

# EXHIBITIONS AND PUBLIC

## Paint by Number

*Paint by Number: Accounting for Taste in the 1950s*, on view from April 2001

through January 2002, revisited an American phenomenon: the popular kits that turned ordinary people into leisure-time painters. Hobbyists were content to color inside the lines, filling numbered spaces on a canvas with pre-mixed paint colors. But cultural critics were appalled at this uniquely American trend, which

they considered a sign of mindless conformity.

Exhibition curator Larry Bird arranged loans of completed creations

from collectors across the country. The overwhelming success of paint by number, he says, “shows that people who have never picked up a paintbrush could get accustomed to making art.”

To generate public interest in the exhibition, Dan Robbins, one of the inventors of the paint-by-number concept, created line art and a 35-color palette for an 18-by-25-foot banner outside the Museum. Over a three-week period, aspiring artists—including Robbins, Museum director Spencer Crew, and Secretary Lawrence M. Small—were lifted in a cherry picker to help create a multihued lighthouse scene.

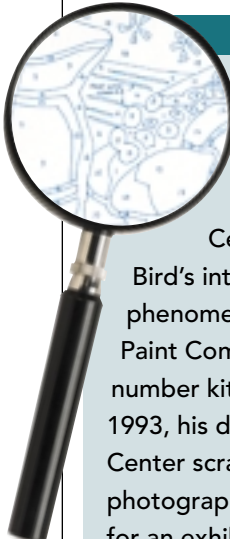
Visitors can post memories of paint by number online in the virtual exhibition, [americanhistory.si.edu/paint](http://americanhistory.si.edu/paint). One



OPPOSITE: Photographs of Nobel laureates by Peter Badge on view in *Nobel Voices*

## A CLOSER LOOK

### The paint-by-number craze



A donation to the Museum’s Archives Center sparked curator Larry Bird’s interest in the paint-by-number phenomenon. Max S. Klein’s Palmer Paint Company introduced paint-by-number kits in 1951. When he died in 1993, his daughter gave the Archives Center scrapbooks, trade materials, and photographs, and Bird saw the potential for an exhibition. His search for examples took him to Toronto, Chicago, New York, Miami, and Boston—and then to

the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library in Abilene, Kansas. “It turns out that Eisenhower’s appointment secretary wanted to establish a White House gallery,” Bird says, “so he distributed about 20 paint-by-number kits to cabinet secretaries and Oval Office visitors, who did them, assuming it was the president’s wish.” Among the treasures Bird uncovered for the exhibition were creations by amateur painters J. Edgar Hoover, Nelson Rockefeller, and Ethel Merman.

# PROGRAMS

*Engaging people in the nation's history*

self-described “amateur artist” speaks for many others: “Paint-by-number introduced me to the smell and feel of ‘real’ oil paint that still thrills me today. Thank you. I wish I still had some of my old paint-by-numbers to hang on the wall now.”

## **Nobel Voices**

*Nobel Voices—Celebrating 100 Years of the Nobel Prize* saluted the innovative spirit and vision honored each year by the Nobel Prizes. A collaboration of the Lemelson Center for the Study of Invention and Innovation, the Deutsches Museum Bonn, and the National Portrait Gallery, it was on view from late April to early November in 2001. *Nobel Voices* launched Spirit of Innovation, a series of exhibitions, public programs, and educational activities sponsored by the Lemelson Center from April 2001 through December 2002 and made possible by the Lemelson Foundation.

The exhibition included fascinating objects associated with the prize, but the Nobel laureates themselves—speaking through short video interviews and wall text—were the center of attention. Co-curator Arthur Molella, director of the Lemelson Center, wanted these remarkable individuals to share their inspiring stories as a way of motivating others. “Sure, our lives have been changed by discoveries like DNA, the bomb,” he told



a reporter. “But the people are the real artifacts.”

Spirit of Innovation programs began during Nobel Week, April 21–27, 2001. The Lemelson Center held an invitation-only forum at which Nobel laureates contemplated the future of innovation. Public programs included a hands-on workshop for local high school students with Douglas Osheroff, physics laureate in 1996, and a poetry workshop for middle-school students with Roald Hoffmann, winner of the chemistry prize in 1981. The Smithsonian Associates sponsored an evening with Elie Wiesel, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986.

The website, *nofestibel.com*, features portraits and a virtual exhibition with excerpts from video interviews of Nobel laureates.



**DAVID FIELDS**  
Board member

*“Chartered by Congress to tell the American story, the Museum bears a tremendous responsibility and enjoys an unprecedented opportunity to capture the many dimensions of America’s past.”*



FROM ABOVE: Images from Eadweard Muybridge's *Animal Locomotion*, "Walking and turning around rapidly with a satchel in one hand, a cane in the other"; Celia Cruz, the "Queen of Salsa," wearing the gown she donated to the collection  
 OPPOSITE: The Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra in performance with vocalist Miles Griffith



NOEL B. BERMAN  
 Trustee, Music Performance  
 Trust Funds

"Our support for the live music programs performed by the Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra makes it possible for greater numbers of citizens to appreciate and benefit from exposure to this musical art form that the Congress has declared to be our national treasure."

### Freeze Frame

Eadweard Muybridge's famous animal- and human-locomotion photographs, made between 1884 and 1887, brought the photographer international fame and have long been considered a significant scientific resource for studying the body in motion. But a recent Museum exhibition, *Freeze Frame: Eadweard Muybridge's Photography of Motion*, offered a more complex interpretation. Research on the Museum's collection of more than 800 working proofs—which recently have undergone conservation treatment to make them accessible to scholars and the public—reveals that Muybridge freely manipulated his negatives to make the final prints.

*Freeze Frame* was on view from October 2000 through mid-March 2001. To visit the interactive virtual exhibition, go to [americanhistory.si.edu/muybridge](http://americanhistory.si.edu/muybridge).

### Family Celebration of American Stories

On a summer Saturday afternoon, the Museum invited fami-

lies to join in a Family Celebration of American Stories. Throughout the building, objects and exhibitions came to life with the help of authors, illustrators, storytellers, and musicians who shared tales of the American experience through the eyes of different communities.

Families discovered life on the great American prairie, heard stories of escape on the Underground Railroad, and learned about World War II Japanese American internment camps. They shared their own family stories and also tried quilting, weaving, origami, and salsa dance lessons. Each family took home a special family guide and reading list.

### Tribute to Latino Style

Costumes worn by Latina entertainers Celia Cruz, Selena, and Rosita Fernández were featured in *Moda y Música: Stage, Fashion, and Style*, a tribute to Latino contributions to music, entertainment, and fashion. An evening gown created by Hispanic American designer Luis Estévez was also on view.

The Hispanic Heritage Month presentation highlighted the Museum's Latino enter-



tainment and costume collections. Cruz's orange gown with white trim—a gift from the “Queen of Salsa” in 1997—is an adaptation of a traditional Cuban rumba dress. All four costumes represented ways Latinos have transformed traditions from their native countries into American style.

**Star-Spangled Banner Snippings**

In a common practice of the 1800s, the owners of the Star-Spangled Banner gave away small pieces of the flag, sharing it with people who felt as they did about the treasured icon. A number of these fragments were displayed in *Snippings from the Star-Spangled Banner*, on view from mid-June to late September of 2001. The Museum recently acquired two “snippings,” originally given to the New England Historic Genealogical Society in the 1870s by the flag’s owner, Georgiana Armistead Appleton.

**Music at the Museum**

Civil War–era tunes, spirituals, folk songs, jazz—music is an indelible part of American history. Throughout the year, the



Museum used music to help tell the nation’s stories. Some highlights:

- The 11th season of the Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra, the Museum’s jazz orchestra-in-residence, opened with concerts dedicated to the legacy of jazz great Louis Armstrong.
- Quincy Jones—bandleader, producer, and composer—launched Jazz Appreciation Month, an annual celebration that will begin in April 2002.
- Continuing recitals, performance tours, and master classes complemented the exhibition *Piano 300: Celebrating Three Centuries of People and Pianos*.
- Performances featured period instruments from the Museum’s collection, including the White House Golden Grand and a quartet of Stradivarius instruments from the Herbert R. Axelrod Collection.
- The 10th-anniversary Duke Ellington Youth Festival, a collaboration of the Museum, the District of Columbia Public Schools, and the Library of Congress, showcased the creative



**TODD AXELROD**  
Board member

“Americans love and appreciate our historical icons. The National Museum of American History brings the nation’s musical heritage to life, reminding us that music is one of those cherished treasures.”