National Portrait Gallery Honors Baseball

Roberto Clemente’s Portrait Chosen by the Public for Display

In the middle of the U.S. baseball season, three All-Stars met in an entirely different competition at the Smithsonian’s National Portrait Gallery as part of the museum’s “Recognize” series. The museum’s historians and curators selected three players’ portraits for the public to choose from: Roberto Clemente, Babe Ruth or Sandy Koufax.

Thousands of votes were cast on Smithsonianmag.com, and Clemente’s portrait received the most votes. Charles “Teenie” Harris’ photograph of him will appear on the “Recognize” wall Aug. 25.

Last year, the Portrait Gallery created “Recognize” as an opportunity for people to decide what will go on display as it continues to acknowledge those who have influenced American history and culture. Twice a year, the museum presents three portraits, and the public can vote for the one they would like to see on the “Recognize” wall. In the last round of “Recognize,” voters elected to display a portrait of the comedian George Carlin by Arthur Grace.

Clemente (1934–1972) was born in Puerto Rico. He became a legend for the Pittsburgh Pirates, where he played his entire 18-year major league baseball career. On Sept. 30, 1972, Clemente made his 3,000th career hit, a double against Jon Matlack and the New York Mets. This was the last regular-season at-bat of Clemente’s life. He was a 12-time Gold Glove outfielder, a four-time National League batting champion and a tireless humanitarian: “If you a chance to accomplish something that will make things better for people coming behind you, and you don’t do that, you are wasting your time on this Earth.” Clemente was killed in an airplane crash on Dec. 31, 1972, while attempting to deliver relief supplies to earthquake victims in Managua, Nicaragua.
About the Artist

A former semipro ballplayer and co-founder of the Pittsburgh Crawfords, photographer Harris documented the city’s African American history and culture. The son of hotel owners, Harris ran his own studio before deciding to focus on photojournalism. He worked for the Pittsburgh Courier for two decades.

National Portrait Gallery

The Smithsonian’s National Portrait Gallery tells the multifaceted story of America through the individuals who have shaped its culture. Through the visual arts, performing arts and new media, the Portrait Gallery portrays poets and presidents, visionaries and villains, actors and activists whose lives tell the American story.

The National Portrait Gallery is part of 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. Website: npg.si.edu. Connect with the museum at @NPG, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and Tumblr.

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