

Stephen Friedman Gallery

ARTFIX daily

Kehinde The Obama Portraits hit the road

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Image: Barack Obama by Kehinde Wiley, oil on canvas, 2018, and Michelle LaVaughn Robinson Obama by Amy Sherald, oil on linen, 2018. National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution.

The official presidential portraits of Barack and Michelle Obama will depart Washington, D.C., for the first time on a nationwide tour, starting this summer. The loans from the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery will be displayed in five cities.

The first stop, from June 18-Aug. 15, is the Art Institute of Chicago, landing the portraits in Michelle Obama's hometown and the former president's adopted hometown. Next up will be the Brooklyn Museum, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, High Museum of Art in Atlanta, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

Kehinde Wiley's Barack Obama portrait, which debuted in 2018, features the former president against a backdrop of chrysanthemums, the official flower of Chicago; jasmine (symbolic of Hawaii where he spent most of his childhood); and African blue lilies (alluding to his late Kenyan father). While Amy Sherald's Michelle Obama stylized portrait shows the former first lady against a blue backdrop, in a dress by Michelle Smith's label Milly. The pose is confident yet relaxed. Wiley and Sherald are the first African American artists to be commissioned by the National Portrait Gallery for the official portraits of a president or first lady.