



**Media only:** Liz O'Brien (202) 633-1522; [obriene@si.edu](mailto:obriene@si.edu)

Oct. 22, 2018

**Media website:** <http://newsdesk.si.edu>

## Smithsonian Libraries Opens “Magnificent Obsessions”

The Smithsonian Libraries presents a new exhibition, [“Magnificent Obsessions: Why We Collect.”](#) at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History beginning Nov. 7. “Magnificent Obsessions” will be on display through July 1, 2020.

“Magnificent Obsessions” tells the captivating stories of the book collectors whose diverse interests and passions helped shape—and continue to contribute to—the Smithsonian Libraries. Through rare books, manuscripts and other intriguing items from across the varied Libraries of the Smithsonian, the exhibition highlights the personal motivations and enduring impact of book collectors who were compelled to share their “magnificent obsessions” with the nation.

The exhibition will feature book enthusiasts such as Sarah and Eleanor Hewitt, whose passion for decorative arts led them to establish an innovative museum of design and a companion collection of books that spanned centuries; Bern Dibner, an electrical engineer who became a pioneer in amassing one of the greatest collections of rare books on science and technology; the Culinary Historians of Washington, D.C., who collect cookbooks that reflect how Americans’ eating habits have changed over time; and jazz singer Ella Fitzgerald, whose personal books offer a glimpse into her and her contemporaries’ lives.

“Without obsessed collectors gathering their favorites over the years, much of our cultural heritage would be lost,” said Mary Augusta Thomas, co-curator of “Magnificent Obsessions” and deputy director of the Smithsonian Libraries. “Often it’s the small details of a child’s worn book, a treasured cookbook or a guide to the World’s Fair that contemporary scholars use to understand the full picture of history.”

“Magnificent Obsessions” will showcase some of the Libraries’ most extraordinary collections, allowing visitors to explore different times and cultures, as well as the evolution of American life. Objects on display include an 1893 pop-up book depicting the Chicago World’s Fair, an original 1942 Wonder Woman comic book once owned by Wonder Woman creator William Moulton Marston and

“Poems of Cabin and Field,” an 1899 collection of poetry by Paul Laurence Dunbar, a son of escaped slaves who gained international literary fame.

The exhibition invites visitors to see and experience the treasures of the Libraries firsthand, inspiring a love of books and scholarship. Whether viewing the woodblock printed books of Japanese artist Katsushika Hokusai or the 2015 Nano Bible—a microscopic version of the Hebrew Bible engraved on a microchip the size of a grain of sugar—visitors will be immersed in the wonder of books, both as objects of beauty and gateways to knowledge.

## **Support**

“Magnificent Obsessions” would not be possible without the support of this collection of contributors:

John P. Ryan and Claire Prouty Mansur  
The Ronald J. and Deborah A. Monark Endowment  
Relly and Brent Dibner  
Peter Bedini and Leandra Bedini  
Laughlin Andrew Campbell  
Susan R. Hanes  
Richard W. Renner  
Emily Train Rowan and James A. Rowan  
Allan and Kim Stypeck  
C. Bowdoin Train and Georgina Sanger  
Jacqueline Vossler

## **Educational Programs**

Public programs accompanying the exhibition will engage the museum’s diverse audiences from K–12 to adult, including lectures, workshops and hands-on sessions.

## **About the Smithsonian Libraries**

The Smithsonian Libraries maintains a collection of more than 2 million volumes and serves as an educational resource for the Smithsonian Institution, the global research community and the public. The Libraries are located in Washington, D.C.; Edgewater, Maryland.; New York City; and the Republic of Panama. Connect with the Libraries at [library.si.edu](http://library.si.edu), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), [Tumblr](#), [YouTube](#) and the [Smithsonian Libraries Unbound blog](#).

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