

# National Portrait Gallery Announces "Amy Sherald: American Sublime"



**Media Website:** Smithsonian News Desk

**On view in Washington, D.C., Beginning Sept. 19, 2025**

The Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery has announced the Washington, D.C., presentation of "Amy Sherald: American Sublime," the largest, most comprehensive exhibition of the artist's work to date. Organized by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA), "American Sublime" is the artist's first major museum survey, bringing together paintings made from 2007 to the present. New and rarely seen work will be joined by the artist's now iconic portrait of former First Lady Michelle Obama (2018), commissioned by the Portrait Gallery for its collection, and her powerful portrait of Breonna Taylor (2020). The exhibition will also mark the return of "Miss Everything (Unsuppressed Deliverance)" (2014) to Washington, where the painting garnered first prize in the Portrait Gallery's 2016 Outwin Boochever Portrait Competition. The Washington presentation of "American Sublime" is curated by Rhea L. Combs, director of curatorial affairs for the National Portrait Gallery. It will be on view Sept. 19, 2025 through Feb. 22, 2026. Sherald is the first contemporary Black artist to receive a solo exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery.

"The Portrait Gallery's presentation of 'American Sublime' celebrates a full circle of sorts," Combs said. "Sherald's work premiered at the museum in 2016, when the artist won first prize in the Portrait Gallery's triennial Outwin Boochever Portrait Competition. Her painting then reached a global stage when she unveiled her remarkable portrait of First Lady Michelle Obama in 2018. For the past eight

years, Sherald’s art has enthralled viewers with its technical astuteness. The empathy it extends to the individuals in her portraits captivates those who experience the paintings. With this mid-career survey, it is an honor to share with audiences the breadth and depth of Sherald’s practice.”

“American Sublime” will consider the powerful impact of Sherald’s work in the art historical tradition of American realism. Gallery texts and catalog essays will elucidate Sherald’s unique artistic process—inviting individuals she meets or sees on the street to be photographed, then transforming the photos into imaginative figure paintings that act as more than representative portraits. Each with few markers of place, time or context beyond clothing, Sherald has described the resulting body of work as a more expansive vision of interiority and selfhood, inviting viewers to consider the possibilities and complexities of each individual’s story.

The exhibition will also explore the artist’s privileging of Black American sitters, who historically have been erased from the genre of portraiture, and her choice to render faces and skin in shades of gray—a technique that dates back to the early Renaissance—to highlight race as a construct. Furthermore, “American Sublime” is the first exhibition to connect Sherald’s references to other historical precedents in visual culture ranging from the paintings of Caspar David Friedrich, and Alfred Eisenstaedt’s famous image of a sailor kissing a woman in Times Square in 1945, to the films of Tim Burton.

“Amy Sherald: American Sublime” is accompanied by an eponymous publication—the artist’s first comprehensive monograph—representing the broad sweep of Sherald’s painting practice as well as her key influences and inspirations. Contributors include the exhibition’s organizing curator Sarah Roberts, as well as Elizabeth Alexander, Dario Calmese and Combs. “Amy Sherald: American Sublime” is published by SFMOMA in association with Yale University Press.

“Amy Sherald: American Sublime” is organized by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) and curated by Roberts, former Andrew W. Mellon Curator and Head of Painting and Sculpture at SFMOMA.

The National Portrait Gallery is grateful to the Ford Foundation whose support has made the Washington, D.C., presentation of this exhibition possible.

## **About Amy Sherald**

Born in Columbus, Georgia, and now based in the New York City area, Sherald documents contemporary African American experiences in the United States through arresting, intimate portraits. Sherald engages with the history of photography and portraiture, inviting viewers to participate in a

more complex debate about accepted notions of race and representation, and to situate Black life in American art.

Sherald received her Master of Fine Arts in painting from the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore and her Bachelor of Arts in painting from Clark-Atlanta University. In 2016, she was the first woman and first African American to receive the grand prize in the National Portrait Gallery’s Outwin Boochever Portrait Competition; she also received the 2017 Anonymous Was A Woman award, the Smithsonian Ingenuity Award in 2019, the Pollock Prize for Creativity in 2018 and the David C. Driskell Prize in 2018. Sherald was selected by First Lady Michelle Obama to paint her portrait as an official commission for the National Portrait Gallery in 2018.

Sherald’s work is held in public collections such as the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art in Bentonville, Arkansas; the Embassy of the United States in Dakar, Senegal; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the Nasher Museum of Art in Durham, North Carolina; the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, D.C.; SFMOMA; the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African American History and Culture; the National Portrait Gallery; and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City.

## National Portrait Gallery

The Smithsonian’s National Portrait Gallery tells the multifaceted story of the United States through the individuals who have shaped American culture. Spanning 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 nation’s story.

The National Portrait Gallery is located at Eighth and G streets N.W., Washington, D.C. Smithsonian Information: (202) 633-1000. Connect with the museum at [npg.si.edu](https://npg.si.edu) and on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [X](#) and [YouTube](#).

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