



Smithsonian
***Donald W. Reynolds Center for
American Art and Portraiture***
Smithsonian American Art Museum

June 2006

Media only: Laura Baptiste (202) 275-1595

Susan Kenney Battle (202) 275-1592

Media Web site: www.americanart.si.edu/press

**Smithsonian American Art Museum Unveils New Galleries and Innovative
Study Center with Visible Storage**
Expanded Galleries Will Showcase Major New Acquisitions

The nation's first collection of American art, an unparalleled record of the American experience, returns home to the Smithsonian American Art Museum on Saturday, July 1. The result of years of planning, the installation captures the aspirations, character and imagination of the American people during three centuries. The museum's historic Greek Revival building in the heart of the nation's capital has been meticulously renovated with expanded permanent collection galleries and the new Luce Foundation Center for American Art, the first visible art storage and study center in Washington.

Visitors will see more than 4,000 works of art, nearly five times the number previously on public view, including iconic masterpieces. More than 940 artworks will be installed in vaulted galleries on three floors, many bathed in natural light for the first time. A city-block long skylight will illuminate the more than 3,300 additional artworks installed in the Luce Foundation Center.

Big ideas governed the gallery installations of artworks that convey America's rich artistic and cultural history. Curators began by selecting those objects that they felt to be of the finest quality and greatest significance. Galleries on the first floor display artworks that embrace the democratic spirit, including photography and folk art. Artworks installed on the second floor reveal key aspects of the American experience from the colonial period through the 1940s. Many modern and contemporary artworks installed on the third floor are experiential pieces that will cause visitors to stop and look.

New acquisitions are highlighted throughout the galleries, including paintings by John Steuart Curry, Everett Shinn and Joseph Stella, and bronze sculptures by Daniel Chester French and Frederic Remington. In recent years, the museum has focused on acquiring major works by

modern and contemporary artists. Several are emotionally powerful works that are considered destination pieces, such as David Hockney's "Snails Space with Vari-Lites, 'Painting as Performance'" (1995–96), Edward and Nancy Kienholz's "Sollie 17" (1979-80) and Nam June Paik's "Electronic Superhighway: Continental U.S., Alaska, Hawaii" (1995). Other artists newly represented in the collection are Oscar Bluemner, Christo, Martin Puryear and James Rosenquist.

"We're excited by the opportunity to create a new presentation of our collections from the ground up, not only in the traditional gallery displays, but also through the Luce Foundation Center, an innovative new public space that dramatically expands a visitors' understanding of art and the museum's collection," said Elizabeth Broun, the museum's Margaret and Terry Stent Director. "Visitors will acquire essential insights into each artwork through new research, vivid artist interviews and lively narratives that are presented on wall labels, kiosks and online. The cumulative experience we believe will be a powerful and emotional one."

American Experience

"American Experience," near the main lobby on the first floor, opens with two paintings by Edward Hopper. These introductory galleries display landscapes from across the United States, including 19th-century paintings and 20th-century paintings and sculpture, which convey a sense of place and the defining role of land in the American imagination. The landscape galleries are paired with photography galleries that present 122 individual portraits of Americans who collectively constitute the "American people" from every period and every walk of life. An additional 80 photographs from Lee Friedlander's series "The American Monument" (1963-2001), a new acquisition, offer his sometimes ironic, sometimes elegiac record of commemorative outdoor sculptures across the country.

"One of the museum's goals for this new installation is to develop a conversation with each visitor, to find an emotional connection or common experience that resonates with something he or she has experienced," said Eleanor Jones Harvey, the museum's chief curator. "In the 'American Experience' galleries in particular, we want to meet the visitors where they are in understanding this art and then to take them someplace new."

Folk Art

Folk art is shown as affirming the basic human impulse to create. James Hampton's "The Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nations Millennium General Assembly" (1950–64), a visionary work made from salvaged materials covered in gold and silver foil—perhaps the artwork most beloved by visitors—is installed in a special niche at the heart of this suite of

galleries. Artist William Christenberry, whose own work is inspired by vernacular forms, curated this installation from the museum's collection.

American Art through 1940

“American Art through 1940,” on the second floor, links artworks to major moments in America's past in nine thematic sections in 31 galleries. The installation begins with Frederic Auguste Bartholdi's model for the Statue of Liberty, a symbol of America as a place welcoming to all immigrants whose ingenuity and creativity plays a key role throughout America's art. As visitors progress through the galleries, works from the American Colonies and the founding of the new republic, western art featuring expansion and discovery, antebellum art and Civil War prints by Winslow Homer and graphic early photographs are displayed. The Civil War gallery both physically and metaphorically divides the spaces dedicated to antebellum art from the later impressionist paintings and works from the Gilded Age as a reminder of the sea change that took place in the country in the 1860s. Early modernism and southwestern art complete the second floor installation, including a selection of WPA murals in the north lobby.

Decorative Arts

Decorative arts are included in the second floor galleries with works that range from the colonial period to the Gilded Age and beyond. Highlights include a commemorative piano decorated by Thomas Wilmer Dewing, presented by Steinway & Sons to the White House which donated it to the Smithsonian, installed in a gallery that features paintings by Dewing, and the museum's gorgeous stained glass windows by John La Farge. In addition, 24 pieces of colonial and federal furniture from the Kaufman Americana Foundation, considered one of the finest private collections, are installed with complementary paintings and sculptures in a suite of galleries.

“Furniture was often the highest form of art being produced in the early days of the republic, and we want to represent that creative impulse with some of the best examples available,” said Harvey. “Including more decorative arts in our installations allows us to complete the story of American artistic achievement in a way that is not available elsewhere in Washington.”

Works on paper are integrated throughout the galleries, as is sculpture. The museum has the largest collection of American sculpture in the world, and for the first time, will feature it to full advantage with the painting collection.

Modern and Contemporary Art

The third floor galleries are home to the collection of modern and contemporary art. The elegant Lincoln Gallery with soaring arches, one of the most beautiful spaces in the building, is well suited to display major sculptures and installations. Newly acquired room-size acquisitions by Hockney, Kienholz and Paik will be featured here, along with large-scale works by Larry Bell, Nancy Graves, Alfred Jensen, Liz Larner, Sean Scully and James Surls which have not been seen before in the museum's galleries.

A delightful new sculpture, commissioned by the museum, is David Beck's "MVSEVM." This exquisitely crafted world in miniature is inspired by the neoclassical architecture of the building, from the 1840s when it was Washington's Patent Office and its first museum to the present day. The piece will be on the second floor near the special exhibition "Temple of Invention: History of a National Landmark."

Luce Foundation Center for American Art

The museum's new Luce Foundation Center will feature paintings densely hung on screens; sculptures, craft and folk art objects arranged on shelves; and portrait miniatures, bronze medals and contemporary jewelry in drawers that slide open with the touch of a button. Interactive computer kiosks will provide the public with information about every object on display, including a discussion of each artwork, artist biographies, audio interviews, still images and nearly 70 videos created exclusively for the Center.

Opening Special Exhibitions

In addition to the permanent collection installations, the museum will present four temporary exhibitions.

A suite of three galleries on the second floor are dedicated to displays of the museum's collection of works on paper that will rotate several times a year. The debut exhibition is "William H. Johnson's World on Paper," on view July 1 through Jan. 7, 2007. It thoroughly examines never-before-exhibited prints by this African American modernist that have been recently conserved. Johnson's distinctive work uses bold compositions and bright colors, and his woodcuts are strongly influenced by German Expressionist art.

The museum also organized "Passing Time: The Art of William Christenberry," on view July 1, 2006 through July 8, 2007. This exhibition presents a selection of Christenberry's photographs, drawings, paintings, sculptures and building constructions inspired by the American South. His artworks are poetic assessments of a sense of place, landscape, aging,

memory and the passing of time. Christenberry selected the works included, some seen here for the first time; the exhibition complements the adjoining installation of folk art which he also curated.

Two exhibitions are traveling to Washington as part of national tours. The Addison Gallery of American Art in Andover, Mass., organized “William Wegman: Funney/Strange,” the first in-depth look at the artist in 15 years that examines his work in all media from the 1960s to the present. This exhibition will be on view from July 1 through Sept. 24.

“American ABC: Childhood in 19th-Century America,” on view July 1 through Sept. 17, explores images of children and their relationship to the American quest for national identity during the 19th century. The exhibition, which features paintings by Winslow Homer, Thomas Eakins and other well-known artists, was organized by the Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University in California.

The Smithsonian American Art Museum celebrates the vision and creativity of Americans with approximately 41,000 artworks in all media spanning more than three centuries. Its National Historic Landmark building, a dazzling showcase for American art and portraiture, is located at Eighth and F streets N.W. in the heart of a revitalized downtown arts district. Museum hours are 11:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. daily. Admission is free. Metrorail station: Gallery Place/Chinatown (Red, Yellow and Green lines). Smithsonian Information: (202) 633-1000; (202) 357-1729 (TTY). Recorded information: (202) 275-1500. Web sites: americanart.si.edu or reynoldscenter.org.

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Note to editors: Selected high-resolution images for publicity only may be downloaded from <ftp://saam-press@ftp.si.edu>. Call (202) 275-1594 for the password. Additional information about the museum’s grand opening, exhibitions and a floor plan is available at americanart.si.edu/press or <http://newsdesk.si.edu/kits/pob>.