



"The Sideshow (La Parade)," circa 1865-66 by French artist Honoré Daumier, is on display now at The Met.

GREATEST *Show*

As the Ringling Bros. takes down its tents for the final time next month, the Metropolitan Museum of Art turns its gaze to the sideshow.

By Sahar Khan

The circus—creepy to some, enthralling to others—is a classic tradition, and its sideshows, the 19th century teaser performances staged outside to attract passersby, were often the place to see the strangest of performances. Now open at The Met is *Seurat's Circus Sideshow*, whose name is taken from Georges Seurat's painting on the subject: a ringmaster, musicians and an acrobat amuse customers waiting in line to enter the carnival.

The father of pointillism and many of his contemporaries were intrigued by the *parade*, loosely translated in French as the "come-on," and the circus, the period's foremost form of commercial entertainment. Seurat's first turn at a nocturnal scene has an austere, haunting effect, conceivably a critique on the blustering emptiness of popular culture; he called his depictions

of modern life "canvases of combat." Fittingly, Seurat's last painting, "The Circus," was of a show under the big top.

More than 100 paintings, drawings, posters, prints and lithographs from other artists, as well as 17 additional Seurat works, supplement the show's main attraction. Caricaturist Honoré Daumier's satirical lithographs portray the challenges faced by circus performers dependent on the capricious inclinations of the public; Fernand Pelez's "Grimaces and Misery" delineates the carnival's daily tedium with a 20-foot-wide stage crowded with bored clowns, musicians and acrobats; and in Picasso's "Fairground Stall," people throng before, while others rush past, the sideshow. *Through May 29, 1000 Fifth Ave., metmuseum.org*



ALL THAT JAZZ

A confluence of aesthetics by way of European styles, growth of national metropolises and technology, and freer social mores helped shape aesthetic tastes during the Roaring '20s.

Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum delves into the era's fresh designs with *The Jazz Age: American Style in the 1920s*. Illustrating the period are more than 400 works featuring drawings, paintings and textiles of soon-to-be ubiquitous skyscrapers; art deco-influenced interior design and decorative art; flapper-power fashion and jewelry; and an ode to jazz as the pulsating symbol of newly relaxed attitudes. Standouts include lacquered wood doors carved with winged figures in gold leaf brandishing horns atop skyscrapers, and cigarettes drawn in pastels by Donald Deskey in 1930, a current-day anathema that once represented the height of glamour. *April 7-Aug. 20, 2 E. 91 St., cooperhewitt.org -SK*

From top: "The New Yorker," a punch bowl designed by Viktor Schreckengost in 1931; Donald Deskey, "Party Ashtray."

