The National Portrait Gallery Presents

“Great Britons: Treasures from the National Portrait Gallery, London”

In celebration of the 150th anniversary of the National Portrait Gallery, London, the Smithsonian’s National Portrait Gallery is honored to present “Great Britons: Treasures from the National Portrait Gallery, London.” The exhibition opens Friday, April 27 at the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C., and will run through Sept. 3.

The exhibition includes 60 works representing five centuries of British history through portraits of some of the greatest Britons. The images featured in the exhibition were chosen by the National Portrait Gallery, London to show the range of people the gallery celebrates as well as the array of great works and media in its collection.

The Smithsonian’s National Portrait Gallery is the only place outside of London where these outstanding works are being displayed.

“We are so honored to host this important exhibition,” said Marc Pachter, director of the Smithsonian’s National Portrait Gallery. “‘Great Britons’ is the culmination of our gallery’s inaugural year in our newly re-opened space and a celebration of the world’s first National Portrait Gallery.”

The exhibition includes images of the great monarchs and the most beloved members of the British Royal Family; figures of political change, such as Oliver Cromwell and Winston Churchill; and great academics, scientists, inventors and explorers from the past and present.

Also featured are images of the finest authors of Britain’s literary tradition, including the ‘Chandos Portrait’ of William Shakespeare, the very first portrait to be presented to the National Portrait Gallery, London in its inaugural year of 1856.
Bringing the exhibition up to date are outstanding contemporary portraits of “Harry Potter” author J.K. Rowling, soccer star David Beckham and musician Mick Jagger.

“The portraits represent different worlds, times and pursuits and reinforce our understanding of the range of people who populate Britain’s impressive history,” said Pachter.

The National Portrait Gallery, London has the world’s greatest collection of portraits, from the late Middle Ages to the present day. The gallery’s mission since its inception in 1856 has been to “acquire likenesses of those who have contributed or are contributing to British history and culture.” Each year, the gallery acquires new works, introducing new faces and stories to discover.

By honoring the National Portrait Gallery, London, “Great Britons” also celebrates what Pachter calls the “idea” of a portrait gallery. In conjunction with the exhibition, the Smithsonian’s National Portrait Gallery has invited representatives from portrait galleries throughout the world—from Australia to Sweden, Canada to Scotland—to attend the opening.

This exhibition has been made possible through generous support from Lillian and Jon Lovelace and the Donald W. Reynolds Foundation.

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; TTY (202) 633-5285. Web sites: npg.si.edu and reynoldscenter.org.

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