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July 14, 2011

## Fact Sheet “The Great American Hall of Wonders”

### Exhibition

“The Great American Hall of Wonders”  
July 15 – Jan. 8, 2012

### Location

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Eighth and F streets N.W.  
Special exhibition galleries, third floor

### Description

“The Great American Hall of Wonders” examines the 19th-century American belief that the people of the United States shared a special genius for innovation. It explores this belief through works of art, mechanical inventions and scientific discoveries, and captures the excitement of citizens who defined their nation as a “Great Experiment” sustained by the inventive energies of Americans in every walk of life. The exhibition features 161 objects, including paintings and drawings by pre-eminent artists, including John James Audubon, Albert Bierstadt, George Catlin, Winslow Homer, Thomas Eakins, and Charles Willson Peale, as well as sculptures, prints, survey photographs, zoological and botanical illustrations, patent models and engineering diagrams. The exhibition explores six subjects that helped shape America during the period—the buffalo, giant sequoia and Niagara Falls represent American beliefs about abundant natural resources for fueling the nation’s progress, while inventions such as the clock, the gun and the railroad link improvements in technology with the purposeful use of time.

“The Great American Hall of Wonders” investigates questions that are still critical today. The exhibition reveals both the successful experiments of the past, as well as the ones that went awry, and invites today’s citizens to explore a valuable legacy left by the founding fathers: a belief in the transformative power of American inventiveness. The museum is the only venue for the exhibition, which is organized by independent curator Claire Perry.

### Free Public Program

Perry will present a lecture in the museum’s McEvoy Auditorium at 6 p.m., Thursday, July 14.

### Publication

An illustrated companion book, *The Great American Hall of Wonders: Art, Science, and Invention in the Nineteenth Century*, accompanies the exhibition. It is written by Perry and co-published by the museum and London-based publisher D Giles Limited. It is available in the museum store and online (hardcover, \$65; softcover, \$45).

### Credit

“The Great American Hall of Wonders” is organized by the Smithsonian American Art Museum in collaboration with the United States Patent and Trademark Office. Battelle has provided important leadership support for the exhibition. Generous contributions also have been provided by provided by Sheila Duignan and Mike Wilkins, the Raymond J. and Margaret Horowitz Endowment, Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, Thelma and Melvin Lenkin, Betty and Whitney MacMillan, Jean Mahoney and Robin Martin.

The Smithsonian American Art Museum is located above the Gallery Place/Chinatown Metrorail station. Open daily 11:30 a.m. to 7 p.m., except Dec. 25. Admission is free. Smithsonian Information: (202) 633-1000; (202) 633-5285 (TTY). Museum information (recorded): (202) 633-7970. Website: [americanart.si.edu](http://americanart.si.edu).

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**Note to editors:** Selected high-resolution images for publicity only may be downloaded from the museum’s online press room at [americanart.si.edu/pr](http://americanart.si.edu/pr). E-mail [AmericanArtInfo@si.edu](mailto:AmericanArtInfo@si.edu) for the password.