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“Zaida Ben-Yusuf: New York Portrait Photographer” Opens at the National Portrait Gallery April 11

The National Portrait Gallery presents the first exhibition of photographer Zaida Ben-Yusuf’s work in nearly 100 years. The exhibition shows Ben-Yusuf’s portraits of individuals who were responsible for transforming New York into a cultural, political and business capital. “Zaida Ben-Yusuf: New York Portrait Photographer” opens April 11 and continues through Sept. 1. It includes 50 photographs by the artist.

“In the early 20th century, Ben-Yusuf was an important figure in New York photographic circles,” said Carolyn K. Carr, acting director of the National Portrait Gallery. “It is an honor for the Portrait Gallery to mount this exhibition that examines her life and work.”

Born in London to an Algerian father and a German mother Ben-Yusuf (1869-1933) was a celebrated portrait photographer in turn-of-the-century New York, yet little was known about her life until Portrait Gallery curator Frank H.

Goodyear III saw an image by the photographer that intrigued him. Through his research, he uncovered more of her work and her life story, revealing Ben-Yusuf as a leader in the art of photographic portraiture.

With her intuitive and often probing portraits, Ben-Yusuf played an influential role in elevating photography to an art; her fine art approach suggested new creative possibilities. Ben-Yusuf had her photographs exhibited with Alfred Stieglitz—a measure of her reputation among photographers—and she served as a spokesperson for the Eastman Kodak Company. Like many photographers, she dedicated herself to building “a gallery of illustrious Americans,” although she was the first woman to embark upon such an enterprise. Ben-Yusuf attracted to her studio many of the cultural and political



James Burton Pond, c.1898; Zaida Ben-Yusuf; National Portrait Gallery

world's most prominent figures, including Theodore Roosevelt, Edith Wharton, William Merritt Chase and Julia Marlowe.

Goodyear, associate curator of photographs, is the curator of "Zaida Ben-Yusuf: New York Portrait Photographer" at the National Portrait Gallery; a 240-page catalog (Merrell, 2008) accompanies the exhibition.

The National Portrait Gallery

The National Portrait Gallery tells the stories of America through the individuals who have shaped its culture. Through the visual arts, performing arts and new media, the Portrait Gallery portrays poets and presidents, visionaries and villains, actors and activists who speak American history.

The National Portrait Gallery opened to the public in 1968. The museum's collection of nearly 20,000 works includes paintings, sculpture, photographs, drawings and new media. Located at Eighth and F streets N.W., Washington, D.C., it is open every day, except Dec. 25, from 11:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. Smithsonian information: (202) 633-1000; (202) 633-5285 (TTY). Web site: www.npg.si.edu.

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Note to editors: High-resolution images are available from the National Portrait Gallery's ftp site. Call (202) 633-8295 or e-mail hahnj@si.edu for information to access the site.