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*Updates on  
Smithsonian*

**RESEARCH**

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### ***Portraiture Now: Staging the Self*/National Portrait Gallery**

*Staging the Self*, the latest in the National Portrait Gallery's (NPG) *Portraiture Now* exhibition series, will highlight the work of contemporary Latino artists. Lead curator Taína Caragol, the first NPG curator of Latino Art and History, began working with the curatorial team in 2013. The curators compiled research on nearly 30 contemporary Latino artists and ultimately decided to highlight the work of six artists: David Antonio Cruz, Carlee Fernandez, María Martínez-Cañás, Rachelle Mozman, Karen Miranda Rivadaneira, and Michael Vasquez. The theme of the exhibition emerged almost organically: the common thread in the work of these artists is that they all use portraiture as a means to explore individuality, rather than to convey fixed notions of identity. The title *Staging the Self* reflects that quality of performativity—the construction of identities as caused by performative actions, behaviors, and gestures—in relation to personal identity and portraiture. The work of these artists also displays a preoccupation with how family ties shape personal character. The exhibition's focus on six artists and the mechanics of representation in portraiture eschews curatorial frameworks that often identify Latino art as a distinct art category and examine Latino art exclusively through the lens of cultural identity. The exhibition will open in August 2014.

[Image: *This is Ours—AJ* / Michael Vasquez (born 1983) / acrylic on canvas / 2011 / Collection of Blair and Arthur Rice]

### **Rodent-borne Disease Risk Increases with Loss of Large Mammals/ National Museum of Natural History**

The loss of large mammals such as elephants and rhinos can have ecosystem-wide implications. New research published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* reveals that when large wildlife species decline, rodent populations rise rapidly — and so does the prevalence of the diseases they carry. Dr. Hillary Young, former Smithsonian post-doctoral fellow and now assistant professor at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and Dr. Kris Helgen, curator of mammals at the National Museum of Natural History, have provided new experimental evidence showing that the risk of rodent-borne disease doubles in landscapes that have lost such large animals. This experimental study used 24 acres of savanna in East Africa that had been fenced off to keep out large wildlife species, such as elephants, giraffes, lions, and zebras. The exclusion of these large animals, which has been ongoing for nearly 15 years at Mpala Research Centre, a research station in Kenya, provided a perfect opportunity for the scientists to observe the effects of large animals on the remaining rodent population and the number of infected fleas they carry.

## **Arctic Ships Bring Marine Invaders/Smithsonian Environmental Research Center**

For the first time in roughly 2 million years, melting Arctic sea ice is connecting the north Pacific and north Atlantic oceans. In a May 28, 2014, commentary published in *Nature Climate Change*, Smithsonian Environmental Research Center (SERC) biologists A. Whitman Miller and Gregory Ruiz assert that the newly opened passages leave both coasts and Arctic waters vulnerable to a large wave of invasive species. Two new shipping routes have opened in the Arctic: the Northwest Passage through Canada and the Northern Sea Route, a 3000-mile stretch along the coasts of Russia and Norway that connects the Barents and Bering seas. While new opportunities for tapping Arctic natural resources and interoceanic trade are high, commercial ships often inadvertently carry invasive species. Organisms from previous ports can cling to the undersides of their hulls or be pumped into the enormous tanks of ballast water inside their hulls. Now that climate change has given ships a new, shorter way to cross between oceans, the risk of new invasions is escalating.

The National Ballast Information Clearinghouse (NBIC) is a joint program of SERC and the U.S. Coast Guard that collects, analyzes, and interprets data on the ballast water management practices of commercial ships that operate in the waters of the United States. All large commercial ships entering U.S. ports are required to tell NBIC how they treat their ballast water for potential invaders.

## **Project IBISCA-Panama Monitors Thousands of Arthropods/Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute**

Led by Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute ForestGEO Arthropod Program Coordinator Yves Basset, scientists in Panama have spent nearly 10 years studying the diversity of arthropods in a San Lorenzo tropical forest. The study, called Project IBISCA-Panama, brought together 102 researchers from 21 different countries. They combed the forest from its floor to the top of the canopy for all insects and plant species. They picked beetles out of dead wood, scaled trees to get leaves and insects off high branches, and flogged trees with insecticides to collect flying insects. In all, 130,000 arthropods were sampled, comprising more than 6,000 identified species.

The findings of this study, which were recently published in *Science*, show arthropod species outnumbering mammal species by approximately 300 to 1. They similarly outnumber plants by 20 to 1. Scientists involved in the project say the reason for the extreme diversity of arthropods is their tiny size and limited resource requirements. Researchers also found that even for carnivorous arthropods, plant diversity was an indicator of arthropod species richness because plants provide the habitat structure and food resources on which these arthropods and their prey depend.

## ***Parallels and Convergences: Pictorial Space in China and Italy*/Freer and Sackler Galleries**

Until its rejection by the modernist avant-garde in the early 20th century, single-point convergent perspective played a dominant role in European representations of space since its invention by Filippo Brunelleschi in Florence in the early 15th century. But convergence is not the only system for spatial depiction, and Chinese artists had developed parallel projection more than 1,000 years before the Renaissance. The Chinese system does not privilege a single, stationary viewpoint but instead allows greater freedom to the moving eye and creates a different relationship between the viewer and the painting. The Freer and Sackler Galleries, in collaboration with the National Museum, Beijing, and the Uffizi, Florence, have organized *Parallels and Convergences*, an exhibition that compares these two systems, which remained largely independent until early modern times, when Jesuit missionaries brought convergent perspective to Beijing. Using as its focus an extraordinary moment in the 17th and 18th centuries when three Chinese Emperors took an intense interest in European perspective, the show explains what the parallel histories of the two systems tell us about the nature of Chinese and European visual art.

[Image: *Cestello Annunciation* / Sandro Botticelli (Italian, 1445–1510) / tempera on wood / c. 1489 / Uffizi Gallery]