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Art of Illinois

by **Wendy Greenhouse**

Art of Illinois is on view through December 2018, at the Illinois Governor's Mansion, 410 East Jackson Street, Springfield, Illinois, 62701, 217-782-6450, https://illinoismansion.org. A 186-page catalogue, with essays by curators Dr. Wendy Greenhouse and Sharon S. Darling, published on the reopening of the Governor's Mansion, accompanies the exhibition.

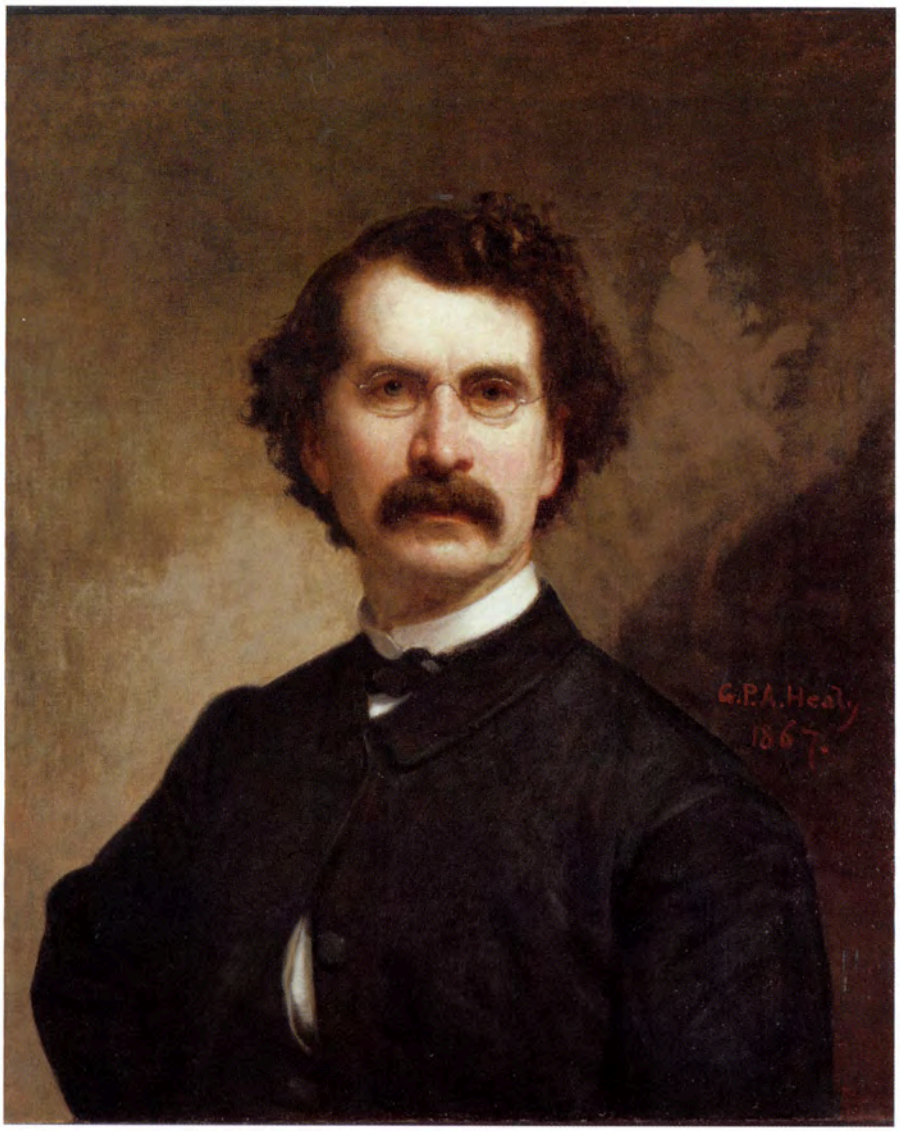
Art and architecture are mirrors. They reflect not only our past but also our evolution to today and tomorrow. The openings of *Art of Illinois* and the reimagined Illinois Governor's Mansion provide a unique opportunity to engage the people and places that influenced the Illinois of today. The Governor's Mansion, built in 1855, has been witness to the state's—and some of the nation's—most transformative events. From this home, governors fought to free slaves, unshackle laborers, deploy troops for the great wars, lift families from the ravages of the Great Depression, and guide a fragile world at the onset of the Nuclear Age.

The idea for *Art of Illinois* evolved from State of Illinois First Lady Diana Rauner's decision to renovate and envision the pri-

RIGHT: William H. Bartels, *Parlor Suite*, handcarved furniture in oak and birch, Illinois Governor's Mansion Association.
BELOW: C. D. Peacock, Chicago, Illinois, designer, Watson Company, Attleboro, Massachusetts, maker, *U.S.S. Illinois Silver Service*, sterling silver, Illinois Governor's Mansion Association.
LEFT: William Schwartz, *Outskirts of Galena*, 1938, o/c, 30 x 36, Illinois Legacy Collection, Illinois State Museum, courtesy of the Fine Arts Program, Public Buildings Service, U.S. General Services Administration, commissioned through the New Deal art projects.

mary purpose of the Illinois Governor's Mansion. That the exhibition coincides with the 200th birthday of the state is a fitting start to the next life of a home that, in its newest iteration, earns its place among Illinois Historic Places as The People's House. The Mansion will serve as both residence and symbol, the latter of Illinois statesmanship, inclusion, and hospitality. It, of course, continues to be the home of the state's chief executive, but now its look is both stately as befits Illinois' heritage and richly inviting.

The 2018 Mansion is surrounded by a majestic landscape that frames the striking sight of the structure. Its interior now accommodates a mission of history, education, and appreciation. There are public spaces for visitors to gather and learn from period art and exhibits once featured in the



ABOVE: Lorado Taft, *The Solitude of the Soul*, modeled 1901, cast 1994, bronze, 29 x 15 x 12, Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois on behalf of its Krannert Art Museum, Museum Purchase through the Harlan E. Moore Charitable Trust Fund, reproduced from an identical cast in the permanent collection of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.
ABOVE LEFT: Belle Emerson Keith, *Home Views (Expectations)*, 1892, o/c, 26 x 37, Rockford Art Museum, gift of Mrs. Edward O. Lathrop (Mary Emerson Lathrop).
LEFT: George P. A. Healy, *Self-Portrait*, 1867, o/c, 28 7/8 x 24, Chicago History Museum, gift of Mr. Ezra Butler McCagg.

1893 World's Columbian Exposition. None of these accomplishments could have been completed without the tireless efforts of the Illinois Governor's Mansion Association and the blue-ribbon group of men and women who lent their expertise and their love of Illinois to the project. Finally, this milestone in the history of the Mansion has been reached without using taxpayer dollars. Nearly $15 million was raised from private sources to pay for the renovation.

This first exhibition in the Mansion's newly defined public spaces captures some of these transformations. The ninety-three pieces on display—from the hands of Illinois artisans, craftspeople, sculptors, and

ABOVE AND ABOVE RIGHT: Lyon & Healy, *Harp, Model 175*, 1896, hard maple frame, Sitka Spruce soundboard, 70 x 38, Lyon & Healy Harps, Chicago. RIGHT: Robert Hessler, designer and decorator, Pickard China Company, *Cake Plate, "Encrusted Linear,"* 1919-1922, porcelain, 10 7/8 x 10, private collection. Robert Hessler, designer, Isadore Bardos, decorator, Pickard China Company, *Tea Set, "Encrusted Linear,"* 1919-1922, porcelain, *Teapot*, 6 1/4 x 6 1/4; *Sugar Bowl*, 3 1/4 x 5 1/2; *Creamer*, 2 3/4 x 4 1/2, private collection.

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painters—deliver both historical insight and cultural wonder. Seventy-one of the objects are on loan from public museums and private collectors located in Illinois; whereas, twenty-two of the works are the

ABOVE: Richard Hunt, *Hybrid Figure*, 1977, welded corten steel, 64 x 32 x 26, Illinois Legacy Collection, Illinois State Museum, Museum Purchase through funding provided by the National Endowment for the Arts and Illinois Arts Council.

ABOVE LEFT: Norse Pottery Company, left-to-right: *Covered Urn*, 1903-1912, glazed earthenware, 6 x 4, John Danis; *Lizard Vase*, 1903-1912, glazed earthenware, 12 1/4 x 7 1/8, John Danis; *Jardiniere*, 1903-1912, glazed earthenware, 8 x 12, John Danis.

LEFT: West End Furniture Company and E. H. Scott Radio Laboratories, *Radio Console*, 1920, walnut, 63 x 37 x 18 3/4, Midway Village Museum, Rockford, Illinois.

property of the State of Illinois.

Three accomplished and talented individuals were enlisted as the curators and designer of the exhibition. Dr. Wendy Greenhouse, a Chicago-area independent art historian who specializes in American art of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, serves as the curator of the fine art section. Sharon S. Darling, an Illinois resident and independent decorative arts historian, oversees the decorative arts portion of the exhibition and John Vinci, a renowned Chicago architect and preservationist, designed *Art of Illinois*.

Outskirts of Galena by William Schwartz (1896-1977) is an idyllic image of a midwestern village that conforms to a tradition-

ABOVE: Eva E. Adams, decorator, Atlan Ceramic Art Club, Chicago, Illinois, *Chocolate pot*, 1898, porcelain, 8 1/2 x 5, private collection.
ABOVE RIGHT: Florence Donovan Pratt Steward, decorator, Atlan Ceramic Art Club, *"Japanese" Place Setting from Conversation Set in Historic Ornament*, 1910, porcelain, *Cup*, 3 1/8 (d); *Saucer*, 5 1/2 (d), Chicago History Museum, Purchase.
RIGHT: Helen Fenton Frazee, decorator, Atlan Ceramic Art Club, *Plate*, c. 1900, porcelain, 10 1/4 (d), Chicago History Museum, gift of Mrs. Clifford Nolan, Sr.

al ideal of landscape beauty that intimates the peaceful coexistence of man and nature, a theme reinforced by the presence of two small figures on the road. In the 1940s, Galena, in northwestern Illinois, was a sleepy memorial to its mid-nineteenth-century heyday, rather than the popular tourist destination of today. *Outskirts of Galena* is one of Schwartz's many works made under the sponsorship of the Depression-era federal Works Progress Administration (WPA). The prominent electrical poles in this image pay homage to another important initiative of the New Deal economic program: rural electrification.

A multitalented painter and printmaker, Schwartz studied art in his native Russia before emigrating to the U.S. in his teens. He arrived in Chicago to train at the Art Institute of Chicago and soon became one of the city's most critically successful modernist artists. In works such as *Outskirts of Galena*, Schwartz drew on village memories from his Russian boyhood as well as romantic fantasy to interpret the midwestern rural scene.

A major figure in Chicago's interwar modernist art community, Emil Armin (1883-1971) created paintings, prints, and carved sculptures that synthesized contemporary artistic trends with inspiration drawn from his Jewish roots and the peasant traditions of the American Southwest. He believed that, above all, an artist must express his own times. Armin arrived in Chicago from his native Romania in 1905 as an impoverished young man. Within a decade, he had completed his studies at the Art Institute of Chicago, re-

ABOVE: Lillian Scalzo, *The Illinois State Register Building*, c. 1945, w/c and gouache on paper, 14 x 11, Springfield Art Association.

ABOVE LEFT: Macena Barton, *The Lobster*, 1946, o/c, 28 x 36, M. Christine Schwartz Collection.

LEFT: Ivan Albright, *Self-Portrait*, 1934, o/c, 29 1/2 x 19 1/2, New Trier High School District 203, Winnetka, Illinois.

ABOVE RIGHT: Rudolph Weisenborn, *Chicago*, 1928, o/c, 48 x 80, Illinois Legacy Collection, Illinois State Museum, gift of Gordon and West Weisenborn.

RIGHT: Julia Thecla, *Remembering*, 1966, tempera, charcoal, lacquer, pencil, and collage on board, 10 x 10, Bernard Friedman.

ceived several solo exhibitions, and been the subject of a book.

One of Armin's several celebratory images of the Chicago waterfront and skyline, *The Open Bridge* offers his adopted city as an exhilarating icon of modernity. Capturing the exuberant optimism of the 1920s, the open arms of a red drawbridge perhaps embodies Chicago's welcoming embrace of the immigrant.

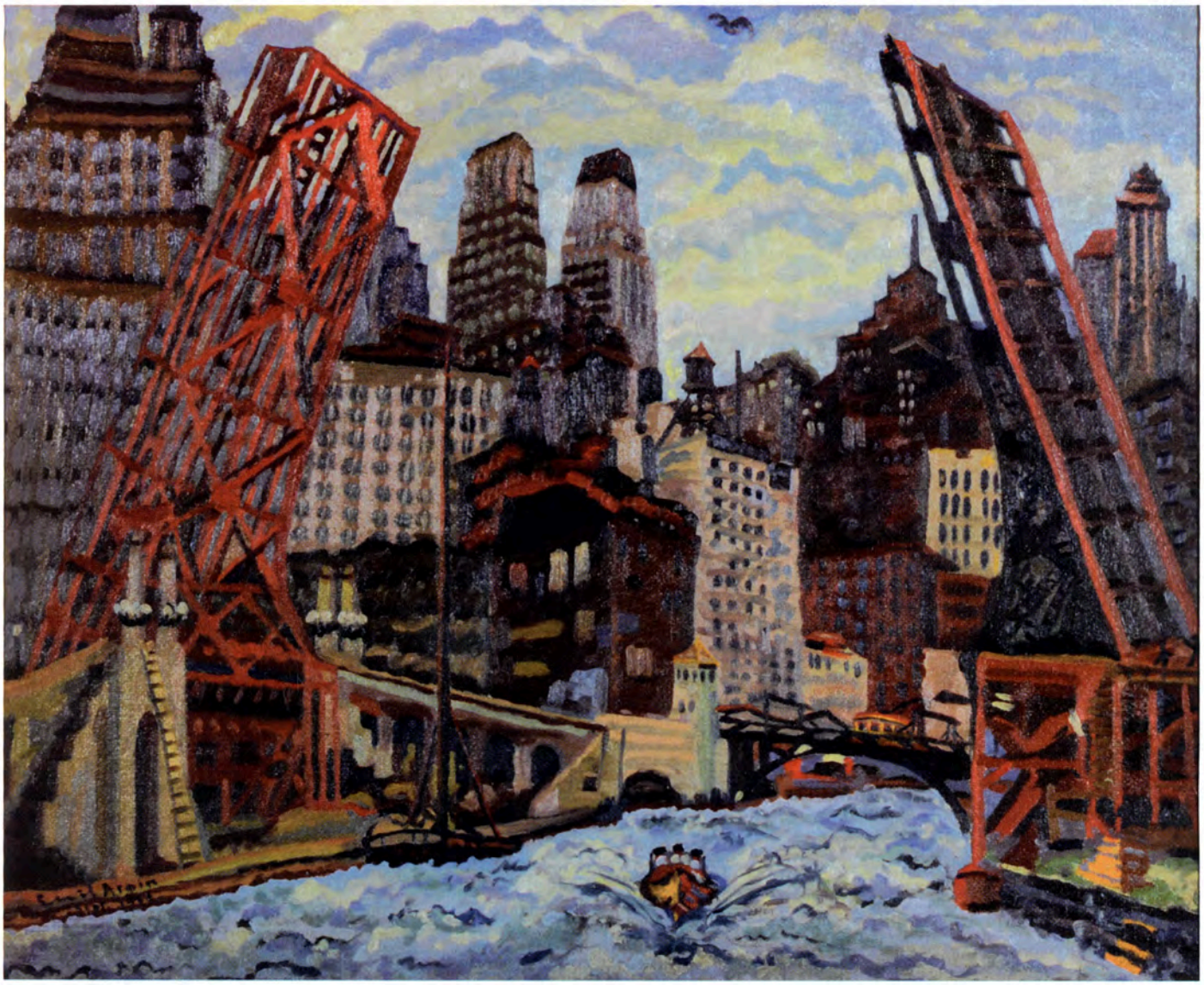
African American artist Archibald J. Motley Jr. (1891-1981), who studied at the Art Institute of Chicago's prestigious school, spent his career on the narrow overlapping borders of two societies separated by race. He was the first artist, black or white, to focus on the urban context of modern African American experience. The humor and even caricature of his images, which may strike today's viewers as offensive, went unchallenged by Motley's largely white art audi-

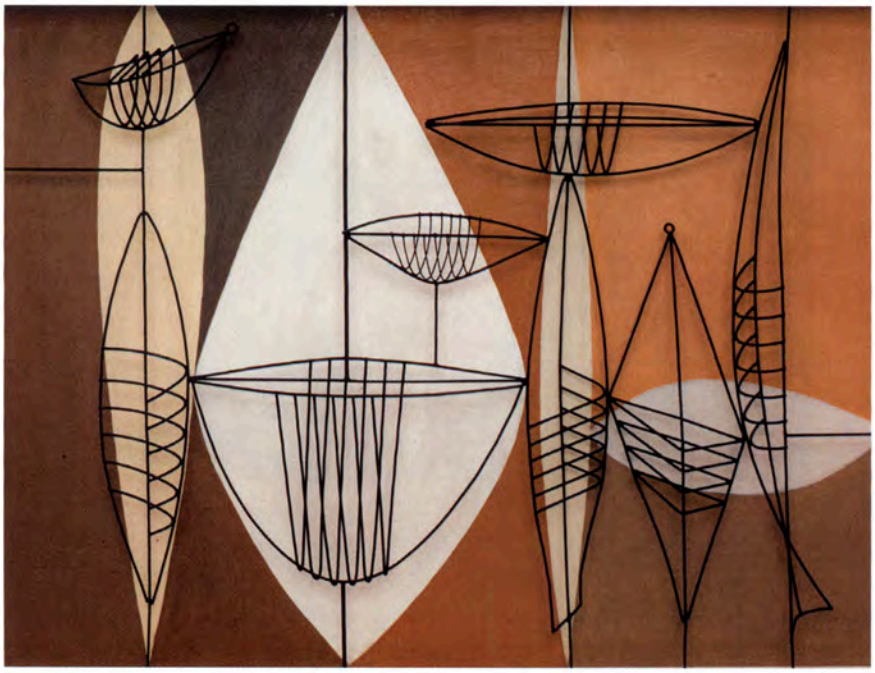
ence. But they hint at his somewhat ambiguous relationship to his own racial identity, as well as his ability to view his community both critically and affectionately.

Motley found many of his subjects in the Bronzeville neighborhood on Chicago's South Side. His images, which often feature musicians and dancers, highlight the rich social variety that gave the area its legendary creative vitality in the interwar period. Arranged as if on a stage before the viewer, the oddly assorted choristers in *The Jazz Singers* vary by body type, expression, and attire, suggesting a spontaneous gathering of individuals from different social and economic spheres. United in song, they also share an identity as African Americans.

Raised mostly in Aledo, Illinois, Gertrude Abercrombie (1909-1977) was active in Chicago from the 1930s to the 1970s as a member of progressive circles of visual artists and jazz musicians. Her diminutive paintings are windows onto dream-like, nearly empty landscapes and interiors. With their recurring imagery of particular animals, objects, and solitary figures, Abercrombie's works are charged with cryptic symbolic content inspired by her own life, family relationships, and psyche.

"It is always myself that I paint," she once said. *Between Two Camps*, one of her many covert self-portraits, refers to changes in the artist's personal life at the time it was painted. In 1948, Abercrombie both divorced her first husband and remarried. According to the artist, the two tents divided by the taut cord of a flying kite





ABOVE: Emil Armin, *The Open Bridge*, 1930, o/Masonite, 22 x 27, Illinois Legacy Collection, Illinois State Museum, gift of Susanna and Matthew Morgenthau in memory of their Mother, Irma Thormann. LEFT: Richard Koppe, *Black Wires*, 1950, canvas, oil paint, wire, and wood, 33 x 43, illinois State Museum.

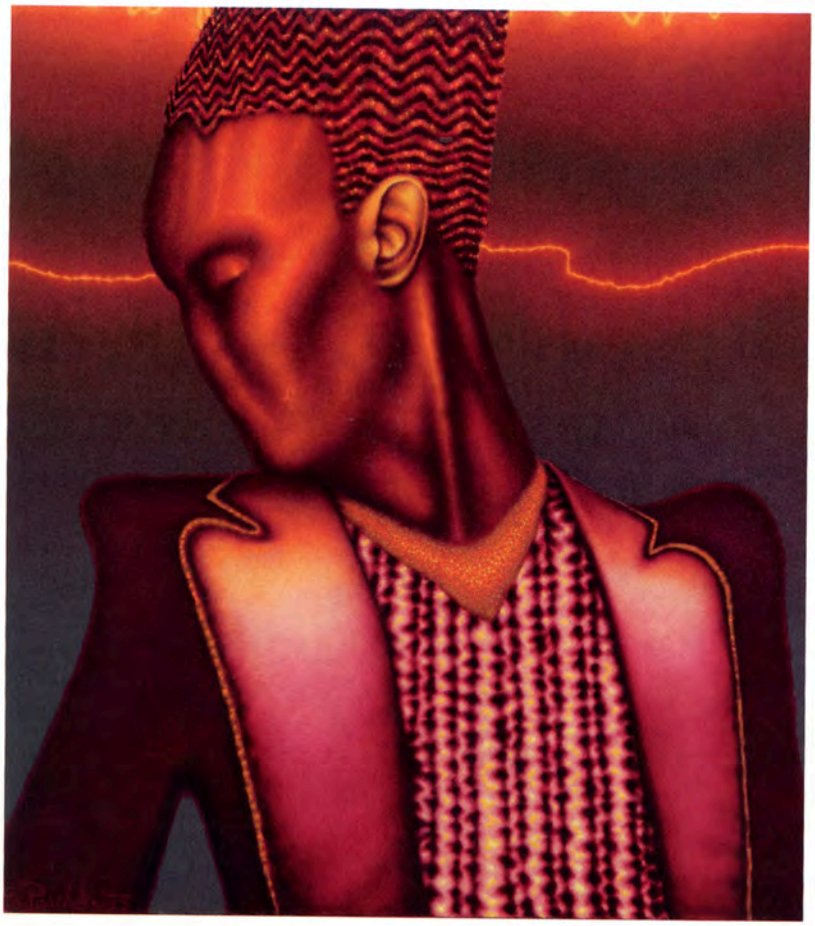
represent her two marriages. The bleak landscape seems to promise an uncertain future, however.

Manierre Dawson (1887-1969) had little formal art training. In 1910, when working as an architectural draftsman in Chicago, he made what are now considered among the earliest entirely non-objective paintings, independent of the experimental abstraction then being developed by avant-garde artists at home and abroad. In 1915,

ABOVE: Archibald J. Motley Jr., *The Jazz Singers*, c. 1934, o/c, 32 1/4 x 42 1/2, The Federal Art Project Collection of Western Illinois University, courtesy of the Fine Arts Program, U.S. General Services Administration, New Deal art project.
RIGHT: Carolyn Plochmann, *Country Store*, c. 1958, o/Masonite, 23 9/16 x 29 9/16, University Museum, Southern Illinois University.

the discouraged artist abandoned both art and architecture as careers, moving to rural Ludington, Michigan, to take up fruit farming. Although Dawson continued to make experimental art, he was virtually forgotten by the art world until his work was rediscovered after his death.

Dawson likely had never experienced the desert firsthand when he made the painting *Desert*. Yet its rhythmic lines and shapes in warm gold colors evoke the graceful loops and whorls of wind-carved stone or sand, and spiky dark forms resem-



ABOVE: Arthur Sieving, *Jitterbug Dancers*, c. 1950, carved wood, 23 1/5 x 8 x 6 1/2, Illinois Legacy Collection, Illinois State Museum, gift of the artist.
ABOVE LEFT: Manierre Dawson, *Desert*, 1920, o/Masonite, 22 x 28, Illinois Legacy Collection, Illinois State Museum, gift of Dr. Lewis Obi, Frank McKeown, and Lefferts Mabie.
LEFT: Ed Paschke, *Savoy*, 1978, o/linen, 38 x 34 1/4, private collection.
ABOVE RIGHT: Ellen Lanyon, *Ogden-Lake*, 1954, egg tempera and gold leaf on Masonite, 25 1/4 x 31 1/4, Illinois Legacy Collection, Illinois State Museum, Museum Purchase.
RIGHT: Herman Menzel, *The Woman in Orange*, c. 1936, o/c, 22 1/8 x 26 1/8, David and Susan Ford Curry.

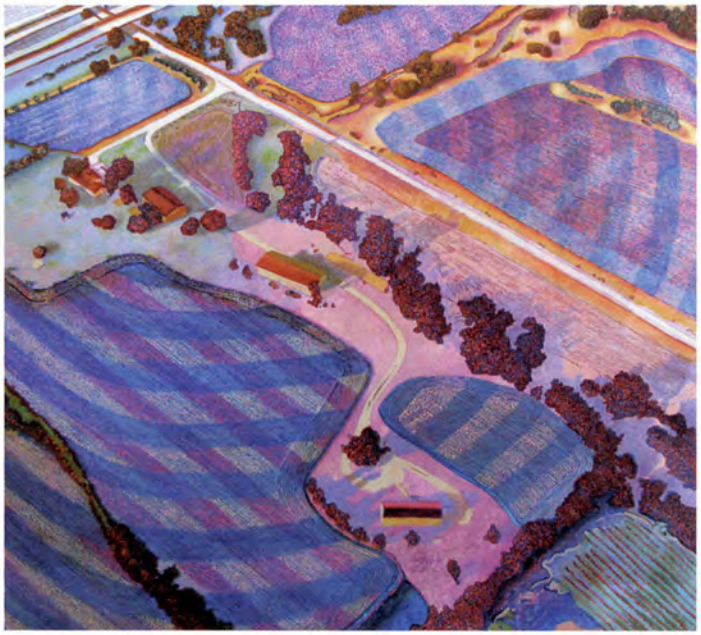
ble the angular limbs of denuded trees. Like the desert itself, his composition is both beautiful and forbidding, inviting and alien, saturated with light and mysterious.

A painter and printmaker, Ellen Lanyon (1926-2013) was a Chicago native who was instrumental in the founding of several important artists' organizations before she moved to New York in 1983. Like many Chicago painters who emerged in an era dominated by abstract expressionism, she rejected artistic formalism in favor of evocative figural imagery derived from fantasy and surrealism.

While studying at the Art Institute of Chicago, Lanyon was introduced to the

museum's collection of late medieval and early Renaissance paintings, with their painstaking technique of egg tempera painting. She drew on that inspiration, as well as her everyday experience, for her Chicago cityscapes of the late 1940s and 1950s, which emphasize the grittiness of the city's decaying architectural fabric. As a student, Lanyon later recalled, she saw the world from the perspective of her daily rides on the L.

With its naïve perspective compressing space and distorting objects, Lanyon's *Ogden-Lake* brings a child's sense of wonder to the prosaic infrastructure of urban mass transit. The Ashland Avenue station of Chicago's Lake Street "L" (elevated) train line appears as if seen from an upper story of a building just east at Ogden Avenue. The track bed is a floating highway surmounting the West Side's aging industrial



ABOVE: John Storrs, *Woman and Soldier*, 1940-1951, terra-cotta with applied gouache paint, 7 1/4 x 4 7/8 x 1 7/8, estate of the artist, courtesy of Richard Gray Gallery, Chicago/New York.

ABOVE LEFT: Harold Gregor, *Flatscape #106*, 2010, acrylic on canvas, 60 x 66, collection of the artist, courtesy of the Tory Folliard Gallery.

LEFT: Marcos Raya, *Psychedelia*, 2016, acrylic on canvas, 88 x 67, collection of the artist.

RIGHT: Gertrude Abercrombie, *Between Two Camps*, 1948, o/Masonite, 12 x 16, Illinois Legacy Collection, Illinois State Museum, gift of Marian and Leon Despres.

architecture. Bridging the tracks, the station sports a mismatched pair of structures that playfully echo the L's elaborate Victorian station houses of the 1890s. Several riders wait on the bridge over the tracks, while at the left a man begins the ascent from street level. Tracks, railings, girders, and electrical wires form a lacy network superimposed on the mosaic of angular planes that make up the ground.

Born into a working-class family in rural Mexico, Marcos Raya (born 1948) grew up in Chicago's Taylor Street neighborhood. The self-described "outlaw artist of 18th Street" became a leader of Chicago's Mexican American political mural movement. His vast body of work in many mediums treats powerful themes of politics, violence, sexuality, and the disso-

BELOW: Eve Garrison, *Untitled (Artists at Work)*, c. 1949, casein on paper, 22 x 27 3/4, Corbett vs. Dempsey LLC.

lution of individual humanity through mechanization, war, political corruption, and addiction.

Raya's self-portrait shows the artist, wearing his signature pork pie hat and dark sunglasses, working intently in his studio. Fantastic animated forms seem to leap from the artist's sketchpad to the large framed canvas, before they overflow the pictured studio space and onto the frame of Psychedelia itself. This imagined spectacle, like the painting's title, recalls the drug-induced hallucinations of the 1960s drug scene. The images in the background refer to Raya's training and early work. *Psychedelia* is not only a monument to the process of creation but a record of Raya's own self-invention as an artist.

—Adapted from the Foreword by Diana Rauner, First Lady of Illinois, the Introduction, and Dr. Wendy Greenhouse's biographical information on each artist in the Fine Arts section in the accompanying exhibition catalogue.