

Report

of the President and Director

THE PURPOSE OF an art museum is to preserve and provide informed access to works of art. In the case of encyclopedic art museums such as the Art Institute of Chicago, this mandate applies to the works of art both as discrete, self-referential objects of human artistic production and as representative examples of the world's artistic legacy. Indeed, the founders of the Art Institute insisted that the museum build an encyclopedic collection; not only because at the time it was the standard set by Europe's greatest museums, but also because it was deemed most appropriate for a burgeoning, multicultural city like Chicago. Our founders believed that art museums—as civic institutions—would, along with symphony orchestras, theaters, libraries, and schools, civilize the expanding population of the modern, immigrant city. In turn, these recent arrivals to our city brought new and diverse cultural forms from their native lands.

What was established here in the second half of the nineteenth century remains true today: the richness of Chicago resides not only in its bold architecture, thriving commerce, and diverse industry, but also in its concert halls, theaters, and museums. And we at the Art Institute strive to meet our responsibilities—as an encyclopedic art museum—through acquisitions, exhibitions, scholarship, and educational programs.

This past year we added almost 700 works of art to our collections, of which we here reproduce but twenty-five, ranging from a large, ancient Chinese bronze vessel dating from the Western Zhou dynasty, or early ninth century B.C., the importance of which stems not only from its size, quality of bronze casting, and elegant surface decoration, but also from its inscription, which identifies its patron as a member of the emperor's administration (though precisely which emperor we are not sure), to a group of diverse nineteenth-century objects—among others, a beautiful African Fang reliquary head, an expressive face jug made by recently freed slaves from South Carolina, an elegant sideboard by the English designer Edward William Godwin, a woman's robe from Uzbekistan, and an intricately patterned English shawl of Kashmir influence—and a Surrealist icon by Salvador Dalí, a provocative

sculpture by Jeff Koons, and drawings documenting the work of Chicago's own Adrian Smith of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill.

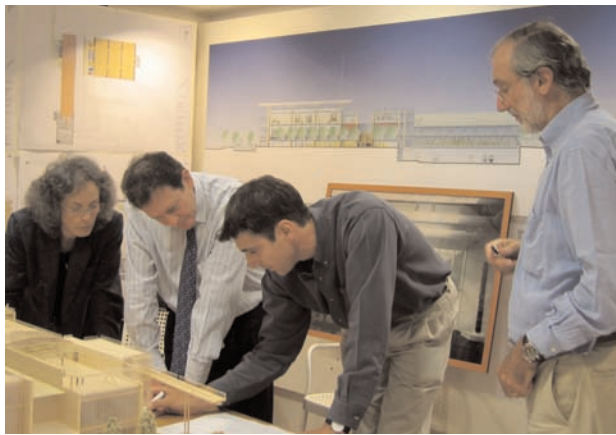
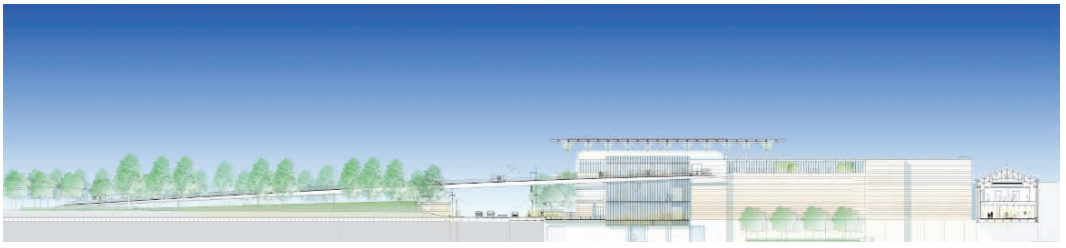
At the same time, we organized and/or presented exhibitions exploring the art of Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec within the cultural context of Paris's bohemian Montmartre district; the elegant and poetic art of the French Revolutionary- and Empire-era painter and draftsman Anne-Louis Girodet de Trioson; ceramics of Africa and the ancient Southwestern culture known as Casas Grandes; the graphic achievements of the prominent African American printmaker Elizabeth Catlett; and the collection of a distinguished master drawings connoisseur, Dorothy Braude Edinburg. We also presented three exhibitions in our contemporary Focus series, including delicate paintings by Cecilia Edefalk and Maureen Gallace, and a conceptual project by Michael Asher revisiting a 1979 installation. Of this group the two ceramics shows and the exhibition of master drawings comprised significant gifts from donors to the museum, thus richly enhancing our permanent holdings. In this respect the exhibitions were a special testament to our curatorial staff as scholars, keepers, and builders of our—of Chicago's—permanent collections.

In addition to exhibition catalogues representing the activities of five curatorial departments and the Kraft Education Center, we published a special issue of *Museum Studies* devoted to important new conservation work throughout this museum, further refined our Web site, advanced our efforts at putting our collections on-line, and took the first steps toward producing podcasts stemming from all of the verbal and musical content we produce about or in conjunction with our collections.

As we did all of the above, we also advanced on our plans for installing the galleries in the Modern Wing and reinstalling the galleries in our current buildings so that we can open our new building in 2009 as a refreshed and rethought Art Institute. These efforts have demanded much of our curators' attention over the year. And nothing is more important for our public mission as Chicago's encyclopedic art museum: our curators, conservators, educators, and designers work tirelessly to introduce our public to their collections, and in the process they perform heroic labors.

We are deeply grateful to them and to all of our generous donors who support their work. A museum like the Art Institute is essentially a collaboration among private donors, dedicated employees, and an eager public. And nowhere in the world is there a more productive such collaboration than here at the Art Institute.

James Cuno, *President and Eloise W. Martin Director*



TOP: Elevation of the Modern Wing, showing the newly named Nichols Bridgeway spanning Monroe Street to Millennium Park.

LEFT, MIDDLE: Trustee and Capital Campaign Chairman Louis B. Susman explains how the Modern Wing will add 65,000 square feet of galleries and double the space dedicated to Museum Education.

LEFT, BELOW: Margot Pritzker and Trustee Thomas J. Pritzker review plans for the Modern Wing with Joost Moolhuijzen and Renzo Piano.

RIGHT, TOP: President and Eloise W. Martin Director James Cuno with a model showing the main concourse of the Modern Wing.

RIGHT, MIDDLE: John D. and Alexandra C. Nichols at the Old Masters Society opening event for *Girodet: Romantic Rebel*.

RIGHT, BELOW: Donna and Howard S. Stone view models of the Modern Wing.