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HIGHLIGHTS

from the

**NATIONAL
COLLECTIONS**

From top left:

Salvatore Scarpitta: *Traveler*/Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden

The exhibition *Salvatore Scarpitta: Traveler*, currently on view at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden through January 11, 2015, is anchored by several important recent acquisitions. Through a combination of gift and purchase, the Hirshhorn acquired from the artist's family five examples of Scarpitta's work representing two major series: his race cars and his sleds. These acquisitions make the Hirshhorn an unparalleled public repository of Scarpitta's art and the sole collection outside of Europe to include examples of his race cars.

Scarpitta's adventurous and unusual career linked the worlds of art and car racing, moving from the avant-garde cultural circles of postwar Rome, where he first exhibited, to the banked dirt speedways of rural America. Scarpitta's work arose from his interest in risk, renewal, and the isolating self-transformation of the personal journey. In the mid-1960s he embarked on a series of full-scale interpretations of antique sprint racecars. The last of these, *Sal Cragar* (1969), is an elegiac, austere shell of a car, deliberately left unfinished. Reflecting a period when Scarpitta ran a competitive racing team, *Trevis Race Car (Sal Gambler Special)* (1985) is a functional winged sprint car that the artist appointed with a Pop-style paint job and retired to the gallery.

The size and nature of Scarpitta's race cars raised new issues in collection management for the museum. To transport and house *Sal Cragar* and *Trevis Race Car*, the Hirshhorn purchased a customized car trailer, rather than using wooden art crates, and worked with the Smithsonian National Collections Program to find long-term storage space for the works. Hirshhorn conservators also consulted with colleagues at the National Air and Space Museum for their expertise on the long-term care of motor vehicles.

[Image: *Sal Cragar* / 1969 / Salvatore Scarpitta (American, 1919–2007) / Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Joseph H. Hirshhorn Bequest Fund / Photo: Lee Stalsworth]

Protecting Our Vital Infrastructure/Scientific Collections

On March 20, 2014, the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) issued a policy on "improving the management of and access to scientific collections" (see <http://wh.gov/IVJf8>). The policy recognizes scientific collections as valuable public assets that play a critical role in promoting public health and safety, homeland security, trade, and economic development, medical research, resource management, education, and environmental monitoring.

The policy responds to the mandate of the America COMPETES Act of 2010, and builds on the work of the Interagency Working Group on Scientific Collections (IWGSC). The policy will be very important in enhancing the availability of Federally funded and Federally supported collections to advance research, education, public health, and natural resource management, and will protect the United States government's substantial investment in creating those collections. In addition to its direct impact on the care of collections owned, maintained, and funded by the Federal government, it will have a significant indirect impact on raising standards for care of non-Federal collections nationally, and will be seen as a model for many other countries.

The Smithsonian fully supports the OSTP policies concerning scientific collections and has participated as co-chair of the Interagency Working Group on Scientific Collections. Although the Smithsonian is not subject to OSTP's scientific collections policy, it is voluntarily complying with OSTP's scientific collections policy, as it is consistent with the Institution's resources and its status and mission as a trust instrumentality of the United States. The Smithsonian has long-standing and well-developed collections management policies that address the bulk of the matters addressed in OSTP's policy. In fact, the Smithsonian's collections policy (SD 600) was used as one of the models leading to the OSTP policy.

Many Smithsonian and affiliated agency staff have contributed to the work of the IWGSC, and several seminal workshops and public events have been hosted by the National Museum of Natural History (NMNH). In particular, NMNH Executive Secretary of the Consortium for the Barcode of Life David Schindel leads several IWGSC task groups, as well as SciCol, a global consortium devoted to promoting the use and impact of object-based scientific collections across disciplines (see <http://www.scicoll.org/>).

[Image: Entomology specimens in the Entomology Department's compactor collection cabinets / National Museum of Natural History / photo by Chip Clark]

Documenting the American LGBT Experience/National Museum of American History

As part of the National Museum of American History's efforts to document both contemporary issues and cover the diversity of the American experience, the museum added dozens of photographs, documents, and other artifacts related to LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) history to its collections. Announced at an August 2014 donation ceremony attended by the donors and members of the press, accession highlights included a red silk dress, tennis trophy, and racquet from Renee Richards, MD. Dr. Richards won an important 1970s civil rights case against the United States Tennis Association, allowing her to play as a woman after undergoing sex-reassignment surgery. Monica Helms donated the transgender pride flag that she designed in 1999. David Huebner, former U.S. Ambassador to New Zealand and Samoa, donated the diplomatic passports used by him and his husband. David Kohan and Max Mutchnick, creators of the NBC television series *Will & Grace*, contributed scripts, correspondence, and other archival materials from the show. The Gay and Lesbian Community Center of Baltimore donated photographs, gay pride ephemera, editor's files from the Baltimore paper *Gay Life*, and other material documenting LGBT Baltimore and the work of the National Association of LGBT Community Centers. In addition, costumes, press, and business records of the DC Cowboys Dance Company, over 100 images from civil rights photographer Patsy Lynch, and 86 photographs of local and national LGBT events taken by Cuban American photographer Silvia Ros joined the collections.

[Image: Artifacts donated by the DC Cowboys Dance Company / National Museum of American History]

Planning for the Smithsonian's Future/The Collections Space Framework Plan

The quality of collections space and storage equipment affects the Smithsonian's ability to make collections available to staff, scholars, students, and the public through traditional methods and new

technologies. If facilities are not in excellent condition, access can be impaired, and the collections themselves could be in danger of losing their integrity for future generations.

Capacity is equally important. The Smithsonian urgently needs more space to continue fulfilling its mission to acquire new collections and to protect collections already held in trust. It must be able to continually upgrade and modernize space, and do so efficiently and cost-effectively.

How well the Smithsonian is able to respond to these needs and challenges impacts the future of its collections, as well as the integrity and vitality of the Institution.

This concept guided the Smithsonian as it rigorously examined the totality of its collections space (1,800 spaces in over 90 buildings, totaling 2.1 million square feet). The assessment offers the opportunity to substantially strengthen both collections space and the Smithsonian's capacity for outstanding stewardship for decades to come.

The Collections Space Framework Plan is a comprehensive and inclusive Smithsonian-wide project vital to safeguarding the Institution's remarkable collections for current and future generations. While not intended to provide detailed solutions to all collections space needs, the framework plan offers a flexible roadmap for further strengthening stewardship, informing management decisions and maintenance protocols, and guiding short- and long-term allocation of resources for collections storage.

The final report on the Collections Space Framework Plan is anticipated in November 2014.

[Image: Art storage cold room / National Air and Space Museum's Udvar-Hazy Center / photo by Dane A. Penland]

Building the Visual Arts Collection/National Museum of African American History and Culture

Recent additions to the Visual Arts Collection of the National Museum of African American History and Culture have contributed to the museum's goal to highlight remarkable and sometimes unknown works by African American artists. *Violets*, a late nineteenth-century painting, is a rare work by an artist who was the first African American painter to exhibit in the state of California. Born and raised in Oakland, Pauline Powell Burns (1872–1912) was a talented artist and gifted classical pianist — as well as the granddaughter of a former Monticello slave. Burns's work is extremely scarce, not only because of the time in which she lived, but also because of her relatively short life.

The museum also acquired a series of 48 digitized color photographs by self-taught African American photographer Robert Houston (b. 1935). Houston, who was mentored by Gordon Parks, covered Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Civil Rights Movement for *Black Star* and *Life* magazines. This collection documents the 1968 Poor People's March on Washington, D.C., which had been planned by Dr. King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and occurred just weeks after his assassination. The compelling images of the march and Resurrection City, the shantytown constructed on the National Mall to house protest participants, capture a seminal challenge to the political and financial underpinnings of discrimination and an important transition in the Civil Rights Movement.

[Image: *Violets* / Pauline Powell Burns (American, 1872–1912) / oil paint on cardstock / 1890 / National Museum of African American History and Culture]