

Press Release



Brooklyn Museum

***The Obama Portraits* Arrive Next Month at the Brooklyn Museum as Part of Five-City National Tour**

[Reserve](#) Your Timed Tickets Now

The groundbreaking portraits of President Barack Obama and former First Lady Michelle Obama—painted by Kehinde Wiley and Amy Serrald, respectively—go on view at the Brooklyn Museum this August in the paintings’ only Northeastern stop on their five-city tour, organized by the Smithsonian’s National Portrait Gallery. Transforming traditions of American presidential portraiture, the paintings document two unprecedented occasions: the election of the first Black president of the United States, and the selection of the first Black artists to receive the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery’s commission for portraits of a president or first lady.

In painting these two portraits, and in close consultation with their sitters, Wiley and Serrald re-envisioned the centuries-long tradition of representing political leaders. Their images of the Obamas present a striking contrast to the formality of earlier presidential portraits and images of first ladies. Before photography, these older portraits often served as the primary image of a president. Today, our presidents and first ladies are constantly in the spotlight and their images are ubiquitous.

The Obama Portraits exhibition reflects the Brooklyn Museum’s own rich history of exploring ideas of portraiture, iconography, and representation of power across time and cultures. Visitors will be encouraged to explore those themes by drawing comparisons

with other works on view throughout the Museum's collection galleries, including Gilbert Stuart's *George Washington* (1796) and Wiley's *Napoleon Leading the Army over the Alps* (2005), as well as examples in our Ancient Egyptian Art, Arts of Asia, and Decorative Arts galleries.

Through the presentation of these now-iconic works by Wiley and Sherald, as well as others across the Museum's collection galleries, the exhibition contemplates how portraiture has given visual form to ideas of power, identity, status, and legacy throughout history.

How to Visit:

The Obama Portraits Tour will be on view for just eight weeks, from August 27 to October 24, 2021. Access to the exhibition is not included with a general admission ticket and requires a separate exhibition ticket, which must be reserved in advance online. To reserve a date and time, please visit <https://my.brooklynmuseum.org/>. *The Obama Portraits* tickets include general admission to the Museum.

General admission is suggested; pay what you wish. Tickets are complimentary for Members, but reservations are required. Standard Membership [admission benefits](#) apply.

Related Programs and Events:

Opening Celebration: *The Obama Portraits*

Saturday, August 28, 4–8 pm

Free

Celebrate the opening of *The Obama Portraits* with an afternoon of music, art-making, and poetry in honor of these vibrant and groundbreaking depictions of American leadership. Enjoy a DJ set by Niara Sterling and a musical tribute by the legendary Burnt Sugar the Arkestra Chamber, who present a smorgasbord of diverse “avant groidd” musical idioms filled with sugar-soaked sonic ingredients. Then, Kyle Carrero Lopez, Nkosi Nkululeko, and celeste doaks read their original poetry presented in partnership with Cave Canem, Brooklyn's leading organization dedicated to cultivating the artistic growth of Black poets. Throughout the day, shop and snack at the Brooklyn Pop-Up Market, which is spotlighting local Black artists and vendors this week, get a community portrait taken by Souls in Focus, and participate in art-making activities hosted by Cool Culture and Brooklyn Museum educators. In addition, Cool Culture will launch their Health, Wellbeing & Vaccine initiative providing families with reliable information on the COVID-19 vaccine and highlighting community-specific traditional healing practices.

Brooklyn Talks: The Sartorial Vision of Michelle Obama

Thursday, September 2, 7 pm

Tickets are \$30 and include after-hours admission to *The Obama Portraits*

From Inauguration Day to her official portrait by Amy Sherald, First Lady Michelle Obama powerfully expressed the values and vision of the Obama White House through her sartorial choices. Explore the former First Lady's culture-shifting style with image strategist Meredith Koop—who has been Michelle Obama's stylist since 2010, in the White House and for subsequent appearances—and fashion historian Kimberly M. Jenkins, Assistant Professor of Fashion Studies, Ryerson University, and founder and principal researcher for The Fashion and Race Database. The two discuss some of Michelle Obama's key looks, starting with her official portrait, and explore the intersection between fashion and politics.

Drink and Draw: *The Obama Portraits***Thursday, September 16, 7–9 pm****Tickets are \$35 and include after-hours admission to *The Obama Portraits***

Sip and sketch in our backyard Biergarten this summer with a monthly series of life drawing classes, open to all levels and accompanied by a refreshing beverage and musical vibes by local DJs. Honor Black portraiture and power in this month's class focusing on the vibrant and groundbreaking depictions of President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama by artists Kehinde Wiley and Amy Sberald. Learn multimedia techniques and try your hand at various approaches to depicting the human form in a casual class led by Museum teaching artist James Antwine. Plus, enjoy a musical set by DJ InO.

Art History Happy Hour: *The Obama Portraits***Thursday, October 21, 6 pm****Tickets are \$45 and include 4 wine tastings, small bites, and after-hours admission to *The Obama Portraits***

Treat yourself to a curator talk and wine tasting inspired by the Obama portraits. We'll begin with a talk with Jane Dini, Andrew W. Mellon Senior Curator, American Art, paired with a wine tasting hosted by wine expert Marquis Williams of Highly Recommended. Explore themes of portraiture and power, delve into the history of presidential portraiture, and explore the ways in which artists Kehinde Wiley and Amy Sberald paid homage to—and broke from—tradition in their iconic and innovative portrayals of President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama. Then, visit the galleries for exclusive after-hours access to see the portraits in person.

Educational Offerings:**Guided & Self-Guided Gallery Visits: *The Obama Portraits***

Free visits for all K–12 school groups, including a museum educator–led option for local schools and a self-guided option with resources for exploring the portraits in conversation with the collection.

F.A.M. (Family Art Magic): Ages 4–6 (with an adult companion)

Fall I: Larger Than Life

Sundays, October 17, 24, 31, 2–3:30 pm

In our Family Art Magic classes, the magic word is *collaboration*. Children ages 4 to 6 and their adult companions explore together to discover the world through art, play fun gallery games, and create their own masterpieces in the studio. This fall, learn about larger-than-life portraits and sculptures, including Kehinde Wiley's portrait of Barack Obama, then create your own large-scale installations in the studio.

Gallery/Studio Program*: Ages 6–7

Painting: From Pharaohs to Presidents

Saturdays, 10:30 am–12:30 pm

From ancient Egyptian pharaohs to President Barack Obama, discover how cultures around the world and across time represent their leaders. Learn about the elements of art and how to use line, shape, and color, and have fun experimenting with materials as you gain the skills of an artist.

Gallery/Studio Program*: Ages 8–10

Drawing and Painting: Shades of Hope

Sundays, 10:30 am–12:30 pm

Explore how artists combine color and portraiture to represent their communities. Visit *The Obama Portraits* to see how the former President and First Lady inspire artists to make paintings that express their unique way of seeing the world. Then, learn to use brushes and acrylic paints to unleash your creativity on canvas.

Gallery/Studio Program*: Ages 14–18

Drawing and Painting: The Color of Change

Sundays, 1:30–3:30 pm

Use the lens of contemporary art to engage in conversations about racial equity. Learn new techniques in color theory, underpainting, and paint mixing in order to paint portraits across a spectrum of hues. Find inspiration in *The Obama Portraits* and continue crafting your own distinct artistic style.

Gallery/Studio Program*: Adults

Painting: The Portrait and Society

Saturdays, 10:30 am–12:30 pm

Saturdays, 1:30–3:30 pm

Using *The Obama Portraits* as a focus, study Kehinde Wiley and Amy Sherald's approach to capturing the iconic figures of Barack and Michelle Obama before crafting your own portrait paintings. Compare portraiture traditions across cultures, from ancient times to today, and experiment with anatomy and proportions to create portraits using water-soluble oil paints.

*Classes run on a semester basis, from October 2 to December 12.

About The Obama Portraits Tour:

The five-city tour travels the United States from June 2021 through May 2022 and is expected to reach millions of people. Other tour locations include the Art Institute of Chicago (June 18–August 15, 2021), Los Angeles County Museum of Art (November 7, 2021–January 2, 2022), High Museum of Art, Atlanta (January 14–March 13, 2022), and Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (March 25–May 30, 2022). *The Obama Portraits Tour* is accompanied by a richly illustrated book published by National Portrait Gallery and Princeton University Press.

The Obama Portraits Tour has been organized by the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery, Washington, D.C. Support for the national tour has been generously provided by Bank of America.

The Brooklyn presentation is curated by Jane Dini, Andrew W. Mellon Senior Curator, American Art, and Eugenie Tsai, John and Barbara Vogelstein Senior Curator, Contemporary Art, with Joseph Shaikewitz, Curatorial Assistant, Arts of the Americas and Europe, Brooklyn Museum.

Major support for the Brooklyn presentation is provided by the Brooklyn Museum's Contemporary Art Committee. Generous support is provided by Regina Aldisert and Sandra Williams-Cornwell and W. Don Cornwell.

Above: Kehinde Wiley (American, born 1977). *Barack Obama*, 2018. Oil on canvas, 84 1/8 × 57 7/8 × 1 1/4 in. (213.7 × 147 × 3.2 cm). National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution. © 2018 Kehinde Wiley; Amy Sherald (American, born 1973). *Michelle LaVaughn Robinson Obama*, 2018. Oil on linen, 72 1/8 × 60 1/8 in. (183.2 × 152.7 cm). National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution. The National Portrait Gallery is grateful to the following lead donors for their support of the Obama portraits: Kate Capshaw and Steven Spielberg, Judith Kern and Kent Whealy, and Tommie L. Pegues and Donald A. Capoccia. (Photos: Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery)