Congratulations Rigoberto González for having one of his paintings as a finalist in The Smithsonian Portrait Competition.
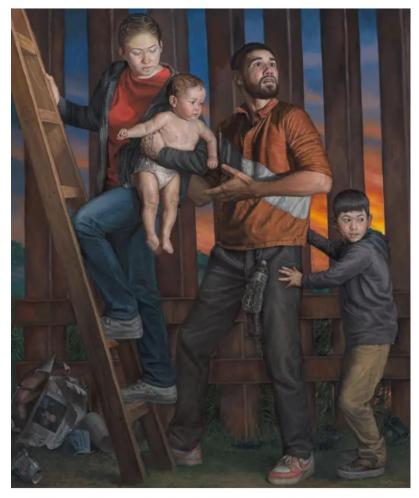**A picture of the painting was featured in an article in the New York Times Sunday edition, see below.**

https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/27/arts/design/national-portrait-gallery-performances.html

Above, dancers rehearsing "El Muro/The Wall" at the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, created by Dana Tai Soen Burgess in response to Rigoberto A. González's "Refugees Crossing the Border Wall into South Texas," below.

Diverse Portraits
The National Portrait Gallery has embraced inclusive live performances.

By LAURA van STRAATEN

WASHINGTON — For centuries, portraits and busts were reserved for capturing images of the elite, leaving a distorted historical record largely limited to "the wealthy, the pale and the male," said Kim Sajet, the director of the National Portrait Gallery.

The museum, like many across the country, is working to rectify those omissions. But it is not merely trying to diversify the faces in the portraits and statues that line its galleries. The museum is turning to performance to enhance its collection, staging a series of events that aim to animate such diverse subjects as immigration, racial identity and Black women's labor. The museum has also broadened its approach to portraiture by relaxing some of the eligibility rules of its triennial Outwin Boochever Portrait Competition (known as the Outwin), whose 42 finalists will have work on view beginning April 30.

The events are all part of the museum's focus on aspects of the American story that have been largely absent from its galleries.

"A whole lot of people were noticeably missing" from the museum, which is part of the Smithsonian Institution, Ms. Sajet said in a recent interview, sitting beneath a 2006 portrait-in-profile of an erect Hillary Rodham Clinton gazing seemingly into the future, across from a Cassatt-like depiction made two years later of Laura Bush, who was then the first lady, reading a book. (Ms. Sajet had spent the first part of the morning giving a private tour of the museum's presidential gallery to the actor and producer Reese Witherspoon.)

"The question is how do you show the presence of absence?" Ms. Sajet asked. "How do we actually signal that there are a whole lot of people and voices and opinions missing?"

"Then," she continued, "how do you actually bring it to ward in a way that nobody makes people really get involved in it?" and think about it and get invested in it?"

The National Portrait Gallery is not alone in raising these questions. Leaders of many institutions devoted to art and history are exploring strategies to rectify historical and cultural distortions by focusing on underrepresented populations and subject matter and embracing new parameters for what work is exhibited, collected and programmed.

For the National Portrait Gallery, "that's where performance comes in," Ms. Sajet said.

On May 17, Dana Tai Soon Burgess, the first choreographer-in-residence at a Smithsonian museum, will premiere a performance that addresses immigration, specifically along the Mexican border. Then, on June 25, as part of the museum's performance series "Identify," the artist Maren Hassinger will perform a new commission that attempts to untangle the complications of ancestral and racial history. And, on Sept. 10, the artist Holly Bass will debut an eight-hour solo dance performance, "American Woman," which portrays the underrecognized contributions of Black women's labor in American society.

The National Portrait Gallery was founded by congressional decree 60 years ago "to acquire and display portraits of individuals who have made significant contributions to the history, development and culture of the people of the United States." When Ms. Sajet, who trained as an art historian, took the helm in 2013, she said in her podcast "Portraits," she found herself "battling" the asymmetry of who was and was not represented in the museum's collection.

In 2015 the museum inaugurated the "Identify" series to invite artists to respond to work on view, or to introduce stories and perspectives they deemed to be missing from the museum. Mr. Burgess was invited to serve as the museum's choreographer.

"My whole goal is to really mine the exhibits and the permanent collection for unique American stories that celebrate diversity, that celebrate communities that might have been marginalized," Mr. Burgess said in an interview, "And I can do that through dance."

Mr. Burgess's newest commission "El Muro/The Wall," will have a three-day run in the museum's atrium courtyard beginning May 17. The half-hour program will include 16 of his company's dancers, accompanied by live music from the Peruvian-born percussionist Martin Zarzar, formerly

most-sanctitude of the individuals who are trying to get to safety."

Mr. González's portrait was available as a source of inspiration because the museum abandoned an "old rule we had of having only portraits that were made from life" be eligible for the Outwin, said Taína Caragol, who directed the competition and curated the exhibition with Leslie Ureña. That change, made for the 2019 competition, paved the way for contemporary artists to revisit history and to think more imaginatively, even abstractly, about portraiture, she said.

A case in point is Ms. Bass's work, which the competition's jury found "extremely compelling," Ms. Ureña said, because she portrays "not one specific individual" but "a part of our population that has been continually unacknowledged." Ms. Bass's short video, "American Woman," will be one of the 42 artworks on view until Feb. 26, chosen from 2,774 entries.

The idea for "American Woman" came to Ms. Bass (disclosure: the author and the artist have been friends since graduate school) when she saw Stacey Abrams hailed

'The question is how do you show the presence of absence?'

RIGOBERTO A. GONZÁLEZ, VIA THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY

Dana Tai Soon Burgess, the Smithsonian's first choreographer-in-residence.

vaudevillian Mamie Smith and the present-day rapper Megan Thee Stallion.

The video lasts 16 minutes and 19 seconds, a "nod" to 1619, when enslaved Africans were first brought to American shores. And Ms. Bass's extended, daylong live performance in September is intended to reference the white-collar, eight-hour work day.

While Ms. Bass is the sole triennial finalist planning a live performance, several others have performative elements in their work. In her short video "The Un-Doing" (2021), Adama Delphine Fawundu slowly unbraids her hair. Lois Bielefeld's "Thank You Jesus" (2020) depicts her mother's love for combining prayer and personal training by citing "memorized Bible passages while I'm working on my plank."

In between Mr. Burgess and Ms. Bass's performances will be a performance by Ms. Hassinger, 74. Part of the 1970s avant-garde in Los Angeles, she participated in the loose artist collective Studio Z alongside Senga Nengudi and David Hammons, and later spent two decades as the director of the sculpture program at the Maryland Institute College of Art.

Ms. Hassinger will screen her 12-minute video "Birthright" (2005), which the museum acquired last year. It documents the first time she met distant older relatives in Louisiana and her — sometimes amusing — attempts to trace her complicated ancestral ties through slavery, intermarriage among

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"Refugees Crossing the Border Wall into South Texas," a 2020 painting by Rigoberto A. González, is a finalist in the National Portrait Gallery's 2022 Outwin Boochever Portrait Competition. Rigoberto A. González, via The National Portrait Gallery

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"El Muro/The Wall" came about when the museum asked Mr. Burgess, 54, to respond to works of his choosing among this year's Outwin finalists. A fourth-generation Korean American who grew up in a predominantly Latin American neighborhood built over a Japanese internment camp in Santa Fe, N.M., Mr. Burgess said he was inspired by Rigoberto A. González's painting "Refugees Crossing the Border Wall into South Texas" (2020). The work portrays a family of four clinging to one another as the woman climbs a ladder with a diaper-clad baby in her arms, rosaries dangling from her hand.

Lexey Swall for The New York Times

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Mr. Burgess says he was drawn to the "baroque feeling" of the painting: "the ugliness of the situation" in contrast to "the almost-sanctitude of the individuals who are trying to get to safety."

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From left, the dancers Jaya Bond, Christine Doyle, Sidney Hampton, Christin Arthur, Joan Ayap and Felipe Oyarzun Moltedo rehearsing "El Muro/The Wall," by the choreographer-in-residence Dana Tai Soon Burgess, at the National Portrait Gallery in Washington. Lexey Swall for The New York Times

How a Smithsonian Museum Stopped Being About the 'Wealthy, Pale and Male'

The National Portrait Gallery is embracing live performance to highlight American stories missing from its halls.

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