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# National Portrait Gallery acquires 20 works from collecting couple

Ian and Annette Cumming set out to commission likenesses of people who would remain renowned

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Nelson Shanks, *The Four Justices* (2012) National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution; Gift of Ian M. and Annette P. Cumming

The Smithsonian Institution's National Portrait Gallery has acquired 20 portraits of well-known figures as a gift from the investment banking titan Ian Cumming and his wife, Annette. Ranging from a 2012 tapestry portrait of a smiling Barack Obama by Chuck Close to Robert McCurdy's 2017 oil painting of Muhammad Ali, nearly all the works will go on view on 24 April

as part of a broader exhibition celebrating the couple's holdings, "Visionary: The Cumming Family Collection."

Two additional portraits, of a more serious Obama and the primatologist Jane Goodall, have been promised by the couple as well and will also be in the show. (Ian Cumming died in 2017, and the gift was finalised by Annette Cumming at the end of last year, the museum says.)

Beginning in 1995, the Cummings conferred with their friend D. Dodge Thompson, now director of exhibitions at the National Gallery of Art, while commissioning or purchasing over two dozen portraits of nationally and internationally prominent individuals. The collection includes likenesses of Warren Buffett (which is part of the gift), the Dalai Lama, Denyce Graves, Nelson Mandela, Mstislav Rostropovich (gifted), Al Gore (gifted), Gabriel García Márquez and Toni Morrison (gifted), among others, by artists such as Jack Beal, Close, McCurdy, Richard Estes, Alex Katz and Nelson Shanks. The gift and the show also include Shanks's preparatory oil studies of the Supreme Court justices Sandra Day O'Connor, Elena Kagan, Sonia Sotomayor and Ruth Bader Ginsberg, culminating in the 2012 group portrait *The Four Justices*.

"They all sat for their portraits," said Brandon Brame Fortune, chief curator at the National Portrait Gallery said of the subjects. "That's what so wonderful about this collection."

"Sometimes the artists had to travel great distances," she added, as when McCurdy went to South Africa in 2009 to capture Nelson Mandela's likeness.

Fortune said the Cummings' resolve to amass portraits was unusual. "There is a long history of commissioning portraits for public institutions," she says. "Commissioning portraits for a personal collection, however, has become very rare."

The couple "wanted to commission and collect portraits of people who would still be well known a century from now", the curator adds. "That was their guiding principle."

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