

COLLECTION HIGHLIGHTS



Smithsonian
Institution

JUNE 2018

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE
NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY
TRIBUTE TO HENRIETTA LACKS

The **National Portrait Gallery** recognizes the life of Henrietta Lacks with the installation of a 2017 portrait by Kadir Nelson. The portrait was jointly acquired by the National Portrait Gallery and the **National Museum of African American History and Culture** as a gift from Nelson and the JKBN Group LLC, and will be shared by the two museums. The artwork will be on view at the Portrait Gallery through November 4.

“It is fitting that Henrietta Lacks be honored at two Smithsonian museums, as each approaches American history from unique and complementary perspectives,” said Kim Sajet, director of the National Portrait Gallery. “Lacks’ story presents moral and philosophical questions around issues of consent, racial inequalities, the role of women, medical research and privacy laws, providing rich platforms for historical understanding and public dialogue.”

“The National Museum of African American History and Culture has always felt that the story of Henrietta Lacks is a significant and important moment that deserved greater recognition,” said Lonnie Bunch, director of the museum.



“Henrietta Lacks (HeLa): The Mother of Modern Medicine” by Kadir Nelson, oil on linen, 2017.

Lacks (1920 – 1951), whose great-great-grandmother was an enslaved person, lost her life to cervical cancer at age 31. During her treatment, doctors took cells from her body and discovered they lived long lives and reproduced indefinitely in test tubes. These “immortal” HeLa cells have since contributed to over 10,000 medical patents, aiding research and benefiting patients with polio, AIDS, Parkinson’s disease and other conditions. Considering the history of medical testing on African Americans without their permission, the fate of Lacks raises questions about ethics, privacy and race. Addressing those issues forthrightly, Rebecca Skloot’s 2010 book, *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, prompted Oprah Winfrey and HBO to explore her story on film. Commissioned by HBO, Nelson used visual elements to convey Lacks’ legacy. The wallpaper features the “Flower of Life,” a symbol of immortality; the flowers on her dress recall images of cell structures; and two missing buttons allude to the cells taken from her body without permission.

SMITHSONIAN ARCHIVES
SMITHSONIAN CULTURAL RESCUE INITIATIVE
EMERGENCY RESPONSE FOR PUERTO RICO’S CULTURAL HERITAGE

In November and December 2017, the **Smithsonian Cultural Rescue Initiative** (SCRI) and Nora Lockshin from **Smithsonian Archives** were detailed to Puerto Rico with colleagues from multiple federal agencies as part of the Heritage Emergency National Task Force (FEMA-HENTF), co-sponsored by the Smithsonian and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The mission operates under Emergency Support Function 11, protecting Natural, Cultural Resources, and Historical Properties (NCH) “to preserve, conserve, rehabilitate, and inform long-term recovery of NCH resources providing post event assessments of damages and providing technical assistance and resources for assessing impacts of response activities on NCH resources.” The mission focused on assessing damage and providing assistance at the National Archives and Library and the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture. The team visited a number of other affected governmental and cultural

heritage institutions, and gave three day-long training sessions in heritage emergency response in three cities across the island.



As part of the FEMA-HENTF mission assignment, Nora Lockshin discusses types of personal protective equipment for mold remediation with Dr. Samuel Quinones Garcia, Archivo General de Puerto Rico. Photo by FEMA/Yuisa Rios.

Preparedness and Response in Collections Emergencies

Collections emergency preparedness is an international focus during the month of May. Closer to home, the **National Collections Program** and the **Preparedness and Response in Collections Emergencies (PRICE)** team organized and led the second annual MayDay Training opportunity for staff from across the Institution. Twenty staff members were invited to participate in a two-day lecture and hands-on learning session on salvaging wet collections. The exercise provided object handling instructions using a variety of stunt-double artifacts. The participants were from 15 different Smithsonian units and multiple disciplines including security, industrial hygiene, fire protection, engineering, facilities, emergency management, conservation, collections management, registration, archives, and libraries.

DIGITIZATION MILESTONES: 2 MILLION OBJECTS AND 1 MILLION BOTANY SPECIMENS

The mass digitization program recently reached two digitization milestones: it digitized the one millionth botanical specimen sheet (in just 17 months) and the two millionth object (an orchid from **Smithsonian Gardens**.) Working closely with Paleobiology staff, the **Digitization Program Office** also launched a production project to digitize one million fossils from the Cenozoic era at the **National Museum of Natural History (NMNH)**. This project is part of a larger digitization effort: the NSF-funded Eastern Pacific Invertebrates of the Cenozoic Collaborative (EPICC), to digitize one million fossils across the U.S. and enable greater research into this critical era, a time of great climate change and speciation.



The program also launched a four-year initiative to digitize the collections of eight Smithsonian history, art, and cultural museums. This “Many Museums X Mass Digitization” effort began with a pilot project to digitize the Meserve/Matthew Brady glass plates collection at the **National Portrait Gallery**, and a production project with Smithsonian Gardens to digitize over 7,000 orchids from their collection.



The 3D program made a strategic decision to move away from scanning single iconic objects, which is resource intensive, towards developing a plan for scaling up 3D capture and processing of entire collections. To accomplish this goal, the 3D program is developing infrastructure to ensure that the 3D datasets captured will

be sustainable in the long-term. To that end, the program team is conducting pilot projects to push innovation in ways that will allow the Smithsonian to scale up, while simultaneously building infrastructure that will more efficiently process, store, sustain, and deliver the large datasets that 3D captures generate.

The pilot projects conducted by the team included test scanning of Chinese bronze objects at the **Freer | Sackler Galleries**, Paleobiology specimens at NMNH, and ivory tusks from the **National Museum of African Art**. These pilots explored the feasibility of reducing 3D capture and post-processing time.

Other efforts to build more robust 3D infrastructure included launching a 2.0 version of the Smithsonian 3D Viewer (in collaboration with Autodesk), and creating a collections management tool to store annotations, articles, and stories associated with various 3D models. These efforts will take the Smithsonian a step closer to being 3D-viewer agnostic, a goal that will ensure the Institution's 3D assets can be viewed on any viewer a user chooses. This effort furthers the goals of the Institution's Strategic Plan, which calls for greater efforts towards making Smithsonian assets available to users where they are, and in ways they want to use them.

SMITHSONIAN MUSEUMS RECEIVE WORKS FROM THE CORCORAN GALLERY OF ART TRUSTEES

Nine Smithsonian museums were among the art institutions in Washington to receive the collection that became available following the closure of the Corcoran Gallery of Art in 2014. The distribution of more than 10,000 works was announced May 14 by the Corcoran Board of Trustees. Nearly all of the art (99.4%) will stay in Washington, D.C. museums. More than 8,000 artworks had previously been accessioned by the National Gallery of Art.

Below is a list of the Smithsonian museums and the number of works for each:

- The Anacostia Community Museum will receive a collection of 100 photographs, paintings, drawings and sculptures, including a painting by Gene Davis.
- The Arthur M. Sackler Gallery will receive nine photographs and a 19th-century Persian rug.
- The Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum will receive 92 works of decorative art, furniture and sculpture, including four plaster studies by Daniel Chester French of the "Continents" at the U.S. Custom House.
- The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden will receive a collection of 10 prints, photographs, sculptures and paintings, including two paintings by Sam Gilliam.
- The National Museum of African Art will receive 11 photographs, including a collection by Constance Stuart Larrabee.
- The National Museum of African American History and Culture will receive 123 works, including photographs by Milton Rogovin, and a number of photographs taken in 1968 by Benedict J. Fernandez.
- The National Museum of the American Indian will receive three photographs by Joseph A. Dixon.
- The National Portrait Gallery will receive a collection of 81 paintings, sculptures, photographs, drawings and prints that include many 19th-century portraits of American Presidents, including nine paintings by George Peter Alexander Healy.
- The Smithsonian American Art Museum will receive the largest collection of all Smithsonian museums. The 318 pieces will include photographs by Russell Lee and Jack Delano for the museum's social documentary photography collection, a major painting by Gronk Llorona and prints by Puerto Rican artist Lorenzo Homar.

The museums will take possession of the artworks in the next few months.

NATIONAL POSTAL MUSEUM TO OPEN ALEXANDER HAMILTON EXHIBITION

The pistols used in the infamous 1804 duel between Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr will be on display May 25 through June 24 at the **National Postal Museum**. They are featured in the exhibition “Alexander Hamilton: Soldier, Secretary, Icon,” along with mail, portraits, and postage and revenue stamps reflective of Hamilton’s life and career as the first U.S. treasury secretary.



Original Hamilton–Burr Dueling Pistols on Rare Public Display

The full exhibition remains on view through next March. The opening in late May is set to coincide with the June opening of the hit Broadway play, *Hamilton: An American Musical*, at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C.

The original dueling pistols used by Hamilton, former secretary of the treasury and retired two-star general, and Vice President Aaron Burr in the duel that resulted in Hamilton’s death are on loan to the museum from JPMorgan Chase & Co. This rare public showing represents the first time the pistols have been on public display in the Washington area.

In the 215 years since his untimely death at 39 in the duel with Burr, Hamilton has become an American icon. Stamps, money, movies, television miniseries, and now a hit Broadway musical, commemorate his meteoric rise and his sweeping vision for America’s future. In a scene that is scarcely imaginable today, on July 11, 1804, Burr killed Hamilton in a duel. Burr had lost the U.S. presidential election of 1800 and the New York governor’s race of 1804. He blamed Hamilton’s outspoken opposition for both losses—especially a letter attributed to Hamilton and published in the *Albany Register* that referred to Burr as “despicable.” Burr then issued the challenge to a duel, which was set for a location outside New York City in nearby New Jersey.

Far from vindicating himself as he had hoped, Burr instead became a pariah. Indicted for the capital crime of murder in both New York and New Jersey, he was forced into hiding. President Thomas Jefferson dropped him from the Democratic–Republican presidential ticket, and later ordered Burr’s arrest on treason charges stemming from an alleged plot to set up an independent country in the Louisiana Purchase territories. Burr was eventually acquitted of murder, dueling and treason, and he resumed a modest law practice in New York but died bankrupt and living in a Staten Island boarding house in 1836.

“History remembers Alexander Hamilton as the pioneering first secretary of the treasury, but he was also responsible for the Post Office Department,” said Daniel Piazza, NPM chief curator of philately. “He used the mail to collect import and export data from customs officers all over the country, and his ability to interpret this data made Hamilton the best informed member of Washington’s first Cabinet.”