Highlights of the Collection

AN HOUR-LONG TOUR TO SEE THE “BEST OF THE BEST”
How to Find these Works
Your tour starts on the second floor in the Asian galleries.
To save time, view the works of art in the order presented.
Look for the gallery numbers posted on door frames.
Signs above doorways and at the elevators indicate time periods and geographic groupings.

IF YOU ONLY HAVE A BRIEF TIME TO VISIT, HERE ARE SOME OF OUR CURATORS’ CHOICES OF THE “BEST OF THE BEST” FROM OUR WORLD-CLASS

Japan
Portra (*Sculpe) of the Priest Gyoki, early 17th century, wood, gesso, lacquer, pigment, and gold
The Ethel Morrison Van Derlip Fund
Gallery 220

Made nearly a thousand years after Gyōki died (749), this portrait honors the determined individual who united Japan in support of Buddhism. He is depicted in a very realistic way, to remind young monks of the self-sacrifice of Buddhism’s founders. Gyōki holds a nyoi, a symbol of authority carried during formal ceremonies.
China

Folding roundback armchair, Ming dynasty, late 16th century, huang-hua-li hardwood with iron hardware
Gift of Ruth and Bruce Dayton
Gallery 217

One of the oldest in existence, this folding chair has been called a “drawing in space.” Its elegant design combines the opposing forces of pulling and pushing to support weight. Reserved for persons of high rank, folding chairs were used as portable thrones for emperors. They represent the high point of the Chinese hardwood furniture tradition—which used neither glue nor nails.

China

Celestial Horse, Eastern Han dynasty, A.D. 25–220, bronze with pigment
Gift of Ruth and Bruce Dayton
Gallery 215

This large bronze horse is the only one of its kind in an American museum. During the Han dynasty, Chinese artisans began to make sculpture in a distinctive, realistic style. This horse, representing the real horses that were imported from Central Asia along the Silk Road, was constructed of nine separately cast sections. In a nobleman’s tomb, it would continue to provide glorious transportation in the afterlife.
Doryphoros (Spear Bearer), Roman, after a Greek original, 1st century B.C., marble
The John R. Van Derlip Fund and gift of funds from Bruce B. Dayton, an anonymous donor, Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Dayton, Mr. and Mrs. W. John Driscoll, Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Harrison, Mr. and Mrs. John Andrus, Mr. and Mrs. Judson Dayton, Mr. and Mrs. Stephen Keating, Mr. and Mrs. Pierce McNally, Mr. and Mrs. Donald Dayton, Mr. and Mrs. Wayne MacFarlane, and many other generous friends of the MIA
Gallery 230

This is the finest of four surviving Roman copies of a work originally made in bronze by the Greek sculptor Polykleitos, about 440 B.C. Polykleitos made his original figure to illustrate his formula of ideal proportion, as well as the principle of balance, whereby parts of the athlete’s body are tensed and opposite parts are relaxed. These understandings were based on mathematics, which made the figures offerings fit for the gods.

Eastern Java, Indonesia Ganesha, Sailendra dynasty, 10th–11th century, volcanic stone
Purchased with funds from Art Quest 2003 and The William Hood Dunwoody Fund
Gallery 213

Ganesha, the most popular God in the Hindu pantheon, is worshipped by Hindus, Buddhists, and Jainists throughout Asia and Southeast Asia. Known as the eldest son of Shiva and Parvati, Ganesha may have his origins in a sacred elephant considered by some to be the Lord of the Yoga. He is seen as the carrier of good luck and the remover of obstacles, and he is consulted before any major venture. Ganesha’s large belly implies that spiritual insight does not preclude partaking in earthly delights.
Africa, Djenne, Mali, *Horse and Rider*, about 945–1245, wood
Gift of Aimee Mott Butler Charitable Trust, Anne S. Dayton, Mr. and Mrs. Donald C. Dayton, Mr. and Mrs. William N. Driscoll, Clarence G. Frame, and Mr. and Mrs. Clinton Morrison

Gallery 250

This is one of the oldest known wood sculptures from sub-Saharan Africa, having been securely dated by radiocarbon testing. It likely represents an ancestral figure, possibly a monarch of the Mali Empire, whose role as ruler and hunter is indicated by his horse, jewelry, and weapons. The man’s large size relative to the horse further emphasizes his status and importance.

Mexico, Olmec, *Mask*, 900–300 B.C., jadeite and cinnabar
The John R. Van Derlip Trust Fund

Gallery 260

It is highly likely that this mask is the portrait of a specific Olmec ruler, identifiable by the particular combination of patterns incised across the face. An image of a were-jaguar (both human and feline), a powerful supernatural being iconic in Olmec culture, appears over the right eye, while the mouth is enclosed by a three-sided box, which means he “speaks with authority.” The four dots within the box represent maize seeds, signifying the ruler’s responsibility to provide for his people.
The Maori conceived of their communal houses as the physical embodiment of an ancestor’s spirit. This figure was the base for a pole supporting the main roof beam. It faced the entrance and served both to welcome guests and to protect the house’s sacred essence. While not portraits in the strict sense, the individuals depicted in poutokomanawa could be identified by their facial tattoos.

Walter Dorwin Teague, American, 1883–1960, “Nocturne” radio, about 1937, manufactured by Sparton Corporation in Jackson, Michigan, mirrored glass, chrome, and wood

The Nocturne radio ranks among the ultimate icons of modernity. In 1936, it sold for $350 (costing nearly as much as a new Ford car) and was intended for posh hotel foyers where sophisticated people could tune in on its 12-tube receiver. Breaking away from the traditional boxy radio housing, the Nocturne was aimed at a masculine clientele more inclined to respond to its futuristic form and advanced technology.
Max Beckmann, German, 1884–1950, *Blind Man’s Buff*, 1945, oil on canvas
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Donald Winston
Gallery 371

Beckmann painted this great triptych in The Netherlands, where he lived in exile after Germany’s Nazi government labeled his work “degenerate.” The three-part format and the “donor” figures on each wing evoke traditional medieval altarpieces. Also shown are figures from classical mythology, such as the minotaur. While the painting cannot be fully interpreted, broad themes contrast good and evil and/or culture and barbarism. The clock, missing both XII and I, suggests this dream or nightmare never ends.

Vincent van Gogh, Dutch, 1853–90, *Olive Trees*, 1889, oil on canvas
The William Hood Dunwoody Fund
Gallery 355

Van Gogh believed the sacredness of life could best be expressed by painting nature, saying, “It is much better to paint olive trees than the Garden of Olives.” This version, one of ten, was created while he was a patient at the asylum at Saint-Rémy in the south of France. Struggling with seizures and bouts of disabling melancholy, van Gogh made hundreds of paintings in the course of his last year. Ten months after painting *Olive Trees*, he committed suicide.
Charleston, South Carolina, *Charleston Drawing Room*, 1772
Gift of James F. and Louise H. Bell, in memory of James S. and Sallie M. Bell
Gallery 336

A masterpiece of architectural proportion and decoration, the *Charleston Drawing Room* originally resided on the second floor of the home of Colonel John Stuart, a wealthy merchant and Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the British government. It is among the museum’s earliest installed period rooms (1928), and remains one of the finest drawing rooms in existence from pre-Revolutionary Charleston.
Nicolas Poussin, French, 1594–1665, *The Death of Germanicus*, 1627, oil on canvas
The William Hood Dunwoody Fund

Gallery 313

A milestone in the history of art, this painting depicts an event that took place in A.D. 19. Commissioned by Rome’s Cardinal Barberini, its subject was chosen to provide a moral lesson in stoic heroism. Germanicus, a young Roman general, has just been poisoned by his jealous adoptive father, the emperor Tiberius, and Germanicus’s officers are swearing to avenge his murder. The arrangement of the figures in a shallow space recalls the carving on ancient Roman stone coffins.

France, *The Stories of Queen Artemisia*, designed 1562–1617; woven 1611–27, wool and silk
The Ethel Morrison Van Derlip Fund

Gallery 330

This is one of a set of eight tapestries that were designed in tribute to Catherine de’ Medici, Queen of France. They illustrate scenes from the life of Artemisia, the 5th century B.C. warrior Queen of Halicarnassus, whom Catherine admired. The tapestries of this series were designed and woven over many years by craftspeople working in Parisian studios that eventually became the royal Gobelins workshops. Such magnificent tapestries instantly proclaimed the wealth and power of their owners.
Rembrandt van Rijn, Dutch, 1606–69, *Lucretia*, 1666, oil on canvas
The William Hood Dunwoody Fund
Gallery 311

This painting also depicts a scene from Roman history. Lucretia was the wife of a prominent general of the Roman Republic (400–300 B.C.), who was raped by one of her husband’s vengeful associates. Although innocent of any wrongdoing, Lucretia believed the only way to restore the family’s honor was to take her own life. *Lucretia* is considered one of the finest Rembrandts in America, and one of the most moving.

Giovanni Battista Piranesi, Italian, 1720–78, *Pier table*, about 1768, oak, limewood, marble, gilt
The Ethel Morrison Van Derlip Fund
Gallery 307

A landmark work of art and one of the museum’s destination pieces, this pier table exemplifies the “grandeur that was Rome.” It is one of the few surviving furniture examples by the Venetian Piranesi, renowned for his genius as an architect, designer, and printmaker. It is one of a pair made for a nephew of Pope Clement XIII. Its rich ornamentation with five-winged chimeras, floral swags, and palmettes, all finely carved and adorned with gold leaf, was derived from ancient Roman artifacts found at Pompeii and Herculaneum.
If you are taking the tour in the order above, take these elevators to the third floor.
Also visit
Because of their sensitivity to light, some works of art cannot be kept on view for long periods of time. Therefore, textiles and works on paper—prints, drawings, and photographs—are rotated on a regular basis. Changing selections of art in these media can be seen in the following galleries, highlighted on the map:

Textiles
255 and 256 – World Cultures
279 – Jack Lenor Larsen Archive
281 – Contemporary Prints and Drawings
239 – Japanese woodblock prints
263 – 20th century and Contemporary
315 and 316 – 17th through 19th centuries
344 – Work before 1600
368 – Modernist paperworks
369 – Artist’s books

Photographs
262 – Contemporary
363, 364, and 365 – 19th and 20th centuries