

Stephen Friedman Gallery

Time Out
The Obama portraits
4 May 2021

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The Obama Portraits



Time Out says

Friendly warning! We're working hard to be accurate. But these are unusual times, so please check that events are still happening.

The Obamas are coming back to Chicago, in portrait form! Paintings of President Barack Obama and Mrs. Michelle Obama that debuted at the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery begin a nationwide tour at the Art Institute of Chicago, where the couple shared their first date.

Unveiled in 2018, the Obama portraits are notable for their striking modern appearances and use of bright colors, standing in contrast to past presidential portraits that favored a classical style and a somber palette. Painted by Kehinde Wiley, Barack Obama's portrait depicts the president against a wall of foliage, with flowers symbolizing his heritage (including Chicago's official flower, the chrysanthemum) peeking through the leaves. The portrait of Michelle Obama by artist Amy Sherald renders the former First Lady in shades of grey, wearing a designer dress in front of a vivid blue backdrop.

The two paintings only stick around Chicago until August 15, before making their way to Brooklyn, Los Angeles, Atlanta and Houston.