

Large Print Exhibition Text

Visionary: The Cummings Family Collection



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Visionary draws from the extraordinary portrait commissioning project launched by collectors Ian and Annette Cumming in 1995. Working closely with art advisor D. Dodge Thompson, they selected national and global leaders whose boldness, courage, and perseverance ensured that their legacies would live on a century from now. As such, their collection grew over twenty-five years to encompass portraits of scientists who made major discoveries; writers who influenced the world with their words; activists who fought for freedom, civil rights, and climate change; Supreme Court justices; and presidents. Several are Nobel Prize winners; we remember them all.

Visionary presents several of these portraits, most of which are gifts, or promised gifts, to the National Portrait Gallery. Each work was created by a major American artist and stands as a testament to the Cummings' creative vision and enlightened patronage.

Due to the museum's closure for much of 2020, only a selection of the Cummings' gift is on view. Robert McCurdy's paintings inaugurate the exhibition, and in December, portraits by Nelson Shanks, Chuck Close, and Jack Beal will be installed nearby.

Untitled

Warren Buffett born 1930

Warren Buffett is the chairman, CEO, and largest shareholder of Berkshire Hathaway, a financial services and investment firm headquartered in Omaha, Nebraska. Often recognized for his successful leadership and foresight, he is regularly listed as one of the wealthiest individuals in the world.



Buffett, who made his first investment at age eleven, started out in investment sales before branching out into investment partnerships. He acquired the textile manufacturer Berkshire Hathaway in 1962 and then sold the mill to concentrate on investments. Buffett is known for his belief in long-term value investing and still lives in the house he purchased in 1958. Personally frugal and modest, he has pledged to give most of his immense fortune to philanthropic causes.

Buffett and Ian Cumming were friends and occasional partners in business ventures. Speaking of their mutual connection, Buffett once remarked, "Ian Cumming is the only person who could have talked me into sitting for a portrait."

Robert McCurdy (born 1952)

Oil on canvas, 2013

Gift of Ian M. and Annette P. Cumming

Untitled

Muhammad Ali 1942–2016

The boxer Muhammad Ali (born Cassius Clay) captured gold at the 1960 Olympics, won epic fights against George Foreman and Joe Frazier, and consistently stood up for what he believed was right. Even after his career in sports ended, he never left the public eye. His conversion to Islam and his opposition to the Vietnam War made him a lightning rod for criticism. In 1967, he was stripped of his heavyweight title and suspended from boxing after refusing to serve in Vietnam. While Ali eventually regained his title and returned to the ring, he increasingly involved himself in global social and humanitarian causes.

Artist Robert McCurdy began this portrait as Ali was nearing the end of his decades-long battle with Parkinson's disease. Physically, he had grown weak, but his wife, Lonnie Ali, noted: "I learn every day from this man: the courage, the strength and the grace that he lives with his illness."

Robert McCurdy (born 1952)

Oil on canvas, 2017

Gift of Ian M. and Annette P. Cumming



Untitled

Jane Goodall born 1934

Jane Goodall, the foremost expert on chimpanzees, first conducted research on the animals in 1960. It was then that the famed anthropologist and paleontologist Louis Leakey sent her into the field, where she assigned personal descriptions to the chimpanzees, thereby establishing a new methodology for studying primates. Because Goodall had not had training as a scientist prior to that experience, she has said that she felt more open to seeing commonalities between animals and humans. She went on to study animal behavior and earned a doctorate in ethology at the University of Cambridge.



In 1977, Goodall established the Jane Goodall Institute to protect chimpanzees and their habitats. Of her work, Goodall has stated, "the most important spin-off of the chimp research is probably the humbling effect it has on us: we are not, after all, the only aware, reasoning beings on this planet."

This is the latest portrait commissioned by the Cummings.

Robert McCurdy (born 1952)

Oil on canvas, 2020

The Cumming Collection

Untitled

Neil Armstrong 1930–2012

On July 20, 1969, Neil Armstrong became the first man to walk on the moon, as mission commander of the crew of Apollo XI. He and astronauts Buzz Aldrin and Michael Collins thus fulfilled President Kennedy's audacious challenge of 1961: "This nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before the decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to the earth." Armstrong subsequently oversaw aeronautics research at NASA and taught aerospace engineering at the University of Cincinnati from 1971 to 1979. He received numerous honors, including the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1969.



A reticent man, it was not certain that Armstrong would agree to sit for his portrait, but after one of his closest friends, Robert L. Kirk, met with him and explained the process, Armstrong sat for the artist Robert McCurdy. The latter completed his photographs of Armstrong in 2006, but the painting was not finished until 2012.

Robert McCurdy (born 1952)

Oil on canvas, 2012

Gift of Ian M. and Annette P. Cumming

Untitled

The 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso born 1935

As the spiritual leader of Tibet, the Dalai Lama has led his nation's government in exile for many years. He fled his country and arrived in northern India in 1959, after Chinese troops suppressed an uprising of the Tibetan people seeking religious and political self-determination. Four years later, he presented a draft constitution as a means to democratize the administration of the nation in exile. The administration was fully democratized in 1990, and today, Tibetans living in exile in India (and in more than thirty other countries) have elected an expanded Tibetan Assembly.

Beloved throughout the world for his universal compassion and understanding, the Dalai Lama received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989 for his nonviolent opposition to the occupation of Tibet. He has declared that when he is ninety years old, he will assess whether the institution of the Dalai Lama should continue after his death.

Robert McCurdy (born 1952)

Oil on canvas, 2008

The Cumming Collection



Untitled

Nelson Mandela 1918–2013

Nelson Mandela dedicated his life to ending apartheid in South Africa and establishing a democratic government. After studying law in Johannesburg, he joined the African National Congress in 1942, and began his long fight against the South African government's racist policies through nonviolent protest. Following his active resistance in the early

1960s, including leading strikes for workers, Mandela was incarcerated as a political prisoner for nearly thirty years (1962–90). When Frederick Willem de Klerk became the president of South Africa, he ordered Mandela's release, and the two worked together to end apartheid and lay the foundations for democracy. They were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993.

After South Africa held its first democratic elections in 1994, Mandela was inaugurated as the country's first Black president, with de Klerk as his first deputy. Mandela established a strong central government and protected the country's economy until his retirement from politics in 1999.

Robert McCurdy (born 1952)

Oil on canvas, 2009

The Cumming Collection



Untitled

James Wolfensohn born 1933

Having grown up in Sydney, Australia, in a family that struggled financially, James D. Wolfensohn sought to alleviate poverty for others. As president of the World Bank Group from 1995 to 2005, he followed through with that goal. Wolfensohn trained as a lawyer and economist prior to becoming president of the organization, and he was driven by his belief that the World Bank should serve the world's people, especially those without adequate resources.



Wolfensohn revitalized the World Bank's efforts to eradicate poverty by illuminating the links among global economics, world stability, and peace. He initiated programs for debt relief to foster new growth in developing countries and waged a vigorous campaign to help nations combat corruption. Since leaving the World Bank, Wolfensohn has served on several boards and has won many prestigious awards, including the 2017 Carnegie Medal for Philanthropy.

Robert McCurdy (born 1952)

Oil on canvas, 2014

Gift of Ian M. and Annette P. Cumming

Untitled

Toni Morrison 1931–2019

Toni Morrison's first novel, *The Bluest Eye* (1970), tells the story of Pecola Breedlove, a young African American girl who longs for acceptance. With the publication of each new work, Morrison's fan base and critical acclaim grew. She received the National Book Critics Circle Award for *Song of Solomon* (1977), the Pulitzer Prize for *Beloved* (1987), the Nobel Prize for Literature (1993), and the Presidential Medal of Freedom (2012). Morrison is primarily remembered as a fiction writer, but she also published works of nonfiction, such as *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992), a provocative reassessment of the American literary canon.



During her years as a professor at Princeton University, Morrison delivered many memorable lectures. Speaking to students in 2005, she told them: "From my point of view your life is already artful—waiting, just waiting, for you to make it art." This painting was the first of many that Ian and Annette Cumming commissioned from Robert McCurdy.

Robert McCurdy (born 1952)

Oil on canvas, 2006

Gift of Ian M. and Annette P. Cumming

Untitled

Desmond Tutu born 1931

Desmond Tutu is a South African Anglican cleric, who received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984 for his humanitarian work in opposing apartheid. As an advocate for human rights, he has emphasized nonviolent protest and kindness. Tutu received increasingly important positions within the Anglican Church during the 1980s and became the first Black archbishop of Cape Town in 1986, thus leading the church in South Africa. In 1995, President Nelson Mandela appointed Tutu as the head of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which investigated human rights abuses during apartheid. Tutu continues to support social justice issues and equal rights for all people.



In addition to the Nobel Prize, Tutu was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2009. He has published a memoir, collections of essays and sermons, and *The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World* (2016), which he co-authored with the Dalai Lama.

Robert McCurdy (born 1952)

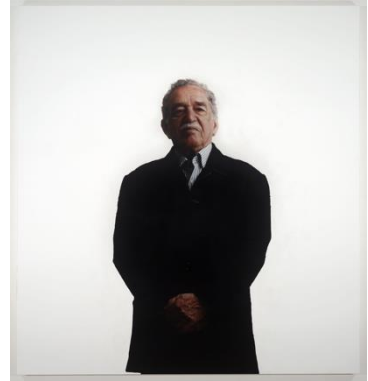
Oil on canvas, 2010

The Cumming Collection

Untitled

Gabriel García Márquez 1927–2014

One of the greatest writers of the twentieth century, Gabriel García Márquez was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1982 and is widely recognized for his mastery of fiction. Born and raised in Colombia, he studied law before embarking on a career in journalism and traveling internationally as a correspondent. He penned his best known novel, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967), after settling in Mexico City, and then went on to write other classics, such as *Love in the Time of Cholera* (1985). García Márquez spent lengthy periods of time in Spain, France, and Cuba, and all the while, he published extensively. He embraced several genres but is most often associated with magic realism, which fuses realistic settings with fantasy.



Ian and Annette Cumming commissioned this painting as one of a triad of portraits of great South American writers; the others depict Mario Vargas Llosa, a Peruvian writer and politician; and Carlos Fuentes, a Mexican author.

Robert McCurdy (born 1952)

Oil on canvas, 2007

The Cumming Collection

Obama 2012 (I)

Obama 2012 (II)

Barack Obama born 1961

In 2008, Barack Obama made history as the first African American to be elected president, capping a meteoric rise in politics and concluding a campaign that encouraged progress and optimism. Even though he entered the White House as the United States was undergoing its worst financial crisis since the Great Depression, Obama expeditiously enacted the Affordable Care Act, which extended health benefits to millions of previously uninsured Americans. During his tenure, the mission to kill al-Qaeda founder Osama bin Laden was successful, but the president's pledge to close the Guantanamo prison went unrealized. When Obama left office, the feelings of solidarity that had been fostered in his campaign languished.

Chuck Close took two large-format Polaroid photographs of President Obama in 2012 (one smiling, one serious) and used them to create double portraits in a variety of media. In January 2013, Ian and Annette Cumming loaned this set of tapestries to the National Portrait Gallery, where they were placed on view for President Obama's second inauguration.



Chuck Close (born 1940)

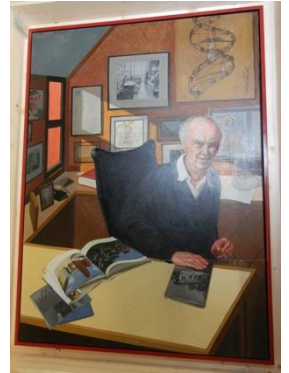
Both: Jacquard tapestry, 2012

Left: The Cumming Collection

Right: Gift of Ian M. and Annette P. Cumming

James Dewey Watson born 1928

James Watson and his collaborator Francis Crick won the Nobel Prize in 1962 for their 1953 discovery of the double-helix structure of deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA). Understanding the configuration of DNA—the carrier of genetic information for most living organisms—paved the way for groundbreaking research on human diseases. Watson spent many years directing the Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, teaching and writing influential books. He retired in 2007, however, after suggesting that the intelligence of those of African descent might not be the same as that of other people.



This was the very first portrait commissioned by the Cummings, working with D. Dodge Thompson, and the only one for which they did not select the artist. The figurative painter Jack Beal captured Watson in his Cold Spring Harbor office, which was filled with many objects and images related to his work and awards, including his Nobel Prize citation.

Jack Beal (1931–2013)

Oil on canvas, 1995

Gift of Ian M. and Annette P. Cumming

Mstislav Rostropovich 1927–2007

Mstislav Rostropovich, who was the music director of the National Symphony Orchestra in Washington, D.C., from 1977 to 1994, studied piano and cello while growing up in the former Soviet Union. After graduating from the Moscow Conservatory in 1948, he began touring internationally and earned a reputation as a world-renowned cellist. Later on, however, the Soviet government restricted Rostropovich's travel for having supported the dissident writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. The musician and his wife, Galina Vishnevskaya, a soprano, lost their Soviet citizenship in 1978, when they were living in the United States. It wasn't until 1990, after Rostropovich had received the Presidential Medal of Freedom (1987), that Mikhail Gorbachev's government restored their citizenship.

Nelson Shanks set this portrait in the abbey church of Vézelay, France, where Rostropovich had performed Johann Sebastian Bach's six suites for unaccompanied cello. The letters B-A-C-H appear in the four stained glass windows in the background.



Nelson Shanks (1937–2015)

Oil on canvas, 2006

Gift of Ian M. and Annette P. Cumming

Mstislav Rostropovich (Head Study)

Nelson Shanks (1937–2015)

Oil on panel, 2006

Gift of Ian M. and Annette P. Cumming



Mstislav Rostropovich (Study of Hands)

Nelson Shanks (1937–2015)

Oil on panel, 2006

Gift of Ian M. and Annette P. Cumming



Mstislav Rostropovich (Compositional Study)

Nelson Shanks (1937–2015)

Oil on panel, 2006

Gift of Ian M. and Annette P. Cumming



Al Gore born 1948

Al Gore served as vice president of the United States for two terms under President Bill Clinton. He ran for president in 2000 but was defeated by George W. Bush in one of the closest and most hotly contested elections in American history.



Gore went on to chair Current TV and now focuses on addressing the climate change crisis. After winning an Academy Award in 2007 for *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006), Gore was awarded the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts to combat global warming. His second film, *An Inconvenient Sequel: Truth to Power*, was released in 2017.

In 2000, artist Chuck Close made portraits to raise funds for Gore's presidential campaign. Working with Magnolia Editions, he created wall-size Jacquard tapestry portraits based on a Polaroid image that he took on July 23, 2000, in New York City. This tapestry was produced for the Cummings in 2009.

Chuck Close (born 1940)

Jacquard tapestry, 2009

Gift of Ian M. and Annette P. Cumming

The Lecture (Edward O. Wilson)

Biologist Edward O. Wilson (born 1929), a two-time winner of the Pulitzer Prize for general nonfiction, has been a leading force in the biodiversity movement since the 1980s. Trained as an entomologist specializing in ants, Wilson's work has taken him from New Guinea and Sri Lanka to the Smithsonian Institution. His groundbreaking study, *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*, was published by Harvard University Press in 1975, sparking controversy. In the book, Wilson examines the biological basis of social behavior in all kinds of organisms, including vertebrates, and links those behaviors to evolutionary biology. The scientist's later work bridges the gap between science and the culture at large, as in *Consilience: The Unity of Life* (1998). He continues to write for a general audience and recently published *Half-Earth: Our Planet's Fight for Life* (2016).



This portrait shows Wilson in his office at Harvard University's Museum of Comparative Zoology. He is surrounded by his books, papers, and awards.

Nelson Shanks (1937–2015)

Oil on canvas, 2008–9

Gift of Ian M. and Annette P. Cumming