Former National Portrait Gallery Director Martin E. Sullivan, 1944-2014

Martin E. Sullivan, former director of the Smithsonian’s National Portrait Gallery, passed away at his home in Piney Point, Md., Feb. 25. Sullivan served as director at the National Portrait Gallery from 2008 through 2012. He is survived by his wife, Katherine Sullivan, their two children and one grandchild: Abigail Maslin, her husband, Thomas, and their son Jack, and Bethany Sullivan.

At the Portrait Gallery, Sullivan oversaw the reinvigoration of the museum’s mission to focus on American portraiture as a medium of visual biography. Under his leadership the museum expanded its works created by commissions, from exclusively commissioning portraits of presidents and first ladies to also including portraits of notable Americans such as Eunice Kennedy Shriver and Alice Waters. He also oversaw the installation of exhibitions that expanded the American story, such as the long-term installation “The Struggle for Justice” and temporary exhibitions, including the award-winning exhibition “Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture,” “Gertrude Stein: Five Stories,” “The Black List: Photographs by Timothy Greenfield-Sanders” and “Portraiture Now: Asian American Portraits of Encounter.”

Most recently, Sullivan had been selected as the recipient of the American Alliance of Museums 2014 Award for Distinguished Service to Museums. The award will be presented to his family later this year.

Before joining the National Portrait Gallery in 2008, Sullivan had served as CEO of the Historic St. Mary’s City Commission in Maryland since 1999. Earlier, he was director of the Heard Museum in Phoenix and director of the New York State Museum in Albany, N.Y.

Sullivan had chaired three national boards concerned with advancing museum standards, ethics and practices: the Accreditation Commission of the American Association of Museums, the U.S. State Department’s Cultural Property Advisory Committee and the review committee overseeing compliance with the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act.
In 2006, Sullivan was named to the Centennial Honor Roll of the American Association of Museums, which recognizes outstanding efforts in advocacy and leadership.

Sullivan received a doctorate (1974) and master’s degree (1970) in American history from the University of Notre Dame and a bachelor’s degree (1965) in history from Siena College in Loudonville, N.Y.

In lieu of flowers or gifts, the family has asked that people consider donations to the following organizations:

• Huyck Preserve and Biological Research Station, Rensselaerville, N.Y.
• Heard Museum, Phoenix
• Historic St. Mary’s City, St. Mary’s City, Md.

**National Portrait Gallery**

The National Portrait Gallery is part of the Donald W. Reynolds Center for American Art and Portraiture at Eighth and F streets N.W., Washington, D.C. Smithsonian Information: (202) 633-1000. Website: [npg.si.edu](http://npg.si.edu).