National Portrait Gallery

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Media only: Bethany Bentley (202) 633-8293; bentleyb@si.edu
Evanne Allen (202) 633-2585; allene@si.edu
Media website: http://newsdesk.si.edu

National Portrait Gallery Announces the Appointment of Asma Naeem as Assistant Curator

The Smithsonian’s National Portrait Gallery has appointed Asma Naeem as an assistant curator of prints and drawings. In her role at the museum, Naeem will work in the department of prints and drawings, conducting research, curating exhibitions, serving on the curatorial team developing the museum’s Portraiture Now series and building the museum’s collection through new acquisitions.

“I am delighted to bring on Asma Naeem to the Portrait Gallery’s talented team of art historians and historians,” said Kim Sajet, director of the museum. “Whilst Asma has come from a unique background for our field, she was an attorney and public servant before she received her art history degrees; it was her experience in dealing with sound-based media and cross-cultural identity from an American perspective that especially impressed me. Asma’s research on “listening” has already drawn attention to new ways to experience art that resonates with our wish to explore the boundaries of traditional portraiture.”

Naeem received her Ph.D. from the University of Maryland, College Park with a specialization in 19th and 20th century American art, and a minor in 19th century French art. She received a M.A. in history of art at American University and a B.A., in art history and political science, from the Johns Hopkins University. Between her time as an undergraduate and obtaining her doctorate in art history, Naeem worked as a criminal prosecutor in Manhattan and an ethics prosecutor in Washington, D.C.

Naeem has curatorial training and experience with several area museums, including the Baltimore Museum of Art and the National Gallery of Art, where she most recently worked as a curatorial research assistant. She has delivered lectures in many distinguished venues such as the Courtauld Institute of Art in London, Columbia University, Yale University, the American Studies Association, and the College Art Association, the latter for which she co-chaired a panel titled,
“Sounding American Art: Patterns and Possibilities.” She has taught modern European and American art history courses at Catholic University and the University of Maryland; and published articles that have appeared in American Quarterly, American Art, and the Chicago Art Journal.

Naeem’s research interests focus on issues of power, identity and technology, and range from the 18th century to the present. She has written about the prints and drawings collections at the Smithsonian’s Dibner Library of History of Science and Technology, and the National Museum of Natural History, as well as the Archives Center at the National Museum of American History.

Her dissertation was an in-depth examination of the prints, drawings and paintings of Winslow Homer, Thomas Eakins and Thomas Wilmer Dewing against the backdrop of American history from the Civil War through the Gilded Age, and the American inventions of the telegraph, telephone and phonograph.

Naeem’s current work urges scholars to think in new and more expansive ways about relationships among mass media, sound technologies and the senses in the visual arts. Naeem’s interest in sound extends to contemporary, time-based media, which is a relatively new collecting interest for the Portrait Gallery.

The National Portrait Gallery

The Smithsonian’s National Portrait Gallery tells the history of America through the individuals who have shaped its culture. Through the visual arts, performing arts and new media, the Portrait Gallery portrays poets and presidents, visionaries and villains, actors and activists whose lives tell the American story.


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