The National Portrait Gallery Presents
“Portraits of Sandra Day O’Connor”

“Portraits of Sandra Day O’Connor” opens Friday, March 30 at the National Portrait Gallery and will run through Oct. 8. The exhibition examines how a group of artists, The Painting Group, interprets the same subject—Justice Sandra Day O’Connor—at the same time. The 25 portraits of O’Connor included in the exhibition illustrate that there is no one way to depict or view an individual.

“‘Portraits of Sandra Day O’Connor’ considers an American who is so important in our daily lives but is also someone we are unlikely to meet,” said Marc Pachter, director of the museum. “Now 25 artists ‘introduce’ her to us in many different ways.”

Sandra Day O’Connor, born March 26, 1930, served as the first female associate justice of the Supreme Court of the United States from 1981 to 2006. She was the crucial swing vote of the Court for many of her final years on the bench. Prior to joining the Supreme Court, O’Connor was a politician and jurist in Arizona. She is currently the only retired associate justice.

The Painting Group, a New York-based group of 25 artists, started out as an art class in the late 1950s. Still led by masters Aaron Shikler and David Levine, The Painting Group has been meeting regularly for almost 50 years. Shikler has painted portraits of eminent scholars, corporate chiefs and society leaders, as well as the official portraits of President and Mrs. John F. Kennedy. Levine is a watercolorist and caricaturist whose drawings appear regularly in The New Yorker and The New York Review of Books.

“A portrait is one of our artifacts that will be looked at 100 or more years from now. People will want to know from that figure something about our times,” said Levine.
In October 2006, Justice O’Connor sat for The Painting Group in two three-hour sessions during one day. Artists then completed their portraits from photographs taken that day by Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer David Hume Kennerly. The resulting artworks make up “Portraits of Sandra Day O’Connor.”

The exhibition includes 25 portraits of Justice O’Connor in oil, watercolor, charcoals, pastel and sculpture. “Everyone—the artist, the sitter, the viewer—will see something different in each of these portraits,” said Shikler.

The sitting was produced by Walter Bernard and filmed under the direction of Neil Leifer; excerpts of the film, “An American Portrait,” will be shown in the exhibition.

**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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