



Smithsonian
National Museum of American History

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**The National Museum of American History to Exhibit Artworks by Presidents
Dwight D. Eisenhower, Ronald Reagan, and George W. Bush**

The National Museum of American History is pleased to present *Presidential Pictures: Paintings & Drawings by Dwight D. Eisenhower, Ronald Reagan, and George W. Bush*. This unprecedented exhibition brings together works from three of the most powerful and influential men in American history. Presidential Artistry will no doubt open the public's eyes to the fact that these men were not just great politicians but also true artistes.

While he is best known as the American president who desegregated the U.S. armed forces and public schools, signed the Civil Rights Act of 1957 and 1960, and articulated the anti-Communist "domino theory," Dwight D. Eisenhower was also a dedicated painter. Having taken up the art in 1948 to relieve the stress of being Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army, Eisenhower created hundreds of images before, during and after his presidential tenure. He even had an artist's studio installed in the White House. Always a straight-shooter, the former President was quick to dismiss symbolic meanings viewers might read into his tranquil images of farm houses, mountains, and mirthful family members. At a 1967 exhibition of his paintings, the former president told United Press International reporter Richard Cohen, "They would have burned this [expletive] a long time ago if I weren't the president of the United States." Referring to his portrait of Abraham Lincoln—based on a photo by Alexander Gardner—one cannot help but consider the thoughts that went through the artist's mind as he carefully rendered the shine on the forehead of his heroic predecessor. President Eisenhower's work is provided courtesy of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Museum, The Lyndon Banes Johnson Library & Museum, and David and Julie Nixon Eisenhower.

It's no secret that Ronald Reagan was an actor before he was a politician, starring in dozens of films, from *Santa Fe Trail* to *The Voice of The Turtle*. Political and film historians have proposed that President Reagan's work as a stage and screen actor, President of The Screen Actors Guild, and spokesman for General Electric, allowed him to cultivate a "Teflon" façade, an impermeable presence that deflected criticism from the Iran Contra affair to his indolence at the dawn of the AIDS crisis. But did you know

President Reagan was also a cartoonist before and after his time in office? Visitors to this exhibition will get the rare chance to explore President Reagan's prolific drawing practice through his images of cowboys, horses, football stars, butlers and even caricatures of hook-nosed men and mustachioed Asian faces. As President Reagan said in a 1984 letter to political cartoonist Jeff McNelly, "I am a cartoon aficionado up to and including reading the comics every morning." Amidst these pictures—most of them doodled on White House stationery—one sees the president's externalized mental space in the moments between moments, when meetings got a little too boring and he needed some distraction. President Reagan's work comes to us courtesy of The Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Library and the many private collectors credited in the exhibition's catalog.

Unlike his artistic predecessors, George W. Bush took up the palette knife after leaving office. America knows the Decider in Chief as the man who battled for the contentious 2000 election, initiated the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, and signed The Patriot Act into law. But in 2014, President Bush had his first museum show of portraits comprising images of global leaders such as Vladimir Putin and the Dalai Lama, all taken from the Google image search engine. Since then, he's never looked back. Speaking of his now prolific painting practice, President Bush told CNN's John King, "I relax. I see colors differently. I am, I guess, tapping a part of the brain that, you know, certainly never used when I was a teenager." Amongst the former president's copious portraits, visitors will have the opportunity to fully experience the former Commander in Chief's visual perspective on what it was like to connect with global leadership. President Bush's paintings appear courtesy of The George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum.

A catalog with essays by Lynne Cheney, Jerry Saltz, and Roberta Smith accompanies this exhibition.

Special Events:

Feb. 6: To celebrate his birthday, the museum will screen *Knute Rockne: All American*, starring the former president. A panel moderated by former California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger will follow.

Starting Feb. 14, President George W. Bush will teach a 10-week drawing and painting class, focusing on classical technique. Students will produce a portrait and a still life, using live models and nature mortes arranged specifically by the 43rd president. Reservations required.

Up Next At The Museum:

Missing! A photographic survey of looted artifacts from the Vietnam, Afghan, & Iraq wars.