

ALBANY INSTITUTE OF HISTORY & ART

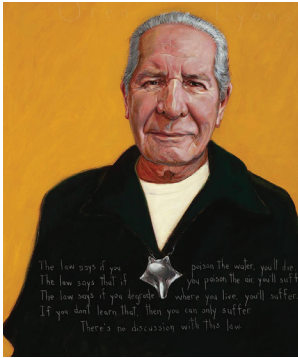
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AMERICANS WHO TELL THE TRUTH An Exhibition of Portraits by Artist Robert Shetterly at the Albany Institute of History & Art



ALBANY, NY—Albany Institute of History & Art presents *Americans Who Tell the Truth*, an exhibition of over 40 portraits by acclaimed artist Robert Shetterly (b. 1946), on view from February 1 through July 20, 2025. The exhibition features individuals throughout American history who Shetterly deems exemplify courageous citizenship, democratic ideals, and commitment to the common good.

Since 2002, Shetterly has painted portraits celebrating “truth-tellers”—individuals who represent the enduring values of civil rights, social and environmental justice, the arts, and the humanities. Shetterly states that, “neither democratic society nor life on Earth will survive if we cannot put long-term good ahead of short-term profit and power by telling the truth about who we are and what needs to be done for a just and equitable future.” Each portrait is painted on wood panel and features a quote from the subject etched into the surface, inviting viewers to reflect and spark dialogue. Shetterly has produced 275 portraits and the series is ongoing.

The portraits on view span generations, from historic icons like abolitionist John Brown (1800–1859) and civil rights pioneer Rosa Parks (1913–2005), to contemporary advocates with connections to the region, such as food justice activist Leah Penniman (b. 1980), based in Grafton, NY, and folk legend and environmentalist Pete Seeger (1919–2014).

Curator Diane Shewchuk hopes the subjects and their stories will appeal to diverse audiences. Shewchuk echoes the quote by artist and educator Natasha Mayers, whose portrait is included in the exhibition: “We need artists to help explain what is happening in this country, to tell the truth and reveal the lies, to be willing to say the emperor has no clothes, to create moral indignation, to envision alternatives, to reinvent language. We need artists to help us come together and share our voices and build community around powerful issues concerning our roles in the world...”

This selection of 42 portraits reflects Shetterly’s commitment to showcasing individuals who challenge injustices, champion civil liberties, and inspire others to act. “By bringing Robert Shetterly’s portraits to Albany, we aim to spark important conversations about courage, integrity, and the power of individuals to shape history and the present,” says Kayla Carlsen, Executive Director, Albany Institute of History & Art.

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In conjunction with the exhibition, Albany Institute will host screenings of *Truth Tellers*, an award-winning documentary chronicling the lives of several individuals featured in Shetterly's portraits, as well as providing insights into the artist's creative process and motivation. Additional educational programs, workshops, and events for school groups, families, and adults will be offered throughout the duration of the exhibition, which runs through July 20, 2025.

Americans Who Tell the Truth is complemented by *Portrait Pairings*, an exhibition of portraits juxtaposed with related objects drawn from Albany Institute's permanent collection, showcasing the depth and diversity of the museum's holdings.

For more information about the exhibition and programming, please visit www.albanyinstitute.org/exhibition/awtt.

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Americans Who Tell the Truth

February 1–July 20, 2025

EXHIBITION SUMMARY

Americans Who Tell the Truth includes 42 portraits by Robert Shetterly, featuring individuals throughout American history who Shetterly deems exemplify courageous citizenship, democratic ideals, and commitment to the common good. The portraits represent a selection from Shetterly's ongoing series, which began in 2002 and now comprises over 275 paintings.

Americans Who Tell the Truth is complemented by *Portrait Pairings*, an exhibition of portraits juxtaposed with related objects drawn from Albany Institute's permanent collection, showcasing the depth and diversity of the museum's holdings.

CURATOR

Diane Shewchuk, Curator, Albany Institute of History & Art

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Robert Shetterly was born in 1946 in Cincinnati, Ohio. He graduated from Harvard College with a degree in English Literature in 1969. At Harvard, he took courses in drawing, which changed the direction of his creative life—from the written word to the image. During this time, he was also active in the Civil Rights and Anti-Vietnam War movements.

After college, Shetterly moved to Maine in 1970 where he taught himself drawing, printmaking, and painting. For twelve years, Shetterly created the editorial page drawings for *The Maine Times* newspaper, illustrated National Audubon's children's newspaper *Audubon Adventures*, and illustrated approximately 30 books.

Shetterly's paintings and prints are in collections throughout the United States and Europe. Since 2002, he has been painting the series of portraits, *Americans Who Tell the Truth*. Exhibitions of the portraits have been organized for over 20 years across 35 states at venues including university museums, grade school libraries, the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine in New York City, and the Superior Court in San Francisco. *Truth Tellers*, Richard Kane's film about the project, premiered in 2021 and continues to be screened, including at the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C.

For 25 years, Shetterly was the President of the Union of Maine Visual Artists (UMVA), and a producer of the UMVA's Maine Masters Project, an ongoing series of video documentaries about Maine artists. Robert Shetterly lives in Brooksville, Maine with his partner Gail Page, a painter and children's book writer and illustrator.

RELATED PROGRAMS

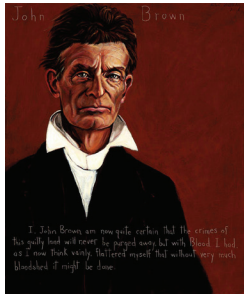
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Americans Who Tell the Truth

February 1–July 20, 2025

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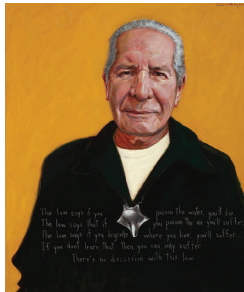


John Brown

Robert Shetterly (b. 1946)

Oil on panel

© Robert Shetterly, courtesy of
Americans Who Tell the Truth

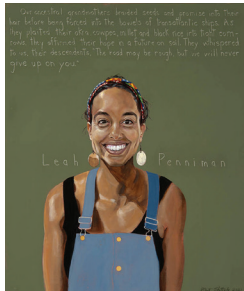


Oren Lyons

Robert Shetterly (b. 1946)

Oil on panel

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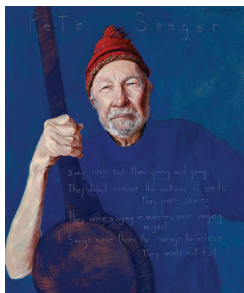


Leah Penniman

Robert Shetterly (b. 1946)

Oil on panel

© Robert Shetterly, courtesy of
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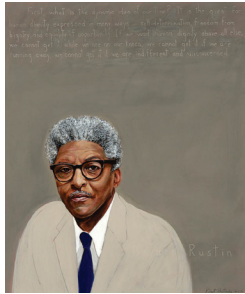


Pete Seeger

Robert Shetterly (b. 1946)

Oil on panel

© Robert Shetterly, courtesy of
Americans Who Tell the Truth



Bayard Rustin

Robert Shetterly (b. 1946)

Oil on panel

© Robert Shetterly, courtesy of
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Kelsey Juliana

Robert Shetterly (b. 1946)

Oil on panel

© Robert Shetterly, courtesy of
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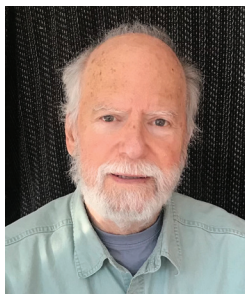


Maja Kazazic

Robert Shetterly (b. 1946)

Oil on panel

© Robert Shetterly, courtesy of
Americans Who Tell the Truth



Robert Shetterly

Courtesy of Americans Who Tell the
Truth