Smithsonian’s National Portrait Gallery Exhibition Schedule

After an extensive renovation of the historic Patent Office Building, the Smithsonian’s National Portrait Gallery opens to the public on July 1. The National Portrait Gallery, with its collection of nearly 20,000 paintings, sculptures, prints, drawings and photographs, portrays men and women who have made significant contributions to the history, development and culture of the people of the United States.

Calendar editors, please note: All exhibitions open July 1.

Permanent Exhibitions

“America’s Presidents”
The nation’s only complete collection of presidential portraits outside the White House, this exhibition lies at the heart of the Portrait Gallery’s mission to tell the American story through the individuals who have shaped it. Visitors will see an enhanced and extended display of multiple images of 42 presidents of the United States, including Gilbert Stuart’s “Lansdowne” portrait of George Washington, the famous “cracked plate” photograph of Abraham Lincoln and whimsical sculptures of Presidents Lyndon Johnson, Jimmy Carter, Richard Nixon and George H. W. Bush by noted caricaturist Pat Oliphant. Presidents Washington, Andrew Jackson, Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt and Franklin D. Roosevelt will be given expanded attention because of their significant impact on the office.

“American Origins, 1600-1900”
A “conversation about America” is on view in a series of 17 galleries and alcoves chronologically arranged to take the visitor from the days of contact between Native Americans and European explorers through the struggles of independence to the Gilded Age. Major figures from Pocahontas to Chief Joseph, Alexander Hamilton to Henry Clay, and Nathaniel Hawthorne to Harriet Beecher Stowe will be among those included.
Three of the galleries are devoted exclusively to the Civil War, examining this conflict in depth. A group of modern photographic prints produced from Mathew Brady’s original negatives complements the exhibition. Highlights from the Gallery’s remarkable collection of daguerreotypes, the earliest practical form of photography, will be on view in “American Origins,” making the National Portrait Gallery the first major museum to create a permanent exhibition space for daguerreotype portraits.

“Jo Davidson: Biographer in Bronze”
Fourteen portraits in bronze and terra-cotta made by renowned American sculptor Jo Davidson between 1908 and 1946 include depictions of Gertrude Stein, Franklin D. Roosevelt, artist John Marin and Lincoln Steffens.

“Twentieth-Century Americans”
Four newly created galleries opening onto the museum’s magnificent third-floor Great Hall showcase the major cultural, scientific and political figures of the 20th century. From the reform movements of the first two decades to the movements for social justice and civil rights of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s and from the Great Depression to the Vietnam era and beyond, visitors can explore the never-ending struggle to attain the American goal of justice for all.

“BRAVO!” and “Champions”
Two additional exhibitions feature particular themes in American life. “BRAVO!” showcases individuals who have brought the performing arts to life, beginning with P.T. Barnum, who raised the curtain on modern entertainment in the late-19th century and continuing through the present. “Champions” salutes the dynamic American sports figures whose impact has extended beyond the athletic realm and made them a part of the larger story of the nation. A lively combination of portraits, artifacts, memorabilia and videos enhances both exhibitions.

Temporary Exhibitions

“Americans Now”
July 1–April 29, 2007
“Americans Now,” drawn from the Portrait Gallery’s permanent collection, features individuals prominent in sports, entertainment and other fields of endeavor during the last 25 years. It also reflects the variety of media the Gallery is now collecting and addresses the museum’s newly established policy of accepting living subjects into the collection. Examples include a hand-stenciled quilt by artist Faith Ringgold, a larger-than-life, cast paper portrait of composer Philip Glass by Chuck Close, and the newly acquired portrait of Sen. Hillary Clinton.

“Portraiture Now”
“Portraiture Now” is a series of changing exhibitions focusing on contemporary artists who explore with imagination and skill the age-old art of depicting the figure. Through paintings, sculpture, photographs, drawings or video art, this selection of artists brings compelling figurative art into the 21st century. The inaugural exhibition in this series features artists William Beckman, Dawoud Bey, Nina Levy, Jason Salavon and Andres Serrano.
“Eye Contact: Modern American Portrait Drawing”
July 1–Oct. 9, 2006
“Eye Contact” showcases masterpieces of 20th century portraiture from the National Portrait Gallery’s drawing collections. The bold, contemporary engagement between one person and another that the term “eye contact” implies will be evident in the ambitious watercolors, drawings and pastels assembled in this exhibition. Underscoring the vitality of figurative art in the modern era are examples such as a charcoal drawing by John Singer Sargent, an image of Robert Kennedy by Roy Lichtenstein and a graphite drawing of Ethel Rosenberg by Elizabeth Catlett.

“Gifts to the Nation”
July 1–April 1, 2007
This display highlights gifts to the National Portrait Gallery’s collection since the gallery’s exhibit spaces closed in 2000. People portrayed in the exhibition include musician Ray Charles, mezzo soprano Denyce Graves, labor leader David Dubinsky and Nobel Prize-winning microbiologist Selman Waksman.

“One Life: Walt Whitman, a kosmos”
July 1–April 1, 2007
Each year, a gallery within the museum is devoted to a curator’s exploration of the life of one individual. David Ward, a Portrait Gallery historian and himself a poet, selected Walt Whitman as the subject for this first exhibition in the series because Whitman, he says, “influenced a century of America’s foremost writers and artists.” Whitman’s images and personal memorabilia are coupled with his words to create a visual portrait. The exhibition is located on the first floor, the same floor where Whitman worked in the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

“Outwin Boochever Portrait Competition 2006”
July 1–Feb. 19, 2007
This exhibition features the work of the 51 artists selected as finalists in the country’s first national portrait competition. Named for Virginia Outwin Boochever, a former docent whose generous gift endowed this program, the competition showcases the variety and excellence of contemporary portraiture in painting and sculpture. Seven winners are highlighted in the exhibition, and visitors may vote in the exhibition and online for their choice of best portrait. The competition will be repeated triennially.

“The Presidency and the Cold War”
July 1, 2006–July 8, 2007
A new gallery adjacent to “America’s Presidents” is devoted to exhibitions on presidential themes. The first is “The Presidency and the Cold War.” During the second half of the 20th century, the United States and the Soviet Union engaged in a global struggle. Beginning with FDR, Joseph Stalin and Winston Churchill at Yalta and ending with the collapse of the Berlin Wall, this exhibition explores how U.S. presidents shaped or reacted to the events of the age.
“Temple of Invention: The History of a National Landmark”

July 1–July 8, 2007

This exhibition honors the completion of the building’s glorious renovation and marks the 170th anniversary of President Andrew Jackson signing legislation that authorized the building’s construction. Begun in 1836 and completed in 1868, it was the third public building constructed by the new nation in its capital city. This landmark was praised by Walt Whitman as the “noblest of Washington buildings” and is considered to be one of the finest examples of Greek Revival architecture in the United States. Charles Robertson, former deputy director at the Smithsonian American Art Museum and specialist in American decorative arts, is the guest curator of the exhibition.

Note to editors: Downloadable, high-resolution images are available at ftp://npg-pa-gst1:gallere1es@ftp.si.edu and http://newsdesk.si.edu/photos.