

USPS Honors Maya Angelou

On March 4 the U.S. Postal Service previewed the Dr. Maya Angelou Forever Stamp and announced that the First-Day-of-Issue stamp dedication ceremony will take place at 11 a.m., April 7, at the Warner Theater in Washington, D.C.

As an author, poet, actress, and champion of civil rights, Angelou (1928–2014) was one of the most dynamic voices in 20th-century American literature. The book, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, an autobiographical account of her childhood, gained wide acclaim for its vivid depiction of African-American life in the South.

The stamp showcases Atlanta-based artist Ross Rossin's 2013 4' x 4' oil-on-canvas portrait of Angelou. The large hyper-realistic painting is part of the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery's collection, where it will be on display through November 1, 2015. The stamp features a quotation by the pioneering author.

The margin of the stamp pane includes a short excerpt from Angelou's book, *Letter to My Daughter*. It reads: "Try to be a rainbow in someone's cloud."

In a news release that spent more time on the artist than on the subject, Ross Rossin explained, "my brush searches beyond the façade, reaching the God particle, the spiritual soul that embodies us all. I see all the subjects of my paintings as humans. All I want to do is paint the truth. My paintings don't look like photographs; photographs look like my paintings. The objective of my art is to transcend hyperrealism. It is nothing else but a language that ensures the connectivity between the viewer, creator and the subject of my paintings. My ultimate goal is to bring the invisible energy through to this visible medium."

The release also went on to make a connection between the

**MAYA
ANGELOU**

"A bird doesn't sing
because it has an
answer, it sings because
it has a song."



creation of the Maya Angelou portrait and Andrew Young and Oprah Winfrey. Rossin is a good friend of Ambassador Andrew Young, and Oprah Winfrey hosted a birthday party for Angelou, during which Rossin, states, "This was the critical moment when I saw Maya through the eyes of others. My personal experience around Maya's aura led to the creation of an intimate yet universal painting, which later Maya enthusiastically approved."

"This is exactly how I see myself and exactly how I wish to be remembered," Rossin recalled of Angelou's reaction to his work. "I wanted to capture her laughter, her cry and the forgiveness and blessings that came from her face," he added. "It is not only her portrait that is bigger than life. It is she herself who is bigger than life. The portrait is evidence of her magic."

"I applaud the U.S. Postal Service for their decision to honor my beloved friend Maya with a Forever stamp, and for using Rossin's portrait of her for this perennial image," said Young. "He is a master portrait artist—a prodigy. It is an honor to be immortalized by his brush stroke." (Rossin created a portrait of Young several years ago, which also hangs in the National Portrait Gallery.)

Maya Angelou published seven autobiographies, three books of essays, and several books of poetry. She is best known for her series of seven autobiographies, which focus on her childhood and early adult experiences.

She also was active in the Civil Rights movement, and, was regarded as a spokesperson for black people and women. In 1993 she recited her poem "On the Pulse of Morning" at President Bill Clinton's inauguration.