



**Media only:** Laura Baptiste (202) 633-8494  
Amy Hutchins (202) 633-8497

May 2008

**Media Web site:** [americanart.si.edu/press](http://americanart.si.edu/press)

## Smithsonian American Art Museum Fact Sheet

**Director:** Elizabeth Broun, The Margaret and Terry Stent Director

**Total Full-Time Employees:** 118

**Approximate Number of Artworks:** 41,500

**Visitors (2007):** 918,000 (This total includes attendance for both its main building and its Renwick Gallery; American Art shares its main building with the National Portrait Gallery.)

### Background

The Smithsonian American Art Museum, the nation's first collection of American art, is an unparalleled record of the American experience. The collection captures the aspirations, character and imagination of the American people throughout three centuries.

The museum's National Historic Landmark building in the heart of Washington's new downtown cultural district has been meticulously renovated with expanded permanent collection galleries and innovative new public spaces. Begun in 1836 and completed in 1868, it is one of the oldest public buildings constructed in early Washington, and is considered one of the finest examples of Greek Revival architecture in the United States. The recent \$283 million renovation (2000-2006) revealed the full magnificence of the building's architectural features, including porticos modeled after the Parthenon in Athens, a curving double staircase, vaulted galleries, large windows and skylights as long as a city block.

The museum shares its main building with the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery; both museums share a joint main entrance at Eighth and F streets N.W. Collectively, the two museums and their activities are known as the Donald W. Reynolds Center for American Art and Portraiture.

### Collections

The Smithsonian American Art Museum is the home to one of the largest and most inclusive collections of American art in the world. Its artworks reveal key aspects of America's rich artistic and cultural history from the colonial period to today. More than 7,000 artists are represented in the collection, including major masters, such as John Singleton Copley, Gilbert Stuart, Winslow Homer, John Singer Sargent, Childe Hassam, Mary Cassatt, Georgia O'Keeffe, Edward Hopper, Jacob Lawrence, Helen Frankenthaler, Christo, David Hockney, Jenny Holzer, Lee Friedlander, Nam June Paik, Martin Puryear and Robert Rauschenberg. In recent years, the museum has strengthened its

SI-11A-2008

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION MRC 970 PO Box 37012 Washington DC 20013-7012 Telephone 202.633.8530 Fax 202.633.8535

commitment to contemporary art through curatorial appointments, endowments, acquisitions, commissions and an annual artist award.

The museum has been a leader in identifying significant aspects of American visual culture and actively collecting and exhibiting works of art before many other major public collections. The museum has the largest collection of New Deal art and the finest collections of contemporary craft, and American impressionist paintings and masterpieces from the Gilded Age. Other pioneering collections include historic and contemporary folk art; work by African American and Latino artists; photography from its origins in the 19th century to contemporary works; images of western expansion; and realist art from the first half of the 20th century.

### **New Public Spaces**

The recent renovation and expansion created four major new public spaces:

- The innovative Luce Foundation Center for American Art, a study center and visible art storage facility, displays more than 3,300 artworks from the museum's permanent collection in a three-story skylight space. A variety of programs are offered in the center, including themed scavenger hunts for children, a weekly sketching workshop and Art + Coffee tours. Ten award-winning interactive computer kiosks provide the public with information about every object on display and include discussions of each artwork, artist biographies, audio interviews, still images and nearly 70 videos created exclusively for the center. Free public wireless Internet access (Wi-Fi) is available.

Three of the new spaces are shared by the Smithsonian American Art Museum and the National Portrait Gallery:

- The Lunder Conservation Center, state-of-the-art labs with glass walls—it is the first art conservation facility to allow the public permanent behind-the-scenes views of the preservation work of the museums. In addition to providing expanded space for conservation projects, the center is a destination for learning about conservation and modern techniques that conservators use to examine and treat artworks. Public outreach and interpretive programs—from weekly behind-the-scenes tours to specialized lectures—are offered to target audiences, including students, families and conservation professionals.
- The Robert and Arlene Kogod Courtyard, a public gathering space with a new glass atrium enclosure designed by the world-renowned architectural firm Foster + Partners in London. The courtyard features a café, as well as provides a public venue for the museums' performances, hands-on art making activities and special events. Free public wireless Internet access (Wi-Fi) is available in the courtyard.
- The Nan Tucker McEvoy Auditorium, a new 346-seat theater with a lobby located on the lower level below the central courtyard, features an ambitious schedule of public programming that includes lectures and films, as well as music and theater performances.

### **National Outreach**

In addition to a robust exhibition program in Washington, D.C., the museum maintains a highly regarded traveling exhibition program. It has circulated hundreds of exhibitions since the program was established in 1951. From 2000 to 2005, the museum organized 14 exhibitions of more than 1,000

major artworks from its permanent collection that traveled to 105 venues across the United States. More than 2.5 million visitors saw these exhibitions.

The museum is a leader in providing electronic resources to schools and the public through its national education program. The museum offers virtual tours via videoconferencing to classrooms, and has produced a series of podcasts that feature voices of artists, curators and students. In 2005, it debuted “EyeLevel,” the first blog at the Smithsonian, which has more than 7,000 readers each month. The museum maintains seven online research databases with more than 1 million records. Each year, more than 250,000 researchers from across the globe use these resources. “Ask Joan of Art,” the museum’s online reference service, began in 1993 and is the longest running arts-based service of its kind in the United States.

### **Renwick Gallery**

The Renwick Gallery, a branch of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, features one of the finest collections of American craft in the United States. Its collections, exhibition program and publications highlight the best craft objects and decorative arts from the 19th century to the present. Several hundred paintings from the museum’s permanent collection—hung salon style: one-atop-another and side-by-side—are featured in special installations in the Grand Salon.

The Renwick Gallery is located steps from the White House in the heart of historic federal Washington. The Second Empire-style building, a National Historic Landmark, was designed by architect James Renwick Jr. in 1859 and completed in 1874. It became the home of the museum’s craft and decorative arts program in 1972.

### **About the Museum**

The Smithsonian American Art Museum’s main building is located at Eighth and F streets N.W. above the Gallery Place/Chinatown Metrorail station. Hours are 11:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. daily, except Dec. 25. Its Renwick Gallery, located on Pennsylvania Avenue at 17th Street N.W., is open daily 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., except Dec. 25. Admission is free. Smithsonian Information: (202) 633-1000; (202) 633-5285 (TTY). Museum information (recorded): (202) 633-7970. Web site: [americanart.si.edu](http://americanart.si.edu).

###