

Art Institute of Chicago

Monday was a full day visit to the Art Institute of Chicago, just ten minutes' walk from our hotel. We were met by Christopher Monkhouse, Curator of European Decorative Arts, who kindly spent the morning with us, not just the hour he had agreed, and explained, 'our collections are led by our patrons'. The result is a fascinating mix of European furniture from the last four hundred years, as rich Chicagoans, from the establishment of the Institute in 1879 to the present day, continue the never-ending minuet between collectors, dealers and curators. Added to the minuet nowadays is the further question about rich countries buying the heritage of older, poorer countries.

The Chicago Institute has just won first place as Tripadvisor Museum of the World and it is quite impossible to do justice to it here. RFS members should simply visit its website, www.artic.edu/aic/collections and view the European Decorative Arts and other equally fascinating sections. Two highlights are a cabinet made by John Kirkhoffer, a German working in Dublin, who had rather unusually signed the piece inside the base of a small drawer with the added words 'facit 1732', and the wonderful Chinoiserie library ladder made for Badminton House by William France in 1782. The latter is in itself a virtual sculpture.

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