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Portraits of George Washington and John Adams among 16 Masterpieces by Gilbert Stuart from National Gallery of Art Collection Being Conserved through Bank of America Art Conservation Project Grant



Independent conservator Gay Myers removing the varnish from Gilbert Stuart's *Abigail Smith Adams (Mrs. John Adams)*, (1800/1815). National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift of Mrs. Robert Homans

Washington, DC—The National Gallery of Art's portraits of George Washington and John Adams are among a select group of 16 Federal-era paintings in its collection by American master Gilbert Stuart (1755–1828) that are being conserved through a grant from the Bank of America Art Conservation Project. Also undergoing conservation are 19 other cultural and historical treasures in museums throughout the world, thanks to the company's global art conservation initiative.

"The National Gallery of Art is fortunate to have in its collection 42 paintings by Stuart, who was declared the 'Father of American Portraiture' by his contemporaries. The conservation work to date has resulted in major improvements in the appearance of the

paintings and has greatly increased the stability of the paint layers. A wonderful group of historically significant portraits will soon be available for exhibition," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "We are extremely grateful to Bank of America, a longtime supporter of the Gallery, for helping to preserve these American masterworks."

"We are honored to include these historical works of art in the 2012 selections for the Bank of America Art Conservation Project," said Rena DeSisto, Global Arts and Culture executive at Bank of America. "The Project was designed not only to conserve important cultural treasures from around the world but also to celebrate diverse artistic and cultural traditions and put a spotlight on the growing need for art conservation and the unsung heroes—conservators, restorers, historians—that undertake this arduous work. In 2012 we are pleased to provide funding for 20 projects in 15 countries."

From presidents and politicians to war heroes and wealthy businessmen, Stuart painted virtually all of the foremost political figures and members of notable families. He demonstrated an astute ability to capture not only the physical appearance of his sitters but their spirit and intellect as well. No artist provides a more complete or more vivid visual record of the men and women of the early republic.

In addition to the works undergoing conservation, there are 13 paintings by Stuart on permanent display in the West Building galleries. They include the famed Gibbs-Coolidge portraits, the only surviving set of portraits depicting the first five American presidents—a must-see as visitors flock to the National Mall for the Fourth of July holiday. This fall six of the newly restored works will be unveiled to the public on October 7, 2012, in the installation of *Masterpieces of American Furniture from the Kaufman Collection, 1700–1830* on the Ground Floor of the West Building.

The Conservation

Many of the 16 works being conserved entered the Gallery's collection after being passed down through generations of private owners—oftentimes relatives of the sitters. Some have varnishes that have discolored with age, old retouchings that do not match the original paint, and structural problems such as cracks in the paint. Under the

supervision of the Gallery's paintings conservation department, a team of conservators, including independent conservators Lance Mayer and Gay Myers and Gallery conservator Joanna Dunn, are examining, cleaning, and restoring the portraits.

Stuart is most well known for his famous images of George Washington, of which the Gallery owns four. The removal of the dark yellowed varnish on the 1795 "Vaughan-Sinclair" portrait revealed it to be much more finely rendered than previously thought. Similarly, the discolored varnish was removed from Stuart's portraits of John and Abigail Adams, begun in 1800 but not finished until 1815, exposing fresh new detail in the faces and clothing. These three portraits, along with *Ann Calvert Stuart Robinson (Mrs. William Robinson)* (c. 1804), *John Randolph* (1804/1805), and *Stephen Van Rensselaer III* (1793/1795), will make their post-conservation debut in the installation of the Kaufman Collection in October.

Commodore Thomas Macdonough (c. 1815/1818) was conserved as part of the project and is now on view in the National Portrait Gallery's exhibition *1812: A Nation Emerges* (June 15, 2012–January 27, 2013). The remaining portraits being conserved under the grant are *Benjamin Tappan* (1814), *Captain Joseph Anthony* (1794), *Dr. William Hartigan* (?) (c. 1793), *Horace Binney* (1800), *Joseph Coolidge* (1820), *Lawrence Reid Yates* (1793/1794), *Robert Liston* (1800), *Luke White* (c. 1787), and *Sir John Dick* (1783).

About the Conservators

Lance Mayer and Gay Myers are independent conservators as well as experts on the materials and techniques of American painting. They are the authors of *American Painters on Technique: The Colonial Period to 1860* (2011), with a second volume forthcoming. They conserved Samuel F. B. Morse's masterpiece, *The Gallery of the Louvre* (1831–1833), on display in the Gallery's West Building from June 25, 2011, through July 8, 2012, on loan from the Terra Foundation for American Art. Joanna Dunn has been a contract conservator at the National Gallery of Art since 2003. During her time at the Gallery, she has conserved paintings by such notable European and American artists as John Singleton Copley and Rembrandt Peale, whose *Rubens Peale with a Geranium* (1801) she most recently treated.

Bank of America Art Conservation Project

The Art Conservation Project is an extension of the bank's global commitment to supporting the arts. The Art Conservation Project is a unique global program that provides grants to nonprofit museums throughout the world to conserve historically or culturally significant works of art that are in danger of degeneration, including works that have been designated as national treasures. Recipients for 2012 include 20 projects at museums around the world, ranging from 6th-century BCE Chinese artifacts to works by Pablo Picasso and Jackson Pollock.

In addition to funding the conservation for these works by Gilbert Stuart, Bank of America has generously supported four exhibitions at the National Gallery of Art over the course of six years: *J.M.W. Turner* (October 1, 2007–January 6, 2008), *Pompeii and the Roman Villa: Art and Culture around the Bay of Naples* (October 19, 2008–March 22, 2009), *Gauguin: Maker of Myth* (February 27–June 5, 2011), and the upcoming *Roy Lichtenstein: A Retrospective* (October 14, 2012–January 13, 2013).

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General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets along Constitution Avenue NW and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. With the exception of the atrium and library, the galleries in the East Building will be closing gradually beginning in July 2013 and will remain closed for approximately three years for Master Facilities Plan and renovations. For specific updates on gallery closings, visit www.nga.gov/renovation (<http://www.nga.gov/renovation>) .

For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's website at www.nga.gov. Follow the Gallery on Facebook at www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt and on Twitter at twitter.com/ngadc.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

For additional press information please call or send inquiries to:

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