



Media only: Laura Baptiste (202) 633-8494
Mandy Young (202) 633-8529

Feb. 3, 2009

Media Web site: americanart.si.edu/press

Smithsonian American Art Museum to Celebrate the Lincoln Bicentennial with an Exhibition, Free Public Programs and More

The Smithsonian American Art Museum is presenting a variety of programming to honor President Abraham Lincoln as part of the city-wide celebration of the bicentennial of his birth. An ongoing exhibition, “The Honor of Your Company Is Requested: President Lincoln’s Inaugural Ball,” and several free public programs, specialty store products and an online initiative are offered.

Exhibition

Currently on view at the museum, “The Honor of Your Company is Requested: President Lincoln’s Inaugural Ball,” is a small, focused exhibition that celebrates Lincoln’s second inaugural ball, which was held March 6, 1865, in what is now the museum’s historic home, but was then the U.S. Patent Office. The exhibition places the ball in historical context, beginning with Lincoln’s re-election and inauguration through his assassination and funeral a month after the ball. It also spotlights the spaces in the building where the ball events took place. What is now called the Lincoln Gallery is where more than 4,000 guests danced the night away, and the museum’s Luce Foundation Center for American Art was the venue for a sumptuous buffet supper, which ended in a riotous melee that was featured in newspaper accounts the following day. The exhibition runs through Jan. 18, 2010.

Public Programs

The museum, in partnership with the National Portrait Gallery, will host a Presidential Family Fun Day Feb. 14 from 11:30 a.m. until 5 p.m. Visitors will enjoy fife-and-drum music, period dancing, storytelling, scavenger hunts through the galleries and a valentine craft, as well as visits from the Washington Nationals’ mascots and wax characters from Madame Tussauds. Also on Feb. 14, from noon until 5 p.m., artist Zilly Rosen will exhibit a double portrait of Presidents Lincoln and Barack Obama, made from more than 5,000 cupcakes, in the museum’s Luce Foundation Center. Guests are invited to help de-install the piece from 5 to 6:30 p.m. by sampling the sugary work. Mark Daniel Epstein, author of “The Lincolns: Portrait of a Marriage,” will give a book talk and signing March 11

at 6 p.m. Gary Ecelbarger, author of “The Great Comeback: How Abraham Lincoln Beat the Odds to Win the 1860 Republican Nomination,” will also give a book talk and signing March 22 at 3 p.m.

Store Promotions

A wide array of Lincoln-related products is for sale in the museum’s store. These include magnets (\$5) and pens (\$9), novelty top hats (\$10.50), replica Lincoln White House china (\$40 – \$70) and reproductions of Lincoln portraits and Civil War-era art (\$10 – \$250). Also available is the book, “Temple of Invention: History of a National Landmark,” by Charles J. Robertson, an account of the museum’s building, which served as the original patent office, a Civil War hospital and the location for Lincoln’s second inaugural ball in 1865 (\$19.95).

Artful Abe

Artful Abe is an online scavenger hunt that takes players from outdoor Lincoln sculptures around America to discover related artworks in the collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum. The online interactive will employ a database of over 32,000 outdoor public sculptures from the museum’s project Save Outdoor Sculpture (SOS!), the museum’s online collections and the online photo-sharing site Flickr. The interactive will be available beginning mid-February at americanart.si.edu/artfulabe/.

About the Smithsonian American Art Museum

The Smithsonian American Art Museum celebrates the vision and creativity of Americans with approximately 41,500 artworks in all media spanning more than three centuries. Its National Historic Landmark building is located at Eighth and F streets N.W., above the Gallery Place/Chinatown Metrorail station. Museum hours are 11:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. daily, 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.

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