

An Innovative Initiative Aims to Raise Chicago's Art Profile Even Higher

BY EILEEN KINSELLA APRIL 4, 2017

In what one art expert described as a “deep dive,” Chicago and its own slice of art history will get the royal treatment in 2018 as part of a new wide-ranging initiative titled Art Design Chicago, fueled largely by the Chicago-based Terra Foundation for American Art.

Art Design Chicago will debut in 2018 as a joint effort from more than 40 organizations, and will examine the influence of Chicago and its achievements across numerous disciplines, beginning in the late 19th century, at the time of the Great Fire of 1871, and continuing up to the present day. Inspired by Los Angeles's massive “Pacific Standard Time” initiative, it will include about 25 exhibitions and hundreds of public programs.

“The city has long had a pioneering spirit, championing the avant-garde, and shaping modern art and design,” said Elizabeth Glassman, president and CEO of the Terra Foundation in a statement. “We could not think of a better moment to launch this initiative, when reconnecting with who and what comprises the American story is so essential and immediate.”

The organization hopes to deepen the public's understanding of the city's distinctive character as a center for art and design. In addition to examining the roots of Chicago's artistic culture, the initiative will also explore the contribution of the city's artists and designers on a national and international level.

In June 2018, the Art Institute of Chicago will host a retrospective of African American artist Charles White, organized with New York's Museum of Modern Art. A show in September will focus on the group of artists known as the Hairy Who, which included artists such as Jim Nutt, Gladys Nilsson, Karl Wirsum, and Art Green.

Among some of the topics that Art Design Chicago will explore are: the role of immigrant communities in the city's creative development; how Chicago residents' social and political activism played an important role in art and design breakthroughs; and the city's unique position as both an artistic and manufacturing center.

In April 2018, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, will host “Picture Fictions: Kenneth Josephson and Contemporary Photography.” The Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Chicago Cultural Center are organizing an exhibition for September titled “African American Designers in Chicago: Art, Commerce, and the Politics of Race.”

The Terra Foundation has promised \$6 million in grants for participating organizations, while the Richard H. Driehaus Foundation has pledged \$1 million. An additional \$1 million is being raised by a consortium of donors.

“Chicago is a dynamic city, rich in culture and history,” said Chicago First Lady Amy Rule, co-chair of the Art Design Chicago Civic Committee. “What better way to tell our story than through art?”