

Marilyn Monroe exhibit coming to Chicago

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She was the sex symbol for an entire generation of moviegoers — and Playboy Magazine's first centerfold and cover girl in 1954.

She once sang a breathless "Happy Birthday" to President John F. Kennedy, with whom she was rumored to have had an affair. Her death of a drug overdose at the tender age of 36 inspired the Elton John song, "Goodbye, Norma Jean."

Chicagoans will get a chance to learn all of that and more about the life of Marilyn Monroe, thanks to a 300-piece exhibit that's coming to the Chicago Cultural Center July 19-Sept. 21. Admission is free.

"Life as a Legend" is a compelling collection of paintings, photographs, sculpture and prints organized in Hamburg, Germany, from more than 80 artists, including Andy Warhol, Allen Jones, Peter Blake, Henri Cartier-Bresson and Mel Ramos.

The exhibit—ranging from fashion photography to pop art—has been making the rounds in Europe and at U.S. museums in Dallas, Texas; Sioux City, Iowa; Dayton, Ohio; Huntington, W.V., and Boca Raton, Fla.

Now, it's headed for an even bigger stage in Chicago.

"We're looking at this—a word I resist generally for the Cultural Center—as a blockbuster show ... a really popular exhibition, one that we can do a great deal of programming with and reach out to a broad audience with an interest in Marilyn from those who remember and those who don't and sort of get it second-hand," Greg Knight, deputy cultural affairs commissioner, told the City Council's Special Events Committee.

"We think this will be a really interesting look at an icon of American history from the mid-century who has gone on to inspire many, many other artists and the whole issue of fame and celebrity in our times."

Knight noted that many of the paintings in the exhibit are "very interpretive" and include "expressions of international artists." It includes Chinese interpretations of Marilyn Monroe with Chairman Mao.

The exhibit is so extensive it will fill both of the Cultural Center's largest upstairs galleries at the same time.

"We still have been able to raise enough funds and manipulate our budget to the degree that we can keep admission free," Knight said.