

Division of Learning & Innovation

ART CARTS

What is an Art Cart?

The MIA's Art Carts are hands-on gallery stations staffed by volunteer museum guides and outfitted with teaching objects, props and visual aids related to the museum's permanent collection. Arts Carts provide a rare opportunity to handle specially designated objects in the setting of the Institute's galleries. Each Art Cart is developed around a specific culture, country or stylistic period represented in the permanent collection and centers around a theme or focus.

What educational objectives do Art Carts support?

Art Carts offer visitors informal opportunities to interact with volunteer museum guides who are knowledgeable about the collection and the museum in general. The guides facilitate multi-sensory experiences that encourage careful looking, lively discussion, inquisitiveness and enjoyment. The carts also allow visitors to learn about the museum's role in the care and preservation of works of art as the guides model careful handling of art objects demonstrate the effects of handling on Art Cart objects and to explain the difference between the teaching objects on the cart and objects in the permanent collection.

When and how are Art Carts available to visitors?

Art Carts are designed for casual, drop-in experiences for visitors of all ages. One or more carts (see complete list below) are regularly available in the galleries for the general public on Thursday evenings and weekends. They are also scheduled on some weekday afternoons. Art Carts may also be requested for private events held during and after regular museum hours. They are most suitable for individuals or small groups of visitors who have an interest in interacting individually with museum volunteers and the objects on the carts at their leisure. (For this and other reasons related to wear-and-tear and volunteer availability, we do not schedule Art Carts for school groups.)

Each cart has a designated area where it is normally set up and staffed by volunteer museum guides in or near the part of the collection to which it relates. In consultation with Museum Guide Programs staff, carts can be set up in alternate locations for special events, Family Days, etc.

Art Cart descriptions

The theme, content and gallery location of each of the MIA's carts are described below.

Africa Art Cart, gallery 250

Explore the patterns and symbols adorning everyday objects in Africa. Use elaborately shaped goldweights from Ghana with a balance scale like those used in traditional commerce. Sit on a stool used for cooking over an open fire. Play rhythms on a thumb piano and *shakere*. Feel like royalty in a kente cloth wrapper and jewelry from Ghana or by holding an elaborately carved staff from Tanzania.

Americas Art Cart, gallery 259

Handle art objects representing Native cultures from the Arctic to South America. Notice how the materials and symbols used reflect the geography, climate and natural resources of the people who made them. Try on examples of everyday and ritual adornment including Guatemalan textiles, a Mexican mask, silver and turquoise jewelry from New Mexico and beaded moccasins from the Great Plains.

China Art Cart, gallery 218

Examine the materials and techniques employed by artists over many centuries. Handle jade “in the raw” and after it has been finely sculpted into a Buddhist devotional sculpture. Feel the texture, weight and construction of Chinese lacquer, bronze and ceramics from ancient to present times. Try your hand at Chinese calligraphy and learn about the special tools and materials used in both writing and ink painting.

Japan Art Cart, gallery 219

Discover the arts of the Japanese tea ceremony with objects including tea caddies, scoops, whisks, and bowls made of ceramic, lacquer and bamboo. Learn about the etiquette and traditions of the tea ceremony. Smell the aromas of Japanese teas and tea sweets, listen to the sound of the bamboo whisk as it froths the tea. Try on traditional kimono and obi worn during specific seasons and occasions in Japan.

South and Southeast Asia Art Cart, gallery 211

Experience the arts of India, Tibet, and Southeast Asia as you learn why the Hindu god Shiva dances, how to identify characteristics of the Buddha, and how symbols are used to keep alive traditions that go back thousands of years in time. Examine the exacting detail of Indian miniature paintings up close. See and handle examples of Buddhist and Hindu sculpture and other ritual objects.

Renaissance Painting Art Cart, gallery 343

See how artists adorned paintings with gold and precious pigments in 14th- and 15th-century Italy. Handle the early Renaissance artists’ tools and materials and learn about creating these richly adorned paintings, a complex process involving a team of artists, craftspeople, and patrons. Compare the subjects, styles and symbols of sacred paintings with secular illustrations of the period.

Dutch Painting Art Cart, gallery 311

Consider how international trade and commerce inspired new subject matter in the 17th-century Dutch Republic. Smell aromatic spices from the East Indies. Put on lace collars worn by upper class men and women and see how they were depicted in portraits. Hold and imagine using a sextant (a maritime navigational device) to find your way between Europe and the Far East long before the advent of global positioning systems. Draw a still life of fruits and insects.

Impressionist Painting Art Cart, gallery 351

Learn how the French Impressionists and other 19th-century artists studied scientific color and optical theories to produce eye-dazzling masterpieces. Practice using the *camera lucida*, an optical instrument used to accurately transfer images from the artist’s surroundings onto canvas. Put on a smock and pick up a palette and brush as you imagine painting at an easel in the great outdoors.

Pacific Islands Art Cart, gallery 256

Explore objects that illustrate the intense relationships between the diverse indigenous peoples of the Pacific Islands and their natural environments. Improvise rhythms on an elaborate drum featuring local materials and symbols. Contemplate traversing the ocean guided by the sun, moon, and stars while handling a handmade chart used as a memory aid for navigational routes.

Ancient Greece and Rome Art Cart, gallery 241

View and handle ceramics and sculpture that give us clues to the lives of the gods, rulers, and citizens of ancient Greece and Rome. Try on a toga like those worn by Roman senators. Design your own Greek vase by drawing on reproductions based on real Greek vessels!

Photography Art Cart, gallery 363

From the familiar to the unusual, discover photographic techniques from the advent of photography through the present day through the opportunity to handle a variety of camera types, film, flashbulbs, and photographic prints. Learn the why and how of photographic processes and mediums that were popular in their time and find out how they tell the history of photography as art. Connect 21st century digital photography to the revival of vintage photography through iPad apps and other tools.

Contemporary Art Cart, location in the museum varies

Engage with contemporary artists through special participatory experiences they design and facilitate for museum visitors. Expect the unexpected; each experience is unique!

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