

## **In Pursuit of a Masterpiece**

October 18, 2009 through April 11, 2010  
U.S. Bank Gallery



**Left to right:**

Jasper Johns, American, b. 1930, *Figure 2*, 1963, graphite wash, charcoal, and chalk, The William Hood Dunwoody Fund 70.71

Francis Bacon, British, 1909–92, *Study for Portrait VI*, 1953, oil on canvas, The Miscellaneous Works of Art Purchase Fund 58.35

Image files of these artworks and others featured in the exhibition are available. Visit the [MIA Press Room](#) to log in for access.

### **MINNEAPOLIS, JULY 27, 2009**

To coincide with the fall exhibition “The Louvre and the Masterpiece,” the Minneapolis Institute of Arts (MIA) will present a companion show that will explore the notion of what makes a masterpiece. On view from October 18, 2009, through April 11, 2010, “In Pursuit of a Masterpiece” is a selection of masterpieces from the MIA’s permanent collection, carefully chosen by MIA curators from every collecting department. Organized around the same themes as the Louvre exhibition, the MIA show encourages visitors to see familiar works of art in a new light and to think about the collection in different ways.

“In Pursuit of a Masterpiece,” curated by MIA Director and President Kaywin Feldman, is arranged in three sections: *Changing Historical Definitions of a Masterpiece*; *Connoisseurship, or Knowing a Masterpiece When You See One*; and *Taste and the Evolution of Knowledge*. MIA curators contemplated the themes and reviewed the permanent collection in their specific areas, considering the artworks’ formal aesthetic qualities, significance, and history and reputation before and after entering the museum’s collection.

The section that introduces the idea of connoisseurship as a means of identifying works from the past as masterpieces will display magnificent works that were not called masterpieces when they were executed, such as a ritual water basin, *Chien*, from Eastern Chou dynasty China, as well as *Chief's Stool* (early 19th century) from the Cook Islands. This presentation will include an examination of a fake still held in the MIA's collection. For years the *Chac mool* was purported to be Maya-Toltec from 10th–12th-century Mexico. Chac mools are distinctive sculptures created by artists from the mingled Maya and Toltec cultures of the post-classic period in pre-Columbian Mexico. Large-scale examples are found at many ancient sites, most famously at Chichen Itza in the Yucatan peninsula. Although purchased as a true masterpiece by the MIA in 1947 and exhibited widely in Europe in 1958–1960, subsequent research in the 1970s proved this striking Chac mool was in fact a copy of the famous Chichen Itza figure.

Works of art that have long been admired as masterworks include the MIA's early collection masterpiece — first shown when the museum opened in 1915 — Gustave Courbet's lively and popular painting, *Deer in the Forest*. Other examples in this area of undoubted connoisseurship include the superb 1792 *Italian Inkstand and Case* by Vincenzo Coaci, a lyrical pair of 16th-century screens by the Japanese artist Sesson Shūkei, and the magnificent William Blake monotype *Nebuchadnezzar* (1795), one of the finest prints in the MIA's collection.

Changes in taste and evolution of knowledge in the field reveal some interesting choices, such as the remarkable Djenne *Horseman* sculpture from 15th-century Mali. Francis Bacon's *Study for Portrait VI* is another selection from the MIA's paintings department. Acquired by the museum in 1958, this painting demonstrates discrimination, courage, and connoisseurship. Another daring acquisition occurred when the museum purchased Jasper Johns's subtle drawing *Figure 2*, a work that encourages us to see beauty in the banal.



**Left:** China, Eastern Chou dynasty, Warring States period, *Chien* (ritual water basin), fifth century B.C., bronze, Bequest of Alfred Pillsbury 50.46.103

**Above:** Djenne, Mali, *Horseman*, c. 1450, wood, The Frances M. Norbeck Fund 2001.2.3



The exhibition will provide opportunities to compare and contrast masterpieces in context. For example, three stunning Chinese Sung dynasty stoneware objects will be displayed together, and viewers will be encouraged to compare the purity and color of the works' celadon glazes and simplicity of form in order to determine the very best example. Also available for a surprising comparison of photographic printing techniques will be two prints of Ansel Adams's iconic 1941 photograph, *Moonrise, Hernandez, New Mexico*. Adams printed both photographs from the same negative, twenty years apart, and the works demonstrate subtle but significant differences.

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### **ABOUT THE MINNEAPOLIS INSTITUTE OF ARTS**

The Minneapolis Institute of Arts (MIA), home to one of the finest encyclopedic art collections in the country, houses more than 80,000 works of art representing 5,000 years of world history. Highlights of the permanent collection include European masterworks by Rembrandt, Poussin, and van Gogh; modern and contemporary painting and sculpture by Picasso, Matisse, Mondrian, Stella, and Close; as well as internationally significant collections of prints and drawings, decorative arts, Modernist design, photographs, textiles, and Asian, African, and Native American art. General admission is always free. Some special exhibitions have a nominal admission fee. Museum hours: Sunday, 11 A.M.–5 P.M.; Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday, 10 A.M.–5 P.M.; Thursday, 10 A.M.–9 P.M.; Monday closed. For more information, call (612) 870-3131 or visit [www.artsmia.org](http://www.artsmia.org).