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Smithsonian American Art Museum to Create Education Center and Expand Its National Outreach Programs

The Smithsonian American Art Museum is creating an education center that will allow it to significantly expand its national education program and meet the needs of the museum's many education constituencies. The center will benefit students in classrooms across the nation and on U.S. military bases worldwide as well as school groups touring the museum, conservators, research fellows and educators. The museum recently received an \$8 million private gift to support the creation of the center and a related program endowment.

The 2,300-square-foot facility will be located on the first floor of the museum's historic main building, located at Eighth and F streets N.W. in Washington, D.C. Activities will include pre- and post-tour discussions, real-time video conference tours, professional workshops for educators, including the Clarice Smith Teacher Institutes, graduate seminars, presentations by research fellows and museum orientations. Distance learning is a priority for the museum's education outreach, so the center will be equipped with a state-of-the-art video conferencing system.

"It has been a long-standing dream to have a space dedicated to the museum's education program in our museum as a visible symbol of our commitment to education and a much needed flexible learning space," said Elizabeth Broun, The Margaret and Terry Stent Director of the Smithsonian American Art Museum. "The museum presents its extraordinary collection of American art as a basis for learning at all levels, using original artworks to teach about the American experience. When this education center opens, it will join the museum's Luce Foundation Center and Lunder Conservation Center as innovative spaces that represent the core purposes of the museum—education, collections and preservation."

The endowment also will support the museum's ambitious goal of creating new American history and civics resources for teachers and students based on the best artworks in the museum's collection. A dedicated staff team and teacher advisory committee will shape this cross-disciplinary initiative and link it to state and national standards.

The center, which is in the early planning stages, is scheduled to be ready in the spring of 2012.

About the National Education Program

The museum is recognized as a leader in providing electronic resources to schools and the public through its national education programs. Its videoconference program, “Artful Connections,” allows students to visit the museum in real time without leaving their classrooms. Through these sessions, the museum’s art educators lead active conversations with students about U.S. history and culture using the museum’s extensive holdings of American art.

For the 2009-2010 school year, more than 16,000 students engaged with the museum’s collection through its educational programs. During this period, “Artful Connections” served nearly 8000 students in 25 states as well as in four countries abroad. In addition, the museum offers several professional development programs for educators, including the Clarice Smith National Teacher Institutes in which teams of educators learn to integrate the museum’s art collections across their curricula using Web 2.0 applications, such as podcasts, wikis and blogs. An array of interactive activities featuring rich media assets, such as the “Catlin Classroom” and “Picturing the 1930s,” a virtual movie theater, were created specifically for a fourth- through 12th-grade audience and are available to educators online.

About the Smithsonian American Art Museum

The Smithsonian American Art Museum celebrates the vision and creativity of Americans with artworks in all media spanning more than three centuries. Its National Historic Landmark building is located at Eighth and F streets N.W., above the Gallery Place/Chinatown Metrorail station. Museum hours are 11:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. daily, except Dec. 25. Admission is free. Follow the museum on Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, ArtBabble, iTunes and YouTube. Museum information (recorded): (202) 633-7970. Smithsonian Information: (202) 633-1000; (202) 633-5285 (TTY). Website: americanart.si.edu.

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