

## The Art Institute of Chicago

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The Artist Looks at People

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## THE ARTIST LOOKS AT PEOPLE

The theme of the large exhibition of paintings and sculpture, now on view in the East Wing Galleries, is expressed very simply and clearly by its title. It could as well have been called "Portraits from the 15th century to the Present, from the collections of the Art Institute," a phrase to conjure up rows of images, with every change in fashion telling the passage of time and generations; instead, the title chosen and the presentation of the exhibition are calculated to direct the spectator away from monotony.

In this exhibition, by avoiding the conventional restrictions of portraiture, it has been possible to include, under the broader term "people," works in which the artist has used his friends or his family to express more than human personality. It is no surprise, then, to see in the first room, hung with self-portraits and portraits of artists, Toulouse-Lautrec's *At the Moulin Rouge* and Renoir's *Rowers' Lunch*, both paintings we usually see as more than group portraits. By using this broad theme, it has been possible to make up the whole exhibit from the permanent collections, with one exception only—the *Portrait of Mrs. Leigh Block* by Ivan Albright, which Mr. and Mrs. Leigh Block have graciously allowed to be included in the gallery of Chicago women.

The paintings make their first appeal through the subject, and looked at from this point of view, some of the more celebrated works can still reveal surprises. The Courbet *Mère Gregoire*, for instance, that we have seen so often in the galleries devoted to the French school, and may have considered from other standards than portraiture, when compared with others in the same genre, dominates the room with its truthfulness of observation.

Curiosities are brought together, and masterpieces hang side by side with humbler efforts. The artists, whatever their powers, had the same intent: to project a human being, and

each figure on the wall has some story to tell. Consider the room where the *Beata Beatrix* of Dante Gabriel Rossetti communicates so many literary associations. Her long neck and heavy eyelids express so much romantic anguish. But a step away, there is Madame Cezanne in her yellow armchair; she reveals no secrets whatsoever, but exists forever, a configuration of volumes and planes of color, all balance and harmony. Here, in this company, appears also Mae West, seen by Dali as an object of complete artifice, yet to the life.

The exhibition is of great documentary interest, especially since the museum's collection of self-portraits and portraits of artists is so large. The labels beside each painting, however, indicate how many other professions are represented. Then, too, there are the intimate portraits artists have done of their families and friends. It is, to be sure, the women who come out victorious before posterity, transmitting their personalities—and fashions—with more *éclat* than men. There are exceptions: the elegant Manet by Fantin-Latour and the commanding presence of Max Beckmann's *Self-Portrait*, but what are these when faced with the appeal of Mrs. Potter Palmer, radiant in tulle and diamonds!

In the same room of Chicago women is the *Portrait of Mrs. Leigh Block*, painted by Ivan LeLorraine Albright in a dark tonality, but dark with the lighted darkness of her black pearl—a work of the most terrifying psychological penetration. Mrs. Emily Crane Chadbourne chose Foujita to paint her, with enormous chic, as a *Recamier* of the 20's, and Mrs. Robert Sanderson McCormick, who was Katherine van Etta Medill, appears in this room, her portrait done by Helleu, with her tiny waist and leg-of-mutton sleeves, extremely pretty and very Parisian.

The exhibition was arranged to stimulate the eye and imagination of the spectator. It presents as a theme the subject that has constantly engaged the artist and fascinated the beholder. THE ARTIST LOOKS AT PEOPLE will continue until January 11.