

Stephen Friedman Gallery

Hyperallergic
Smithsonian Is the Backdrop of Barack Obama's Latest Interviews
Hakim Bishara
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HYPERALLERGIC

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Also, a new portrait by Jordan Casteel accompanies a new Atlantic interview with the former president.



Image: Jordan Casteel, "BARACK" (2020). The portrait was featured in an interview with former President Barack Obama for the Atlantic (Photo by David Schulze; Courtesy the artist and Casey Kaplan, New York. © Jordan Casteel)

Former President Barack Obama, who is on a media tour to promote his new memoir *A Promised Land*, spoke with CBS's *Sunday Morning* and *60 Minutes* this weekend about his two-term presidency, the turbulent events of 2020, and Joe Biden's recent election. Both interviews took place inside the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery in Washington, DC, home to the immensely popular Obama portraits by artists Kehinde Wiley and Amy Sherald.



Image: Kehinde Wiley, Barack Obama, 2018. © Kehinde Wiley. Amy Sherald, Michelle LaVaughn Robinson Obama, 2018. Photo by Mark Gulezian, National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution. Courtesy of Princeton University Press.

Sherald's portrait of the former First Lady received special attention in a conversation between the former president and CBS's Gayle King about his family life, and his wife's Michelle initial reservations against his 2008 presidential run.

"I am mindful of the sacrifices that she made, but the good news is that, for whatever reason, she has forgiven me ... sort of," Obama said about his wife. "She still reminds me occasionally of what she up with."

On *60 Minutes*, Obama sat for a conversation with Scott Pelley in front of Abraham Lincoln's official portrait. "He's a good example of somebody who I think understood deeply the need to be able to see another person's point of view," said Obama while pointing at Lincoln's portrait behind him.

Obama, who has been increasingly vocal in his criticism of his successor, Donald Trump, addressed the current president's relentless refusal to concede his loss in the 2020 election.

"It is one more step in delegitimizing not just the incoming Biden administration, but democracy generally," said Obama. "That's a dangerous path. We would never accept that out of our own kids behaving that way if they lost."

An interview with the former president for the Atlantic released today, November 16, featured a new portrait of Obama by artist Jordan Casteel.

Titled "BARACK" (2020), the oil painting depicts the former president in a contemplative pose, resting his face in his palm in a manner that subtly alludes to Auguste Rodin's sculpture "The Thinker".

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"Barack Obama is, in many ways, all of us," Casteel wrote on Instagram. "The distance between us was lessened through the act of making this painting... and I needed to be reminded of that now more than ever."