UPDATES

ON

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

COLLECTIONS

1896 TIFFANY BICYCLE
NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN HISTORY

From the 1880s to the 1910s, Americans took to the wheel, sparking a nationwide bicycle craze. For riders—especially women—bicycles were a means of personal mobility, of independence. And cycling shaped how many riders thought about themselves: as people who were *modern*. For about four years at the peak of "wheel fever," Tiffany & Co. produced a limited number of lavishly ornamented bicycles for riders who wanted to stand out in the crowd. One of those riders was Mary Noble "Mittie" Wiley of Montgomery, Alabama. Her 1896 Tiffany wheel has a nickel-plated frame, gold-plated sterling silver decorations, ivory grips, and a sterling silver lamp with a rock crystal lens. Her monogram on the front tube is gold inset with small diamonds and emeralds. The Wiley bicycle was a gift to the Smithsonian from her son in 1950; newly cleaned and polished, it sparkles in the *Patrick F. Taylor Foundation Object Project*, a new interactive learning space on the recently opened 1 West Wing at the National Museum of American History that invites visitors to explore the history of bicycles and other everyday things that changed everything.

AI WEIWEI'S CUBE LIGHT
HIRSHHORN MUSEUM AND SCULPTURE GARDEN

One of China's most prolific and provocative contemporary artists, Ai Weiwei creates work in a broad spectrum of disciplines; encompassing art, architecture, design, and social activism. This room-sized sculpture investigates Minimalist geometric forms, as well as the cultural codes and functions of the materials used.

Cube Light is a seminal example from the artist's celebrated chandelier series: large-scale installations composed of thousands of glass crystals, which he began in 2002. The work extends Ai's interest in re-examining Minimalist strategies and, more specifically, in questioning the perceived solidity and exactitude of the iconic cube. The artist's use of glass crystals signals his versatility and his continued interest in the manipulation of materials that question conventions of culture, history, politics, and tradition.

Cube Light provides the Hirshhorn a cornerstone in the area of non-Western contemporary art. It enforces the Hirshhorn's role as a leader in acquiring important works of our time. In December 2015, it will be placed on display in the Hirshhorn lobby, providing a beacon for visitors.

Cube Light, 2008, acquired FY13. Glass crystals, lights, and metal; 163 x 157 ½ x 157 ½

CORRINE RILEY QUILT COLLECTION
SMITHSONIAN AMERICAN ART MUSEUM

The Smithsonian American Art Museum recently acquired 56 quilts from the collection of Corrine Riley, an acquisition made possible through the generosity of the collector and the Smithsonian Institution's Barbara Coffey Quilt Endowment.

Bold, bright, and innovative, the quilts date from about 1900 to 1970 and come from various Southern and Midwestern states. They are pieced together from discarded work clothes and clothing scraps. Even though they speak of communities in which people subsisted below the poverty line and wherein absolutely nothing could go to waste, they are strikingly poignant and powerful.

In most cases the identity of the quilters is lost, however there are enough stylistic and material markers to identify their African-American origin. The stories these quilts tell are not those of refined households, special occasion and heirlooms. They convey a harder existence, but one in which beauty, strength and love were effective tools for survival.

FROZEN SPERM OFFERS SURVIVAL HOPE FOR CRITICALLY ENDANGERED SPECIES

The black-footed ferret, a critically endangered species native to North America, was down to its last 18 individuals in the 1980s. A captive population was established at what is now Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute ("SCBI") to maximize reproduction to reestablish the species in the wild.

The reintroduction program has proven successful for the population which was suffering from inbreeding, demonstrated by skeletal deformities first noticed by John Ososky, who runs the Osteology Laboratory at National Museum of Natural History ("NMNH").

The work published August 13, 2015, in the journal *Animal Conservation,* "Recovery of Gene Diversity Using Long-Term Cryopreserved Spermatozoa and Artificial Insemination in the Endangered Black-Footed Ferret," highlights this first successful integration of artificial insemination with frozen semen into a formal recovery program and the positive impact on genetic diversity for the critically endangered black-footed ferret. According to lead author and senior scientist at SCBI David Wildt: "Our study is the first to provide empirical evidence that artificial insemination with long-stored spermatozoa is not only possible but also beneficial to the genetic diversity of an endangered species… What we've done here with the black-footed ferret is an excellent example of how sperm preservation can benefit species recovery programs."

To mitigate the inbreeding, sperm from one of the original wild founders that had been frozen in liquid nitrogen (−196°C/−321°F) for 20 years, was introduced back into the breeding population by artificial insemination. The findings underline the impact of the Pan-Smithsonian Cryo-Initiative, the Smithsonian network of biodiversity repositories and collections, and advances bio specimen research through the management of frozen biomaterials and cryo-collections.

LAUNCH OF U.S. FEDERAL SCIENTIFIC COLLECTIONS REGISTRY

A new website, the Registry of U.S. Federal Scientific Collections ("USFSC") available at usfsc.grscicoll.org, is the product of a joint effort between Smithsonian leadership on the U.S. Interagency Working Group on Scientific Collections ("IWGSC"), Scientific Collections International ("SciColl"), and The Consortium for the Barcode of Life (CBOL).

The collection is a community-curated comprehensive registry of object-based scientific collections that are owned and/or managed by the U.S. Federal government.

Designed to be truly interdisciplinary, the registry of USFSC includes and accepts data on institutions and collections that span all scientific disciplines including earth and space sciences, anthropology, archaeology, biology, biomedicine, and applied fields such as agriculture, veterinary medicine and technology.

The USFSC registry is additionally connected to The Global Registry of Scientific Collections ("GRSciColl"), also launched earlier in fiscal year 2015, and The Global Registry of Biodiversity Repositories ("GRBio").