



Smithsonian
***Donald W. Reynolds Center for
American Art and Portraiture***
National Portrait Gallery

News

Media only: Lauren Hassel (202) 275-1768
Noelle Myers (202) 275-1771

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The National Portrait Gallery Presents “Josephine Baker: Image and Icon”

“Josephine Baker: Image and Icon” opens Friday, Nov. 24 at the National Portrait Gallery and will run through March 18, 2007. The exhibition celebrates Baker’s life during the 100th anniversary year of her birth. Her contributions to Jazz Age music and dance, the French resistance during World War II and civil rights throughout the world are represented through vintage photographs, posters, drawings, prints and ephemera.

The National Portrait Gallery is the only stop outside of St. Louis for the exhibition, which was organized by the Sheldon Art Galleries in St. Louis. The show features nearly 100 objects drawn from several collections, including those of the National Portrait Gallery, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture and private collections from Europe and the United States.

“The National Portrait Gallery is proud to honor Josephine Baker on the 100th anniversary of her birth,” said Marc Pachter, director of the museum. “We are pleased to pay tribute to a remarkable American life, celebrated on two continents.”

The exhibition examines how Baker (1906–1975) reinvented her image throughout her lifetime. Born into poverty in St. Louis as Freda Josephine McDonald, she ran away from home at age 13 to join a traveling road show, eventually working her way to become the toast of Paris. Depicted as a sensual and exotic phenomenon in her early career, she became a glamorous, iconic cabaret star, a war hero and a vocal force during the civil rights movement. She also pursued the ideal of a multicultural world. Baker considered herself “world mother” of her “Rainbow Tribe”: During the mid- to late 1950s, she adopted 12 children of differing nationalities and races from four continents. At her death in 1975, shortly after opening a 50th anniversary performance in Paris, Josephine Baker was mourned around the world.

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SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION MRC 973 PO Box 37012 Washington DC 20013-7012 Telephone 202.275.1764 Fax 202.275.1895

The exhibition features original sketches, posters, and prints by the great French graphic artist Paul Colin, who helped establish Baker's reputation when she first arrived in Paris in 1925. Several prints from his famed portfolio, *Le Tumulte Noir*, capture her energetic movements and slim, athletic figure. Photographs by Baron Adolph de Meyer, George Hoyningen-Huene, Dora Kallmus and others document her rise to star status. Music sheets, programs and posters tell the story of her life, her wartime work and her triumphant returns to the stage during her long career.

Catalogue

An accompanying 116-page hardbound catalogue edited by Olivia Lahs-Gonzales, director of the Sheldon Art Galleries—with essays by Bennetta Jules-Rosette, Tyler Stovall and Olivia Lahs-Gonzales—has been co-published by the Sheldon Art Galleries and Reedy Press of St. Louis. The catalogue price is \$35.

Support

The exhibition, publication, and related education and outreach programs for “Josephine Baker: Image and Icon” were generously underwritten by Mary Strauss. The exhibition in Washington has been made possible by Rizik's. Additional support has been provided by the Boeing Company; the city of St. Louis; the National Endowment for the Arts; Patrick Davis Partners; Paradowski Creative; and the Missouri Humanities Council, with support from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

The National Portrait Gallery

The Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery tells the stories of America through the individuals who have shaped its culture. Through the visual arts, performing arts and new media, the Gallery portrays poets and presidents, visionaries and villains, actors and activists who speak American history.

The National Portrait Gallery was established by an act of Congress in 1962 and opened to the public in 1968. The museum's collection of nearly 20,000 works ranges from paintings and sculpture to photographs and drawings. The National Portrait Gallery is housed in the Donald W. Reynolds Center for American Art and Portraiture at Eighth and F streets N.W., Washington, D.C. Smithsonian Information: (202) 633-1000; (202) 357-1729 (TTY). Web sites: npg.si.edu and reynoldscenter.org.

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