

Exhibition: *The Obama Portraits Tour*

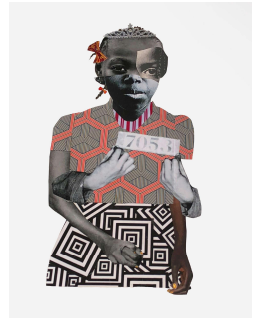
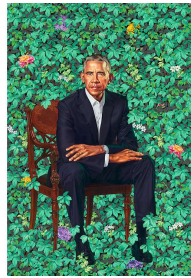
Dates: November 7, 2021–January 2, 2022

Location: Resnick Pavilion

Exhibition: *Black American Portraits*

Dates: November 7, 2021–April 17, 2022

Location: Resnick Pavilion



The Obama Portraits

Black American Portraits

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(Los Angeles, CA—August 19, 2021) The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) presents two exhibitions that celebrate portraiture, opening November 7, 2021: *The Obama Portraits Tour* and *Black American Portraits*. In the West Coast presentation of the national tour, Kehinde Wiley’s *Barack Obama* and Amy Sherald’s *Michelle LaVaughn Robinson Obama* are on loan from the Smithsonian’s National Portrait Gallery, and on view in the Resnick Pavilion at LACMA November 7, 2021–January 2, 2022. To complement *The Obama Portraits Tour*, LACMA presents *Black American Portraits*, an exhibition that reframes portraiture to center Black American subjects, sitters, and spaces. Primarily drawn from the museum’s permanent collection, this exhibition will feature approximately 140 works, including new acquisitions that will be on view for the first time. The *Obama Portraits Tour* is co-curated by Christine Y. Kim, Curator of Contemporary Art, and Liz Andrews, executive director of the Spelman College Museum of Fine Art. *Black American Portraits* is co-curated by Kim and Andrews with support from Breanne Bradley, Curatorial Assistant, Contemporary Art.

The LACMA exhibitions will also be accompanied by a full slate of public programs, including talks, performances, films, panel discussions, and more. On November 7, 2021, the museum will host a day of music, activities, and programs during an Open House celebration.

“It is an honor for LACMA to be the West Coast venue of *The Obama Portraits Tour*,” said Michael Govan, LACMA CEO and Wallis Annenberg Director. “The Portrait Gallery’s official portraits of President Barack Obama by Kehinde Wiley and First

Lady Michelle Obama by Amy Sherald are powerful works of art. The colors and styles of the paintings are a fresh departure from the history of presidential portraiture, and these have become two of the most recognized artworks in the world. These portraits have already inspired millions of people and will be on view, side by side, for the diverse and multi-generational audiences of Los Angeles.”

“To complement the power and grace of Wiley and Sherald’s paintings, *Black American Portraits* centers Black love, abundance, family, exuberance, self-possession, and self-expression through over two centuries of African American portraiture,” said co-curators Christine Y. Kim and Liz Andrews. “Artists across time, geography, and diverse practices are represented in the exhibition, with attention to the work of many Los Angeles artists and figures. Paying homage to David Driskell’s *Two Centuries of Black American Art*, presented at LACMA almost 45 years ago, this is an exhibition that celebrates community, agency, and self-representation.”

The Obama Portraits Tour

The Portrait Gallery’s official portraits of President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama both honor the tradition of presidential portraiture and break the mold of past portraits. In his portrait, Kehinde Wiley foregrounds the president against a colorful background that symbolizes Obama’s personal history. Amy Sherald’s portrait of Michelle Obama shows the First Lady seated in a confident, relaxed pose, wearing a long dress with a bright geometric pattern.

The Smithsonian’s National Portrait Gallery holds the nation’s only complete collection of portraits of U.S. Presidents that is accessible to the public, and began commissioning presidential portraits in 1994, with George H. W. Bush. It commissioned its first portrait of a First Lady in 2006, with Hillary Rodham Clinton. The paintings by Wiley and Sherald are the subject of a richly illustrated book, *The Obama Portraits* (2020), which delves into the making of these two artworks. Published by the Smithsonian’s National Portrait Gallery in partnership with Princeton University Press, the book, along with merchandise inspired by the artworks, can be purchased at the LACMA Store and online at lacmastore.org.

The tour began in Chicago on June 18, 2021, and will continue through May 30, 2022. Tour locations include the Art Institute of Chicago, Brooklyn Museum, LACMA, High Art Museum (Atlanta), and The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. For more on the Portrait Gallery and the full tour schedule, visit npg.si.edu/obamaportraitstour.

On November 6, Amy Sherald, Kehinde Wiley, and Steven Spielberg will be honored at the 2021 Art+Film Gala, which celebrates its 10th anniversary this year. The event is presented by Gucci.

Black American Portraits

Portraiture has provided a tool for generations of Black Americans to see themselves in their own eyes, countering a visual culture that often demonizes Blackness and fetishizes the spectacle of Black pain. *Black American Portraits* depicts Black figures in a range of mediums such as painting, drawing, prints, photography, sculpture, mixed media, and time-based media. The exhibition spans over two centuries, with highlights including a late-18th-century portrait of a sailor, early studio photography, scenes from the Harlem Renaissance, portraits from the Civil Rights era and Black Power movement, and works exploring the politics of identity made from the 1990s to the present day. Drawn primarily from the museum's permanent collection, the exhibition features approximately 140 objects by over 100 artists, ranging from emerging to self-taught to mid-career to established. Organized thematically, the exhibition explores family, legacy, and memory; history; myth, legend, and futurism; queer subjects and spaces; and the gaze.

Artists featured in the exhibition include Alvin Baltrop, Jordan Casteel, Beauford Delaney, Charles Gaines, Barkley Hendricks, Sargent Claude Johnson, Kahlil Joseph, Titus Kaphar, Deana Lawson, Samella Lewis, Kerry James Marshall, Archibald J. Motley Jr., Lorraine O'Grady, Augusta Savage, Amy Sherald, Ming Smith, Tavares Strachan, Henry Taylor, Tourmaline, Mickalene Thomas, James Van Der Zee, Laura Wheeler Waring, Charles White, Kehinde Wiley, Deborah Willis, Richard Wyatt, and many more. In addition to work by artists of African descent, *Black American Portraits* includes several works by artists of other backgrounds who have exemplified a thoughtfulness about, sensitivity toward, and commitment to Black artists, communities, histories, and subjects, such as Edward Biberman, Bruce Davidson, rafa esparza, Shepard Fairey, Alice Neel, Catherine Opie, Betsy Graves Reynaud, and Edward Steichen, among others. Speaking to a wider range of art practices beyond the gallery walls, *Black American Portraits* also includes an edition of Tavares Strachan's ENOCH currently in low orbit around the earth in collaboration with LACMA's Art + Technology Lab supported by SpaceX, Kahlil Joseph's BLKNWS in the foyer of the Resnick Pavilion, and Ada Pinkston's augmented reality (AR) monument honoring the life of Bidy Mason and accessible on the Snapchat platform near LACMA's Smidt Welcome Plaza.

Background

In the past decade, LACMA has presented several major exhibitions featuring Black artists. However, during LACMA's earliest decades, Black museum staff spearheaded grassroots efforts to better represent Black art and artists in the museum's collection and programming. In 1968, LACMA's Black security officers organized A Black Culture Festival in conjunction with *The Sculpture of Black Africa: The Paul Tishman Collection*, offering music, dance, fashion, lectures, and tours by the officers. The same year, LACMA art preparators Claude Booker and Cecil Ferguson founded The Black Arts Council (BAC) (1968–1974), which became the driving force behind Black arts programming at LACMA. Though the BAC initially did not receive support from within LACMA, it built its membership by reaching out to the active Black arts

community in Los Angeles. In 1969, it organized a sold-out three-part lecture series at the museum, featuring Samella Lewis's "The Contributions of the Black Artist to Our Society," and continued to pressure LACMA to organize Black art exhibitions and programs and hire a Black curator. In 1971, LACMA presented its first exhibition of work by contemporary Black artists, *Three Graphic Artists: Charles White, David Hammons, Timothy Washington*. In 1972, LACMA and the BAC co-organized *Los Angeles 1972: A Panorama of Black Artists*. The BAC paved the way for LACMA's seminal *Two Centuries of Black American Art* (1976), guest curated by David Driskell. In the 1990s, LACMA presented *Graphic Odyssey: Romare Bearden* (1994) and *Roy DeCarava: A Retrospective* (1996), and in the 2000s renewed its commitment to presenting Black-centered exhibitions and programs. In the last decade, the museum has presented 12 solo exhibitions by Black artists, and is actively planning future solo and group exhibitions featuring Black artists.

Credit

The Obama Portraits Tour has been organized by the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery, Washington, D.C.

Support for the national tour has been generously provided by



Black American Portraits is organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

Support for *The Obama Portraits Tour* in Los Angeles and *Black American Portraits*:

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About LACMA

Located on the Pacific Rim, LACMA is the largest art museum in the western United States, with a collection of more than 142,000 objects that illuminate 6,000 years of artistic expression across the globe. Committed to showcasing a multitude of art histories, LACMA exhibits and interprets works of art from new and unexpected points of view that are informed by the region's rich cultural heritage and diverse population. LACMA's spirit of experimentation is reflected in its work with artists, technologists, and thought leaders as well as in its regional, national, and global partnerships to share collections and programs, create pioneering initiatives, and engage new audiences.

Location: 5905 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90036. lacma.org

Image captions: *Barack Obama* by Kehinde Wiley, 2018, oil on canvas, National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, © 2018 Kehinde Wiley; *Michelle LaVaughn Robinson Obama* by Amy Sherald, 2018, oil on linen, National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution. The National Portrait Gallery is grateful to the generous donors who made these commissions possible and proudly recognizes them at npg.si.edu/obamaportraitstour. Elizabeth Catlett, *Sharecropper*, 1952, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of the 2011 American Art Acquisitions Group, © 2021 Catlett Mora Family Trust/licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY, photo © Museum Associates/LACMA; *Portrait of a Sailor (Paul Cuffe?)*, United States, circa 1800, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Purchased with funds provided by Cecile Bartman, photo © Museum Associates/LACMA; Deborah Roberts, *Breaking ranks*, 2018, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, purchased with funds provided by Karen R. Constine, the Ralph M. Parsons Fund, George and Azita Fatheree, Nike O. Opadiran, and Demetrio and Gianna Kerrison, © Deborah Roberts, photo by Philip Rogers

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