# Art Institute’s Collection of Modern Art

## Slide 1

Hi, today we’ll be looking at the Art Institute of Chicago’s Modern Art collection. This image shows the exterior of the building with its two iconic lion statues. In 1913, the International Exhibition of Modern Art opened at New York City’s 69th Regiment Armory building. This was Modern Art’s introduction to America. Paris would lose its place as the art capital of the world as New York became the new place to be. Previously, the United States had followed European art trends; now they were creating them. Modern Art is art that broke all of the rules and different styles began appearing in rapid succession. Fortunately, the Art Institute has an exceptional collection, so let’s check it out.

## Slide 2

Constantin Brancusi’s “The Golden Bird” from 1919/20 exemplifies the abstract movement. At first glance, the viewer simply sees a polished gold form sticking up in the air. The title however, gives a clue as to the subject. Imagine a bird with wings pressed tightly against its side and its beak pointed up, and the form takes on more shape. Brancusi wasn’t interested in a faithful reproduction of a bird soaring upward, but rather he wanted to capture the essence of flight by abstracting the subject.

## Slide 3

The next image shows Grant Wood’s “American Gothic” from 1930. The farmer and his daughter in front of the Carpenter’s Gothic style house, harken back to a simpler time. America was going through many transitions. In simplest terms, Regionalism was about searching for America’s identity during a time of crisis. The stock market crashed in 1929 and the 1930s were marked by dust storms and the Great Depression. Wood came from a rural background and felt that was America's true identity.  Did you know that his dentist and sister posed for this work?  Most viewers think it's a husband and wife; actually, it represents a man and his daughter.

The farmer looks out at the viewer, wearing a nice jacket over his work overalls, and holding a pitchfork – a tool of his occupation. The barn is depicted over his shoulder and also refers to his occupation. The daughter’s role is one of domesticity. Her gaze is averted and she wears an apron over her dress accessorized with a cameo pin. Notice the plants over her shoulder that allude to her place in the household. Both figures display hard-working, dignified Americans.

## Slide 4

Rene Magritte’s “Time Transfixed” from 1938 is indicative of his playful nature and love of puns. He was part of the Surrealists whose imagery was based on dreams and the subconscious and thus, unrelated objects are juxtaposed in his works. Here, in his typically realistic painting style, he places a locomotive in a fireplace and oddly enough, it works! Looking just at the locomotive, it seems to be emerging from a tunnel that is the fireplace. And looking just at the fireplace, it seems to resemble a coal burning stove complete with smoke rising, albeit from the train’s smokestack. The result is a playful, unusual, but always interesting painting!

## Slide 5

The next image is Edward Hopper’s “Nighthawks” from 1942. As American cities grew in size and population, Hopper depicted the emotional isolation that followed. The restaurant is on a deserted street and the figures inside, while in close proximity physically, remain emotionally detached from one another. This is how Hopper viewed America’s identity. His clean, crisp painting style also adds to the effect of a cold society.

On a side note, you might more readily recognize a derivative of this work – the one that features James Dean, Marilyn Monroe, and Elvis. However this is the original and it hangs in the Art Institute of Chicago.

## Slide 6

Next, we’ll look at Abstract Expressionism which had two branches: Action Painting and Color Field. Jackson Pollock’s technique of lying his canvases on the floor and actively dripping and flinging his paint earned him the nickname of “Jack the Dripper” and the style, Action Painting. Many things seemed to inspire Pollock, his love of jazz, his interest in psychotherapy, and even Navajo sand painting where shamen pour colored sand on the floor. Abstract Expressionism allowed artists to express their thoughts and feelings without recognizable subject matter. Another rule broken in the name of Modern art! This work is called, “Greyed Rainbow” from 1953, just a few years before Pollock’s untimely death in a suspicious car crash. Note the lyrical use of layered lines and the foundation of colors that delicately peek out like a rainbow in storm clouds.

## Slide 7

The other branch of Abstract Expressionism was Color Field and best exemplified by the works of Mark Rothko. While Pollock’s works were very layered and linear, Rothko’s featured horizontal, broad bands of symbolic color. This work is “Untitled – Purple, White and Red” from 1953. The bands of color float on the background while their considerable sizes balance each other so as to avoid a top-heavy work.

Thanks for joining me on this quick look at the Art Institute’s collection of Modern Art that broke all of the rules.

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