



Maya Rockey Moore Cummings and Baltimore Museum of Art to Unveil the Official Portrait of the Beloved Late Congressman Elijah E. Cummings

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Commissioned painting by Baltimore-based artist Jerrell Gibbs will be on view at the BMA from December 22 through January 9, before its permanent installation in the U.S. Capitol

BALTIMORE, MD (December 3, 2021)—Maya Rockey Moore Cummings and the Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) today announced the forthcoming unveiling of the official portrait of Elijah E. Cummings will take place at the museum on December 21 during an intimate event that celebrates the beloved Congressman’s life and enduring advocacy for social justice. The portrait was commissioned by Rockey Moore Cummings in March 2021 and painted by Jerrell Gibbs, a Baltimore-based artist recognized for his evocative portraits of Black life and identity. Gibbs was selected from a short list of three Baltimore-based artists that also included Monica Ikegwu and Ernest Shaw, following a multi-phase process led by Rockey Moore Cummings and a selection committee of BMA and local community leaders. The portrait, which serves to honor Cummings’ many achievements and unwavering commitment to his home city of Baltimore, will be on public view at the BMA from December 22, 2021, through January 9, 2022, before it is permanently installed in the U.S. Capitol. Additional details about the Washington, DC display will be announced at a later date.

“In life Elijah and I enjoyed supporting the diversity of artists and events hosted by the Baltimore Museum of Art. It is providence that I was able to bring Elijah’s official portrait to life in partnership with the BMA’s transformational leader Christopher Bedford and his team of world-class experts, as well as community arts leaders and wonderfully supportive donors,” said Rockey Moore Cummings. “We are exceedingly pleased with the result. Jerrell Gibbs is a masterfully expressive painter and his stunning portrait perfectly captures Elijah’s essence and majesty. It is a timeless masterpiece.”

Elijah E. Cummings was born in 1951 in a segregated Baltimore and grew up facing profound racism from white communities that brutally resisted integration. Despite the discouragement he faced when he was labeled special education in his early school years, Cummings graduated with honors from City College, Howard University, and the University of Maryland School of Law. He served for 14 years in the Maryland House of Delegates, where he became the first African American to be named speaker pro tem, before running for Congress in 1996. For more than two decades, he served in the U.S. House of Representatives on behalf of the people of Maryland’s 7th congressional district, which includes parts of Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Howard County. Cummings rose to become one of the most powerful and respected voices in Congress,

championing social justice, fairness, and a democracy that serves all Americans. In 2019, he was appointed Chairman of the House Oversight and Reform Committee and leveraged the role to lead investigations into the administration of Donald Trump. Throughout his historic career, he remained committed to his home city and governed with a sensibility that acknowledged the incredibly negative effect that systemic racism and classism have on people's lives. Following his death in October 2019, he became the first African American legislator to lie in state in the U.S. Capitol, and he continues to be remembered for his profound influence on the contemporary fight for civil rights and the preservation of our democracy.

With his lifelong commitment to Baltimore, it was essential that his portrait be created by an artist that represented the rich cultural fabric of the city and, in particular, the incredible creative contributions of Black artists. To establish the selection process, Rockeymoore Cummings approached leadership at the BMA, where she served on the Board of Trustees from 2017 to 2019. Asma Naeem, The Eddie C. and C. Sylvia Brown Chief Curator at the BMA, led the curatorial process in collaboration with Christopher Bedford, Dorothy Wagner Wallis Director at the BMA, working with the selection committee and organizing the presentation of the portrait at the museum. The short-list of three finalists emerged from a broader list of more than 30 artists developed with support from Naeem; Carlyn Thomas, the BMA's Curatorial Assistant for Contemporary Art; and other members of the BMA curatorial and leadership team.

The selection committee was comprised of Rockeymoore Cummings, Bedford, Naeem, Jeffrey Kent, Lori N. Johnson, Lisa Harris Jones, Amy Frenkil Meadows, Troy Staton, and Kwame C. Webb. They conducted studio visits and reviewed preliminary sketches and portrait concepts presented by Gibbs, Ikegwu, and Shaw, before holding a discussion session and formal vote. As part of the commission, Gibbs received a \$75,000 financial award. Additionally, the BMA acquired one preparatory work by each artist on the short list, marking the first acquisitions by Ikegwu and Shaw to enter the museum's collection. Over the course of the past seven months, Rockeymoore Cummings collaborated with Gibbs on the creation of the Congressman's portrait. The painting is inspired by Baltimore-based photographer Justin T. Gellerson's image of Cummings, which is also featured on the cover for Cummings's biography, *We're Better than This: My Fight for the Future of Our Democracy*. Gibbs' portrait is a continuation of his exploration of the layers between memory, time, presence and absence, and the varying handling of paint on canvas.

"Working on a painting of such great importance meant so much to me. I am extremely honored to have been considered and selected to paint the official portrait of The Honorable Elijah Cummings," said Gibbs. "A very special thank you to Maya Rockeymoore Cummings, Christopher Bedford, Asma Naeem, as well as the entire portrait committee. This experience has been a once in a lifetime opportunity and I will forever cherish this monumental moment. I hope I made Elijah proud."

To celebrate the completion of the portrait, the BMA will host a private dedication event on December 21. The portrait, which will be installed in the center of museum's historic John Russell Pope building, will open to the public on December 22, so that the community that Cummings so loved can enjoy and experience it before it travels to its permanent home in Washington, D.C.

“It is our great honor to have worked with Maya on the commission for the portrait of the iconic Elijah Cummings, and to share it now with our community. The Congressman’s life was guided by the belief that our diversity and our differences only strengthen us, as individuals and as a society. These are beliefs that the entirety of the BMA team and leadership hold and are ones that we try to bring to our own work every day,” said Christopher Bedford, the BMA’s Dorothy Wagner Wallis Director. “I am grateful to Maya for the opportunity to support this process, to everyone at the BMA that helped realize it and the accompanying events, and to Jerrell, who has brought his inspired vision to this portrait and whose work so beautifully captures the daily experiences and lives of our community.”

About Jerrell Gibbs

Jerrell Gibbs retraces family memories, examining the origin of his own life by representing intimate and instantly joyous moments. Affirming the multilayered experience of the African American diaspora, Gibbs plunges the viewer into an immersive experience and the realm of his childhood. Growing up in Baltimore influenced his perspective on socioeconomics, body politics, race, economic disparities, and the ways in which these dynamics influence each other. Through his figurative portraits, Gibbs invigorates banal representations of Black identity by depicting empathy, inviting the possibility for a spiritual connection. The works are adapted from small Polaroids into life-size paintings. He graduated with an MFA from the Maryland Institute College of Art in 2020. His work has been exhibited at the Baltimore Museum of Art, The Los Angeles County Museum of Art, The Columbus Museum of Art, The Reginald F. Lewis Museum, The Galleries at the Community College of Baltimore County, and The Gallery at Howard University. His work is in the permanent collection of the Baltimore Museum of Art, Columbus Museum of Art, CC Foundation, X Museum, and the Los Angeles Museum of Art.

About Maya Rockey Moore Cummings

Dr. Maya Rockey Moore Cummings is a nonresident senior fellow at Brookings Metro and the Founder, President, and CEO of Global Policy Solutions. A wealth, health, and education equity expert, she has conducted extensive research and policy analysis on aging, Social Security, the social determinants of health, and racial wealth and achievement gaps. She also conceived and co-authored the first-ever study examining the labor market impact of level 5 autonomous vehicle technology. Her forthcoming book, *RAGEISM: Racism, Ageism, and the Quest for Liberation Policy* (Routledge), will be published in 2022. She has worked as Vice President for Programs and Research at the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, Chief of Staff for former Congressman Charles Rangel, Senior Resident Scholar for Health and Income Security at the National Urban League, and on the Social Security Subcommittee of the House Ways and Means Committee. She has taught at American University’s Women & Politics Institute and served as a panelist for the White House Fellowship program. Dr. Rockey Moore Cummings has chaired the boards of the National Association of Counties Financial Services Corporation and the National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare, and served on the boards of the National Academy of Social Insurance, National Council on Aging, Economic Policy Institute, and the Baltimore Museum of Art, among others. She co-chaired the Commission to Modernize Social Security and the National Academy of Social Insurance Study Panel on Medicare and Disparities and was a founding member of the Council of Urban Professionals and the Experts of Color Network. Among her many honors and awards, Dr. Rockey Moore Cummings was selected as an Aspen Institute Henry Crown Fellow, a Congressional Black Caucus

Foundation Fellow, and a Woodrow Wilson Public Policy and International Affairs Fellow. She has a Ph.D. and M.A. from Purdue University and a B.A. from Prairie View A&M University.

Sponsors

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The presentation of the commission at the Baltimore Museum of Art is supported by The Stoneridge Fund of Amy and Marc Meadows, Pearlstone Family Fund, Clair Zamoiski Segal, and Michele Speaks and David Warnock.

Baltimore Museum of Art

Founded in 1914, the Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) inspires people of all ages and backgrounds through exhibitions, programs, and collections that tell an expansive story of art—challenging long-held narratives and embracing new voices. Our outstanding collection of more than 95,000 objects spans many eras and cultures and includes the world’s largest public holding of works by Henri Matisse; one of the nation’s finest collections of prints, drawings, and photographs; and a rapidly growing number of works by contemporary artists of diverse backgrounds. The museum is also distinguished by a neoclassical building designed by American architect John Russell Pope and two beautifully landscaped gardens featuring an array of modern and contemporary sculpture. The BMA is located three miles north of the Inner Harbor, adjacent to the main campus of Johns Hopkins University, and has a community branch at Lexington Market. General admission is free so that everyone can enjoy the power of art. artbma.org

Visitor Information

General admission to the BMA is free. The BMA is open Wednesday through Sunday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Timed reservations, face masks, and answering two questions about COVID-19 exposure are required for all visitors. The Sculpture Gardens are open Wednesday through Sunday, 10 a.m. to dusk. The museum and gardens are closed New Year’s Day, Juneteenth, July 4, Thanksgiving Day, and Christmas Day. The BMA is located at 10 Art Museum Drive, three miles north of Baltimore’s Inner Harbor. For general museum information, call 443-573-1700 or visit artbma.org.

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