



Media only: Bethany Bentley (202) 633-8293

April 16, 2008

Public only: (202) 633-1000

Press Preview: April 29, 9:30 – 11:30 a.m.

“Herblock’s Presidents: ‘Puncturing Pomposity’” Opens at the Smithsonian’s National Portrait Gallery May 2

As the nation moves toward electing its 44th president, the Smithsonian’s National Portrait Gallery is opening an exhibition of the political cartoons of Herbert Lawrence Block (1909–2001), known by the pen name “Herblock.” In “Herblock’s Presidents: ‘Puncturing Pomposity,’” 40 political cartoons demonstrate the witty, biting humor of the cartoonist who appeared in American newspapers for more than seven decades. The cartoons featured in the exhibition were selected from the collections of the Library of Congress. The exhibition demonstrates that none of the 11 presidents who held office during his career escaped his criticism. “Herblock’s Presidents: Puncturing Pomposity” will be on view through Nov. 30.

“There are many talented political cartoonists today, some of whom are included in the National Portrait Gallery’s collection,” said Carolyn K. Carr, acting director of the National Portrait Gallery. “However, Herblock remains unmatched in his ability to craft a subtle visual metaphor.”

Herblock’s cartoons were never ambivalent or balanced but always expressive of a distinct political point of view; they were always clear in meaning and direct in expression. Herblock’s first political cartoon appeared in the *Chicago Daily News* in 1929. He was an editorial cartoonist with the *Newspaper Enterprise Association* from 1933 to 1943 and, after serving in the army, joined *The Washington Post* in 1946. Maintaining editorial independence for most of his newspaper career, Herblock won three Pulitzer Prizes in 1942, 1954 and 1979 and shared one more with the *Washington Post* in 1973 for its coverage of Watergate. Also, he was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1994. Besides the cartoons, Herblock’s awards—including his first Pulitzer Prize—and his drawing tools also will be exhibited.

The exhibition includes his depictions of Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, Dwight D. Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton. While Herblock was generally unsympathetic to Republican presidents, Democrats such as Lyndon Johnson, Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton did not escape his wrath. He consistently attacked any president he felt was insensitive to the “underdog.” The show offers a rare opportunity for visitors to see how one of America’s greatest political cartoonists viewed the American presidency for much of the 20th century.

An additional element of the exhibition is a computer touch screen that will allow visitors to further explore Herblock’s presidents. These virtual digital images are organized along such topics as presidential scandals, domestic policy and war.

The exhibition curator is Sidney Hart, historian at the National Portrait Gallery.

This exhibition has been made possible by a generous grant from The Herb Block Foundation.

The National Portrait Gallery

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.

###