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“Portraiture Now: Communities” Opens at the Smithsonian’s National Portrait Gallery Nov. 6

The National Portrait Gallery presents the fifth installation of “Portraiture Now,” a series of exhibitions that presents contemporary artists’ varied approaches to portraiture. The latest installation showcases three painters—Rose Frantzen, Jim Torok and Rebecca Westcott—who explore the idea of community through a series of related portraits of friends, townspeople and families. The exhibition will be on view from Nov. 6 through July 5, 2010.

“These three extraordinary painters offer a unique opportunity to look at the many ways in which we define community today,” said Martin E. Sullivan, director of the gallery. “Portraiture Now: Communities’ not only showcases current trends in portraiture, it also offers an intimate look at the countless traits that connect us as a family or a group.”

In the exhibition, each painter offers a distinctive approach to recording the communities that surround and shape him or her.

- Frantzen portrays 180 people from her hometown, Maquoketa, Iowa. The oil paintings are 12 by 12 inches and were created over a 12-month period.
- Torok creates meticulous small-scale oil-on-panel portraits, many of which take upwards of a year to complete. His portraits depict fellow New York artists, and a series of paintings documents three generations of a Colorado family.
- Westcott, until her accidental death in 2004, created subtle, full-length images of her peers, often Philadelphians in their 20s. Her work merges expressive style and a love for the handmade with a gritty street-art vibe.

Seen together, the paintings by these three artists suggest the enduring power of personal communities.

The galleries containing Frantzen’s work have a special audio component. After completing the portraits, Frantzen asked her subjects to speak to her on tape about Maquoketa and their

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experiences. Many of the 180 subjects participated, and the compilation provides insight into their lives and experiences. The artist's brother, John Frantzen, created an audio mix that employs unusual cadences and punctuation between "topics" by using the sounds of the voices musically.

Curators for "Portraiture Now: Communities" are Brandon Brame Fortune, Anne Collins Goodyear and Frank H. Goodyear III.

The exhibition and its programming have been made possible by a gift from The Ceres Trust.

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; (202) 633-5285 (TTY). Web site: npg.si.edu.

Note to editors: Selected images for publicity may be downloaded from a password-protected FTP site. Call (202) 633-8295 or e-mail ZirinskyJ@si.edu to access the site.

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