

## Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery to Honor Fashion Legend Carolina Herrera, More American Icons at American Portrait Gala

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Designer Carolina Herrera attends Carolina Herrera Spring 2016 during New York Fashion Week: The Shows on September 14, 2015 in New York City. (Photo : JP Yim/Getty Images for NYFW: The Shows)

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The Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery (NPG) will hold its inaugural American Portrait Gala in Washington, D.C. on Sunday Nov. 15, to honor five different individuals with "The Portrait of a Nation Prize," whose achievements have contributed to American culture.

Included in this list of honorees is Venezuelan-born designer Carolina Herrera, an icon in American fashion and embodiment of Latino-American success.

Through various forms of visual art, the [National Portrait Gallery](#), known for its portraits of some of the nation's greatest leaders, tells America's story through the people who have contributed and shaped its culture, whether it be in politics, sports, entertainment or fashion.

Smithsonian's NPG Director Kim Sajet spoke to Latin Post and explained that Herrera exemplifies several aspects of what the NPG hopes to accomplish. The 76-year-old designer is not only a fashion icon, but also a powerful woman and influential Latina, an example of American prosperity and diversity.

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"She's a businesswoman and successful," said Sajat, who explained that someone like Herrera, who recently opened a store in Washington, D.C., brings diversity and glamour to the gallery. "She's a role model to young women and Americans in general."

Herrera, one of the world's most renowned designers and, in her own right, one of the best dressed women of the 1980s, is one of several American fashion icons, like Calvin Klein, Ralph Lauren, Marc Jacobs and Diane Von Furstenberg, who also have portraits at the NPG.

Her 1979 portrait, shot by the late Robert Mapplethorpe, famous photographer and her close friend, is one of over 30 portraits that sits at the NPG collection of fashion designers.

Unlike other designers who aspire to change with new generations, Herrera stands by her core designs values and traditions, which she inherited from her grandmother in Caracas. The designer, who presented her first collection at New York City's Metropolitan Club in the 80s, ensures that her fashion shows are rooted in artistic tradition both in design and setting.

This was best exemplified by her refusal to follow her fellow designers downtown after New York Fashion Week left Lincoln Center for Fall 2015 presentations. Instead, Herrera incorporated art into her show by presenting her Spring/Summer 2016 Collection at the Frick Collection Museum, which she called her favorite museum in New York.

"To me, the most important thing about a runway show is the clothes being presented," the designer, whose clothing is not only sold in the U.S, but in Europe, Asia and the Middle East, [told Daily Mail](#). "I wanted a venue that allowed guests to focus on the collection in an intimate setting."

The designer's constant tribute to refined, classic and romantic storytelling through design was influenced by her aristocratic upbringing in Venezuela. Herrera wasn't particularly interested in fashion as a young privileged girl.

Despite attending exclusive fashion shows as a child, her biggest inspirations, which she revealed to [Harper's Bazaar](#) in 2011, were the people in her life who weren't as privileged but were always well dressed, like her tennis instructor.

In other words, to wear Herrera you don't have to fit into an exclusive fashion mold or class. You just have to enjoy looking refined and proper. Herrera's contribution to the fashion world is that you don't have to be European to sell class and glamour. You can carry a South American accent and influence American culture just as much as Tommy Hilfiger or Calvin Klein.

It seems fitting that a woman who creates wearable pieces of art, worn by first ladies and stars alike, would be featured at the nation's capitol, where art is featured across a spectrum of disciplines.



*(Photos: Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images, Jason Merritt/Getty Images) First Lady Michelle Obama, actresses Sofia Vergara and Lucy Liu and singer Taylor Swift all wearing designs by Carolina Herrera.*

Along with Herrera, all of the 2015 recipients of "The Portrait of a Nation Prize" represent the diversity and history of American culture. Honorees include singer and musician Aretha Franklin, Major League Baseball Hall of Famer Henry "Hank" Aaron, U.S. Marine and Medal of Honor-recipient Cpl. Kyle Carpenter and artist Maya Lin.

Sajet, who herself represents what the gallery embodies as the first female director of the National Portrait Gallery and happens to be Nigerian-born and Australian raised, notes that while the purpose of the American Portrait Gala is to raise \$1 million to host future exhibitions so that "the generations of tomorrow can explore American culture through various art forms," there is a larger goal.

"Telling the history of this nation through the people who made it is core to our mission, and these honorees -- Hank Aaron, Cpl. Kyle Carpenter, Aretha Franklin, Carolina Herrera and Maya Lin -- are today's history makers. We are continually working to build the Portrait Gallery's collection to reflect American achievement by highlighting those who make a difference, and these five people are exemplars in their fields," said Sajet.

The NPG hopes to celebrate the people whose portraits are on display, as well as the artists who create them. For this reason, the gala will also include a presentation of the actual "Portrait of a Nation Prize," which was designed by American sculptor **Barton Rubenstein**.

"We celebrate different art styles, different crafts, cultures and genders," said Sajet, who added that the gallery is currently working on touring the country for exposure. "Demographically we know that this is important."

The November 2015 gala will be hosted at the Robert and Arlene Kogod Courtyard, a part of the renovated National Historic Landmark Building shared by the NPG and the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

Besides the honorees and the yet to be named presenters, also attending the gala will be the founding chairs Wayne and Catherine Reynolds, co-chairs Steve Hamp, the museum's chairman, and his wife Sheila Hamp; Robert and Arlene Kogod; David and Alice Rubenstein; and the Ambassador of France to the United States Gérard Araud, who will be hosting a private dinner at his residence for the honorees.

Besides Herrera, visitors can also expect to see several other famous Latino-American public figures displayed at the gallery, including Dolores Huerta, whose currently the subject of the gallery's latest exhibition "[One Life: Dolores Huerta](#)," Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor, entertainers Roberto Clemente, Marc Anthony, Eva Longoria and John Leguizamo, baseball player Pedro Martínez and writer Sandra Cisneros.

For more information on exhibitions, collections and events head over to the [National Portrait Gallery website](#).

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