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Fact Sheet

“The Honor of Your Company Is Requested: President Lincoln’s Inaugural Ball”

Exhibition

“The Honor of Your Company Is Requested: President Lincoln’s Inaugural Ball”

March 8 – Jan. 18, 2010

Location

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Eighth and F streets N.W.

Description

This small, focused exhibition celebrates Abraham Lincoln’s second inaugural ball, which was held March 6, 1865, in what is now the museum’s historic home, but was then the U.S. Patent Office. The exhibition, which marks the 143rd anniversary of this historic event, features the invitation, dance card, menu and a gown worn at the ball, as well as engravings illustrating the night’s events. To place the ball in historical context, the exhibition traces events beginning with Lincoln’s re-election and inauguration through his assassination and funeral a month after the ball. It also spotlights the spaces in the building where the ball events took place, including the entrance for guests at the second-floor south portico, where the exhibition is on view, and on the third floor where more than 4,000 guests danced the night away in the north wing and the east wing, which is now called the Lincoln Gallery, as they celebrated the imminent end of the grueling Civil War. The west wing, now home to the museum’s Luce Foundation Center for American Art, was the venue for a sumptuous buffet supper, which ended in a riotous melee that was featured in the newspaper accounts the following day. The exhibition coincides with the upcoming presidential election and inaugural season, and also with the bicentennial of Lincoln’s birth in 1809. Charles Robertson, former deputy director at the museum and specialist in American decorative arts, is the guest curator of the exhibition.

Free Public Program

Saturday, Jan. 31, 2009, members of the Victorian Dance Ensemble, dressed in costumes and trained in the customs of the period, will recreate the grace and elegance of mid-19th-century dancing. Demonstrations take place at noon, 2 p.m. and 4 p.m. in the Kogod Courtyard. For information, call (202) 633-8490.

Publication

“Temple of Invention: History of a National Landmark,” written by Robertson and published by the Smithsonian American Art Museum and Scala Publishers, details the historical and cultural significance of the building and includes a chapter on the inaugural ball. The book received the 2007 Ruth Emery Award from the Victorian Society in America. It is available for \$19.95 in the museum store and online at americanart.si.edu.

Credit

The exhibition is organized by the Smithsonian American Art Museum with support from the Ford Motor Company Fund.

The Smithsonian American Art Museum is located above the Gallery Place/Chinatown Metrorail station. Open daily from 11:30 a.m. to 7 p.m., except Dec. 25. Admission is free. Smithsonian Information: (202) 633-1000; (202) 633-5285 (TTY). Recorded museum information: (202) 633-7970. Web site: americanart.si.edu.

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