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Views of the Inland from Chicago to Detroit: 'Gallery Guide' with notes on 'Regionalism in American Art'

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GALLERY GUIDE

VIEWS OF THE INLAND: FROM CHICAGO TO DETROIT

ON VIEW JULY 1 - SEPTEMBER 18, 2016

FREE & OPEN TO THE PUBLIC



Mining in Illinois (detail) by William S. Schwartz

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING AT?

VIEWS OF THE INLAND features a spectacular selection of paintings and works on paper on loan from the Flint Institute of Arts. 28 artworks span 50 years, from 1910-1960, showing views of the Great Lakes Basin by artists living and working between Chicago and Detroit. Images depict figures, landscapes and industry, and represent several movements in art, both regionally and nationally.

BY THE NUMBERS

ARTWORKS ON VIEW BY DECADE

1910s	1
1920s	5
1930s	14
1940s	4
1950s	2

THE COLLECTION

All but 4 of the artworks in this exhibition are from the **Flint Institute of Art's Inlander Collection**, secured through the Isabel Foundation and the collecting efforts of sculptor **Michael Hall** and watercolorist **Pat Glascock**. The latter two are a dynamic husband and wife team who not only collected many of the works, but researched them, met the artists and personally travelled to each location that they represent.

FUN FACT:

3 sculptures by artist and collector Michael Hall are in the KAC's permanent sculpture collection.

A BRIEF TIMELINE OF INTERNATIONAL ART MOVEMENTS & ARTISTS DURING THE PERIOD THE INLAND ARTWORKS WERE CREATED

1910s	Abstraction Paul Klee, Piet Mondrian
1916	Dada Hans Arp, Man Ray, Marcel Duchamp, Francis Picabia,
1919	Bauhaus Paul Klee, Wassily Kandinsky
1920s	American Scene Painting Charles Burchfield, Edward Hopper
1920s	Mexican Muralists Diego Rivera, Jose Clemente Orozco
1920s	Magic Realism Frida Kahlo, Paul Cadmus
1921	Constructivism Vladimir Tatlin, Aleksandr Rodchenko
1924	Surrealism Joan Miro, Hans Arp, Man Ray, René Magritte, Salvador Dali
1925	Art Deco Paul Iribe, Georges Lepape
1930s	Regionalism Thomas Hart Benton, Grant Wood, John Stuart Curry
1930s	Social Realism Ben Shahn
1930s	Black Chicago Renaissance Archibald J. Motley
1945	Art Brut Jean Dubuffet
1946	Abstract Expressionism Jackson Pollock, Willem DeKooning, Robert Motherwell, Mark Rothko
1950s	Neo-Dada Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns
1950s	Pop Art Richard Hamilton, Roy Lichtenstein
1959	Chicago Imagists Don Baum, George Cohen, Leon Golub, Nancy Spero, H.C. Westermann, June Leaf

REGIONALISM IN AMERICAN ART

VIEWS OF THE INLAND depicts the people, land, waterways and industry of the Midwest between Chicago and Detroit by artists living and working there. In doing so, it provides a regionalist perspective in art. Krasl Art Center docent Michael Hill provides two art historical contexts for understanding Regionalism in American art history below.

Regionalism in the history of American art is a multi-faceted and problematic concept. In its narrowest and first definition, Regionalism refers to a relatively short-lived movement, limited primarily to the Great Depression era of the 1920s and '30s, that — in an ostensible attempt to reject all things European — championed the representational depiction by painters and watercolorists of decidedly American scenes and landscapes (hence this movement was also called American Scene painting). Regionalism in a broader, second sense, refers collectively to the artists of any specified geographical area, such as the drainage basin of the Great Lakes, the American Southwest, Lower Michigan, the greater Chicago area, the Hudson River valley, etc. Further, some well-known Regionalist painters (first definition) were closely identified with the geographical area known generally as the American Midwest (second definition).

Three painters and their now iconic works are universally identified with Regionalism in the first sense: Thomas Hart Benton (*The Hailstorm; Boomtown*), John Steuart Curry (*Tornado over Kansas*), and Grant Wood (*American Gothic*). Standard interpretations hold that Regionalism actively embodied nativist, conservative, isolationist values and celebrated the virtues of hard work, American agriculture and rural life. Regionalism undoubtedly produced highly accessible, representational works that were popular with many Americans.

Among art critics at the time, Regionalism became, for some, a cause célèbre but was clearly anathema for others. Thomas Craven promoted Regionalist art in concert with his utter disdain for European modernism, writing in 1940, "... better the nameless illustrators for the old *Police Gazette* than an army of imitators of Matisse and Picasso." H.W. Janson, no admirer of Regionalism, but noting the extreme vehemence with which critics attacked each other, pro and con, wrote judiciously in 1943 that "The final judgement on the artistic validity of Regionalism, must be left to the future." Two decades later, in 1962, H.H. Arnason asserted, concerning the Regionalists, "Whatever their qualities and virtues may be, their work, offering little that was new or experimental, is not in its essence germane to the evolution of modern art." More recent evaluations, however, by Nancy Heller, Julia Williams, Michael Hall, Patricia Glascock, Debra Bricker Balken and others, are often more favorable, and point especially to the complexity, contradictions, and contested space of the Regionalist movement as worthy phenomena to be appreciated and more closely analyzed in their own right.

Regionalism in the second sense, speaking collectively about the artistic work produced in given geographical areas during specified temporal periods, is replete with hazards and conundrums. In today's hyper-modern societies, there is little rationale for presuming that arbitrarily delimited geographical areas should or can produce cohesive, consistent, or distinctive schools of artistic outlook. There is almost always too much variation — too many precursors and influences, too many exceptions — to build convincing, all-inclusive composites. In today's world, the patterns discerned on the basis of regional surveys, more often than not, reflect the perspectives and definitions of the surveyors much more than the presence or absence of underlying systematic regional regularities.