National Portrait Gallery Commissions Cuban American Artist to Create a Large-Scale Landscape Portrait for the National Mall

The Smithsonian’s National Portrait Gallery has commissioned a grand landscape portrait from Cuban American urban artist, Jorge Rodríguez-Gerada, to be placed temporarily on the National Mall; it will be open to the public Oct. 4 through Oct. 31.

For the work titled “Out of Many, One,” the English translation of E pluribus unum, Rodríguez-Gerada is using dozens of images of people photographed in Washington, D.C., to create a composite portrait that will be an interactive walk-through experience for visitors and also be viewable from the newly reopened Washington Monument. The work is so large it is also visible via satellite. The project covers 6 acres and falls midway between the World War II and Lincoln memorials along the south side of the Reflecting Pool.

“Jorge Rodríguez-Gerada’s work demonstrates that the art of portraiture knows no boundaries,” said Kim Sajet, director of the Portrait Gallery. “Who we are, how we perceive others, those we recognize and those we place in high esteem constantly shifts over time. Portraits and the people they represent can be as big as we are willing to imagine.”

Rodríguez-Gerada has translated his drawing into a digital format incorporating parallel lines. Currently each line is being drawn out using TopCon high-precision satellite navigation receivers on the ground. The image is created using different colors of dirt and sand based on these lines. The GPS technology allows the artist to place the large-scale image at the location with high resolution and precision.

“This portrait, a stunning compilation of American faces, reflects the unique composition of the National Mall’s 29 million annual visitors and honors the legacy of diversity that has made
this park—and our country—so great,” said Caroline Cunningham, president of the Trust for the National Mall.

The installation began in September and will be completed by the end of the month. The project will require approximately 2,000 tons of sand, 800 tons of soil, 10,000 wooden pegs and 8 miles of string. At the conclusion of the temporary exhibition, the high-quality sand and dirt will be tilled back into the soil to help the National Park Service as they move forward with the next phase of turf restoration on the National Mall. The sand-soil composition will leave the grounds in better condition than when the project began.

“‘Out of Many, One’ reflects what the National Mall stands for—democracy, diversity and freedom of expression,” said National Mall and Memorial Parks Superintendent Bob Vogel. “It will provide visitors with a unique national park experience and, in keeping with our mission, will improve the soil for better turf in the future. These benefits would not be possible without this unique partnership.”

Rodríguez-Gerada, born in Cuba and raised in New Jersey since the age of 3, has worked in this style of urban portraiture since 2002. His art aims to create a dialogue about the concept of identity, and it questions the role models who are chosen to represent people in the public sphere. These works have no negative environmental impact and are created to poetically blend back into the land.

All of Rodríguez-Gerada’s large-scale “facescapes” can be seen from space and are part of his TERRESTRIAL series; this is the first placed in the United States. Others have been created in Barcelona, Spain; Amsterdam; and Belfast, Northern Ireland.

The work has come together in large part due to a group of in-kind donors, including Clark Construction, Chaney Enterprises, The Bulldog Group, Alvin Hatcher Group and Topcon, with consulting assistance from Terry Stancill.

The National Portrait Gallery presents “Out of Many, One,” by Rodríguez-Gerada in partnership with the Trust for the National Mall and the National Park Service.

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.
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; Facebook: facebook.com/npg.smithsonian; Instagram: instagram.com/smithsoniannpg; blog: face2face.si.edu; Twitter: twitter.com/npg; YouTube: www.youtube.com/user/NatlPortraitGallery.

National Mall and Memorial Parks

As a unit of the National Park Service, the National Mall and Memorial Parks preserves, protects and interprets the original planned design for the city of Washington, D.C., laid out by Pierre L’Enfant in 1791. Upon those lands NAMA protects the memorials, monuments and sites that define the nation to the world. On the National Mall these sites include the Washington Monument, Lincoln Memorial, Thomas Jefferson Memorial, Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Korean War Veterans Memorial, Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial, World War II Memorial and Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial. NAMA is also America’s foremost civic space, annually administering more than 3,000 permitted special events and First Amendment activities. Every year, the National Mall and Memorial Parks proudly serves more than 25 million visitors.

Trust for the National Mall

The Trust for the National Mall is the official nonprofit partner of the National Park Service dedicated to restoring and improving the nation’s most visited National Park. The Trust is raising awareness and funds to support the 2010 National Mall Plan, a comprehensive blueprint and detailed action plan to enhance the National Mall’s beauty, usefulness and sustainability for generations to come. The Trust’s Campaign for the National Mall will raise $350 million from all corners of America to fund needed infrastructure improvements, educational opportunities and visitor amenities, while building a once-in-a-generation movement to create stewards of the National Mall across the country. Learn more at nationalmall.org, facebook.com/Nationalmall, twitter.com/thenationalmall or instagram.com/nationalmall.

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