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## **Renwick Gallery Opens Nov. 13 After Major Renovation of its National Historic Landmark Building**

The Renwick Gallery, home to the Smithsonian American Art Museum's craft and decorative arts program, will open to the public Friday, Nov. 13, following a comprehensive two-year renovation. The museum, located across from the White House at the corner of 17th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue N.W., in downtown Washington, D.C., will open with an updated interior aesthetic, carefully restored historic features and significantly upgraded, state-of-the-art infrastructure. The inaugural exhibition, titled "[WONDER](#)," will feature gallery-sized installations by nine major contemporary artists, renewing the commitment inscribed in stone above the front door, "Dedicated to Art." The opening will be accompanied by a celebratory weekend of public programs and three special publications.

"The Renwick Gallery is the first purpose-built art museum in America and an architectural masterpiece," said Betsy Broun, The Margaret and Terry Stent Director of the Smithsonian American Art Museum. "The original legislation states that the building is intended to 'encourage American genius' and the words 'Dedicated to Art' are prominently inscribed above the entrance. We are delighted to renew that commitment through this renovation, which will allow us to continue showcasing the best and most innovative American art for the next half-century."

### **Renovation**

This project marks the first comprehensive renovation to the building in 45 years. [Westlake Reed Leskosky](#) is the lead architectural design and engineering firm, and [Consigli Construction Co. Inc.](#) is the general construction contractor. Both firms are recognized leaders in working with museums and historic buildings.

A dramatic new carpet for the Grand Staircase, designed by French architect Odile Decq in her signature red color, re-establishes the French influence in the building. Further enhancing the new, contemporary look of public spaces are a lighter paint palette in the galleries, custom-designed furnishings for the lobby by metalsmith Marc Mairoana, LED up-lighting of the ceiling coves and gilding on decorative moldings.

The renovation of this National Historic Landmark has revealed two long-concealed ceiling vaults on the second floor, restored the original 19th-century window configuration throughout and repaired original moldings and other decorative features, in addition to numerous other preservation

efforts. Infrastructure has been replaced or upgraded with the most up-to-date sustainable and energy-efficient technologies.

Public and gallery spaces are now illuminated entirely with LED lighting. [The new lighting system](#) is a landmark advance in museum energy efficiency and, combined with other infrastructure improvements, will reduce the building's energy usage by more than 70 percent, making the Renwick Gallery one of the most energy efficient Smithsonian museums. [Read more in-depth details about the renovation here.](#)

### **Inaugural Exhibition—“WONDER”**

The debut exhibition, “[WONDER](#),” features new site-specific installations by nine contemporary artists, including Jennifer Angus, Chakaia Booker, Gabriel Dawe, Tara Donovan, Patrick Dougherty, Janet Echelman, John Grade, Maya Lin and Leo Villareal. Each artist works intensively with expressive materials—including tires, thread, insects, branches, netting, glass marbles and LED light strips—to create larger-than-life installations that will transform the museum into an immersive artwork. Nicholas R. Bell, The Fleur and Charles Bresler Curator-in-Charge of the Renwick Gallery, organized the exhibition.

### **Public Programs and Events**

A series of public programs and events will accompany the opening. Celebratory galas will be held Tuesday, Nov. 10, and Wednesday, Nov. 11 ([tickets \\$75](#)) featuring exclusive previews of “WONDER.” A morning ribbon-cutting ceremony Friday, Nov. 13 (weather permitting), will precede a free open house where the public can explore the galleries, meet curators and enjoy live music. The Renwick will remain open after hours that evening to present a large-scale version of its DIY program, “Handi-hour,” featuring “all you can craft” activities inspired by artworks in “WONDER,” craft beer and live music. This event is [ticketed](#) (\$25 in advance and \$30 at the door) and available for ages 21 and up. A free festival Saturday, Nov. 14, for children, families and visitors of all ages will feature craft activities, artist demonstrations, musical performances and museum tours. Details are available at [renwick.americanart.si.edu/opening-events](http://renwick.americanart.si.edu/opening-events) and [in an advisory](#).

### **Publications**

The museum has published [three new books](#) to accompany the reopening. *American Louvre*, *A History of the Renwick Gallery Building*, by Charles Robertson, traces the building's history and explores its architectural innovations. *WONDER*, by Bell, accompanies the debut exhibition of nine installation artists. *Craft for a Modern World*, *The Renwick Gallery Collection*, by Nora Atkinson, the Lloyd Herman Curator of Craft, focuses on the museum's permanent collection of contemporary craft and decorative arts.

### **History**

The Renwick Gallery was the first building in America designed specifically to be an art museum and is considered one of the first and finest examples of Second Empire Architecture in the country. James

Renwick Jr. designed the building to display William Wilson Corcoran’s art collection, taking inspiration from the new pavilions of the Louvre in Paris. When the building first opened a decade after the Civil War it was hailed as the ‘American Louvre,’ symbolizing the young nation’s aspirations for a distinctive culture. It was saved from demolition by Jackie Kennedy in 1962 and subsequently designated a National Historic Landmark. The Smithsonian American Art Museum has used the building since 1972 to present a program of traditional and modern crafts, decorative arts and architectural design. The opening marks the third time that the building has opened as an art museum in three centuries (1874, 1972, 2015). [Read an in-depth history of the Renwick Gallery here.](#)

The elegant “Octagon Room,” designed to house Corcoran’s favorite sculpture, Hiram Powers’ “Greek Slave,” will present a history of the building during the inaugural year. A full-size 3-D print of the “Greek Slave,” recently made from a scan of the original plaster in the Smithsonian American Art Museum’s collection, will recall the sculpture’s original placement.

### **Credit**

Funding for the \$30 million renovation was a 50-50 public-private partnership. The renovation was supported in part by a Save America’s Treasures grant administered by the National Park Service, Department of the Interior. With matching support from generous federal appropriations, the museum raised renovation funds from new and longtime supporters. David M. Rubenstein, known for underwriting the restoration of several of the nation’s historic landmarks, is the lead donor for the renovation. The museum’s Grand Salon is being named in honor of his gift. Other public areas and galleries recognize Nancy Brown Negley, the Robert H. Smith Family Foundation, the Bresler Foundation Inc., Debbie Frank Petersen, Hacker and Kitty Caldwell, Sheila Duignan and Mike Wilkins, the Ted Slavin Family, the James Renwick Alliance and Wendy and Jerry H. Labowitz, among others. In all, 35 individuals and organizations gave \$100,000 or more to the project.

### **About the Renwick Gallery**

The Renwick is the branch museum of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, featuring a wide array of contemporary craft and decorative art. The Renwick Gallery is located on Pennsylvania Avenue at 17th Street N.W. It is open daily from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., (except Dec. 25). Admission is free. Metrorail station: Farragut North (Red line) and Farragut West (Blue and orange lines). Follow the museum on [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#), [Tumblr](#), [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#), [Flickr](#), [Pinterest](#), iTunes U and [ArtBabble](#). Museum information (recorded): (202) 633-7970. Smithsonian information: (202) 633-1000. Website: [renwick.americanart.si.edu](http://renwick.americanart.si.edu).

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**Note to editors:** Selected high-resolution images of the Renwick Gallery may be downloaded from [americanart.si.edu/pr](http://americanart.si.edu/pr). Email [americanartpressoffice@si.edu](mailto:americanartpressoffice@si.edu) for the password. Additional information about the renovation is available in an [online press kit](#).