

Celia Cruz Will Be First Afro-Latina to Appear on the U.S. Quarter

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By Isabella Simonetti

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Celia Cruz, a Cuban American singer who was known as the Queen of Salsa, will be the first Afro-Latina woman to appear on American quarters as part of a U.S. Mint initiative.

The mint said in a news release on Feb. 1 that Ms. Cruz would be featured as a 2024 honoree of the American Women Quarters Program, which portrays prominent women throughout history on the quarter.

Other honorees this year include Patsy Takemoto Mink, the first woman of color to serve in Congress; Pauli Murray, the writer, lawyer and activist; Mary Edwards Walker, an abolitionist and surgeon during the Civil War era; and Zitkala-Sa, also known as Gertrude Simmons Bonnin, who was a political activist for Native American rights.

The designs for the honorees will be made public by mid-2023, the mint said.

Ms. Cruz, described by the mint as “one of the most popular Latin artists of the 20th century,” was born in Havana and joined Cuba’s most popular band, La Sonora Matancera.

Ms. Cruz won five Grammy Awards, the National Medal of Arts and a posthumous Lifetime Achievement Grammy, the mint said.

In addition to her voice, Ms. Cruz was known for wearing dazzling outfits and large wigs. She moved to New York in 1961 and eventually to Fort Lee, N.J., where, in 2003, she died at 77 from complications after surgery for a brain tumor.

“When people hear me sing,” she told The New York Times in 1985, “I want them to be happy, happy, happy. I don’t want them thinking about when there’s not any money, or when there’s fighting at home. My message is always felicidad — happiness.”

The American Women Quarters Program, which began in 2022 and will run through 2025, honors women in fields including civil rights and science who have made contributions to U.S. history, according to the mint’s website.

Honorees are chosen by the Treasury secretary after consulting with the American Women’s History Initiative at the Smithsonian Institution, the National Women’s History Museum and the Congressional Bipartisan Women’s Caucus, the mint said.

Maya Angelou, Eleanor Roosevelt and Sally Ride are among the program’s past honorees.

“All of the women being honored have lived remarkable and multifaceted lives, and have made a significant impact on our nation in their own unique way,” Ventris C. Gibson, the mint’s director, said in the news release. “By honoring these pioneering women, the mint continues to connect America through coins, which are like small works of art in your pocket.”

Other efforts over the years have aimed to increase the diversity of figures represented on the country’s currency. Harriet Tubman, the abolitionist, is supposed to appear on the \$20 bill, but that change will most likely take several years because of a deadline concerning counterfeiting protections.