conserve, or study them. For example, when the new, Modern Wing was being built, the AI removed Marc Chagall’s iconic blue, stained glass windows to protect them from vibrations caused by the construction. While they were away from public view, conservators removed a gray film of linseed oil and calcium

carbonate that was left on the glass surface from putty used to create the windows.

When the well-known Paris Street; Rainy Day painting by Gustave Caillebotte, that shows a Paris street scene during a storm, was returned to the AI after being loaned out, a conservator saw that its varnish had aged and yellowed, darkening the piece. So, a conservator carefully removed the varnish with hand-rolled cotton swabs and acetone.

Who takes care of the Institute’s art?

A staff of 20 conservators and scientists use high tech tools to learn about the creation of the art pieces, how their materials may have changed over time, and how best to protect them. In 2003, the AI created a state-of-the-art scientific laboratory for the staff. They use surgical scalpels, a macro-x-ray fluorescence scanner, and high-powered microscopes, among other tools. The research microscopist, for instance, analyzes tiny (smaller than a human hair) bits of paint to learn about paintings’ composition and colors.

Using a process called surface-enhanced Raman spectroscopy, which analyzes microscopic bits of paint with laser, AI conservators learned that the background for Renoir’s 1883 Madame Léon Clapison painting, which is now a mottled brown with blues and yellows, was originally deep red.

