



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

News

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Press preview: June 30; 10 to 11:30 a.m.

Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery Opens "One Life: Ronald Reagan"

The National Portrait Gallery will mark the centennial of the 40th President's birth with an exhibition chronicling Ronald Reagan's early years in Illinois, his acting and political career and presidency from 1981 to 1989. Reagan's warm manner and cheerful smile were hallmarks of a personality that fascinated Americans, but it was his steadfastness to the ideas of a limited government and a free-market economy that won him votes. "One Life: Ronald Reagan" is open July 1 through May 28, 2012.

"This 'One Life' exhibition acknowledges the long and remarkable career of an American leader whose life spanned nearly the entire 20th-century," said Martin Sullivan, director of the National Portrait Gallery. "Ronald Reagan played a key role in many aspects of American public life."

Reagan got his professional start as a sports radio announcer with WHO in Des Moines, Iowa, from 1934 to 1937. Relying on telegraph wires for his information, he had to embellish his play-by-play accounts, and he later laughed about a time when the wire went dead, and instead of turning to recorded music, he had to improvise the game. Reagan's career as an actor is represented with an image from a Warner Bros. press book from his film, *Knute Rockne, All-American* and a lobby card advertising his favorite film *Kings Row*.

The stirrings of Reagan's political career can be traced to his time as a board member of the Screen Actors Guild in the 1940s, and then as its president from 1947 to 1952 and 1959 to 1960. His next exposure to politics occurred when he became the corporate ambassador for the General Electric Co. and host of its Sunday-evening television show, *General Electric Theater*. He evolved during his time at General Electric from a union leader to a free-enterprise proponent and limited-government

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conservative. Reagan campaigned for Barry Goldwater in the 1964 presidential race, and in 1966 he made a successful run for governor of California.

The majority of the exhibition chronicles Reagan's political career. It includes an array of images, including those showing the 1981 assassination attempt; Reagan at his California retreat, Rancho del Cielo; with House Speaker Thomas P. ("Tip") O'Neill; with Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev; and viewing the DMZ from South Korea along with images from *Time* magazine covers. The exhibition also addresses the Iran-Contra controversy, the conflict with Moammar Gadhafi's Libya and Reagan's reaction to the strike by the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization in 1981 and subsequent short-term firing of about 11,500 air traffic controllers.

Andy Warhol's 1985 portrait of Reagan, mixing personality, politics and public image, is featured. The artist used a 1953 Arrow shirt advertisement to capitalize on Reagan's panache as a movie star. Warhol recast the source image to draw a parallel between the shirt collar that will not wrinkle and the "Teflon President"—Congresswoman Patricia Schroeder's label for Reagan because it appeared that no criticisms stuck to him for long.

The exhibition also includes a bronze sculpture of Reagan as a cowboy by renowned caricaturist Patrick Oliphant, a fragment of the Berlin Wall and a video kiosk with excerpts from his speeches.

An online version of the exhibition will launch July 1 at npg.si.edu/exhibit/reagan/.

Sidney Hart, senior historian at the National Portrait Gallery, is the curator of "One Life: Ronald Reagan."

The Guenther and Siewchin Yong Sommer Endowment Fund has underwritten this exhibition and recent exhibitions that have focused on the lives and influence of Katharine Graham, Thomas Paine, Abraham Lincoln, Sandra Day O'Connor and Walt Whitman.

National Portrait Gallery

The Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery tells the history 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; (202) 633-5285 (TTY). Website: npg.si.edu.

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