The National Portrait Gallery Announces Digital Lecture
Tues. Jan. 25

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José María Mora, Napoleon Sarony, and the Migrant Surround in American Portrait Photography

Tuesday, Jan. 25 at 5 p.m.

Online via Zoom

Free—Registration required

Closed Captioning provided.

Presented by Erin Pauwels, Assistant Professor of Art History at the Tyler School of Art and Architecture at Temple University. Leslie Ureña, curator of photographs at the National Portrait Gallery, will moderate the Q & A.

What is the relationship between early portrait photography and identity? This presentation considers how portrait photographers constructed their studio spaces to facilitate the performance of diverse American identities during the late nineteenth century. José María Mora, a Cuban-born US photographer, and his mentor Napoleon Sarony, a native French speaker born in Quebec, rose to prominence during the Gilded Age for staging lush portrait tableaus that deployed hand-painted backdrops and richly theatrical studio effects. Though the vivid artifice of their work conventionally has been connected to the commercial excesses of the period, deeper consideration both photographers’ immigrant status helps illuminate how publicly circulated portraiture participated in the renegotiation of national type at an historical moment when more than 12 million new arrivals to the United States were reinventing and revitalizing what it meant to be American.

The National Portrait Gallery acknowledges the recent passing of Daniel B. Greenberg, whose generosity and that of his wife, Susan, makes the Greenberg Steinhauser Forum in American Portraiture possible. The program is hosted by PORTAL, the Portrait Gallery’s Scholarly Center.
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