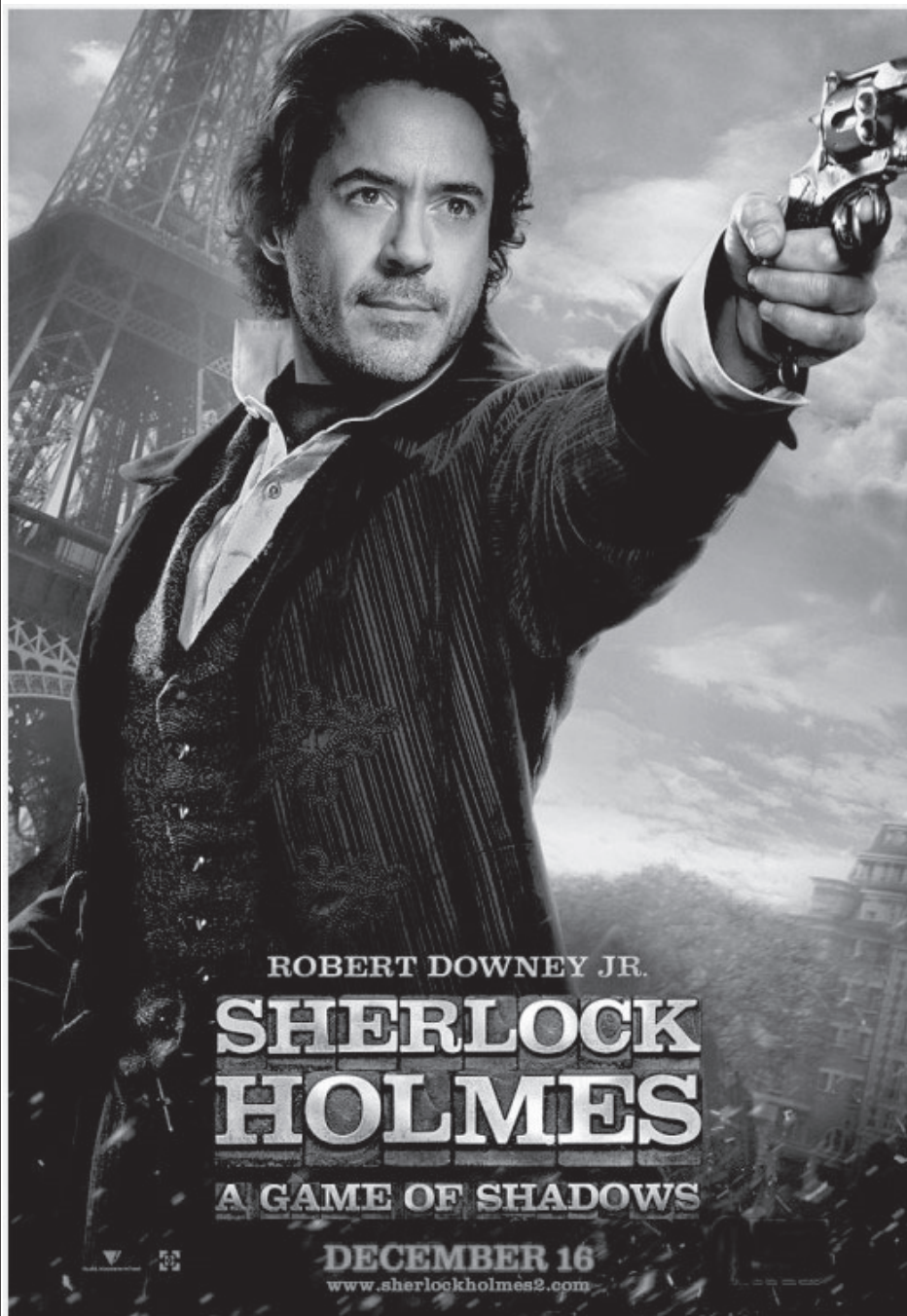




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50 YEARS LATER

*Cummer Museum of Art & Gardens
Replanting the Seed of Jacksonville's Culture*

BY LILTERA WILLIAMS

The Cummer Museum of Art & Gardens celebrated 50 years of art, gardens and education by hosting its 50th Anniversary Community Celebration in honor of the Museum and its legacy on Friday, November 11. The event featured fun and exciting entertainment, including gallery activities, art-making, scavenger hunts, artist demonstrations, and a live radio broadcast by Lite 96.1. Visitors were encouraged to leave recommendations for future improvements near the wishing tree and were also invited to print their names on the donation wall. Anniversary toasts, followed by an evening concert in the gardens featuring the University of North Florida Jazz Ensemble, were key highlights of the celebration.

The Cummer opened 50 years ago on November 10, 1961, when art collector, garden enthusiast and civic leader Ninah Cummer donated an art collection that consisted of more than 60 works. Cummer also donated a riverfront home that she owned with her husband, Arthur, to create an art museum that would represent "a center of beauty and culture for the benefit of all people." As avid volunteers and community advocates, Mr. and Mrs. Cummer dedicated their lives to philanthropic efforts that would improve the condition and appearance of local Jacksonville surroundings.

Although the displays change often, the Art Connection space frequently showcases exhibits that allow you to learn about and experience the garden, embodying the desires of Mr. and Mrs. Cummer, with interactive education that pulls together information about the art they collected.

Ongoing construction was completed just this past year. The Tudor Room, an exhibit featuring antique pieces from the original Cummer home, was restored, museum galleries were renovated, the Wark Collection of Early Meissen Porcelain was reinstalled, and the Eugene Savage paintings, which are a recent addition to the Museum's collection, were revealed for the first time after undergoing extensive conservation work.

"We will continue to bring diverse art from different time periods and cultures of the world to the community as a means for growth and advancement, while aiming to use museum displays as a tool for civic engagement," said Museum Director Hope McMath. Future additions and improvements include restoration of the Olmsted Garden that belonged to the Cummer family, an additional historic garden that extends the riverfront property, remodeling of the old Woman's Club building as a major social center and place for public programs such as member events, concerts, poetry readings and films, major beautification of the entire Riverside Avenue property entrance, including the parking lots across the street, and a possible addition of café seating on the front lawn.

"We are working towards becoming more open to the public through educational outreach and partnering with community organizations that may seem untraditional for a museum, such as medical facilities, local universities, and organizations like the St. Johns Riverkeeper, whose mission is to preserve the natural assets of the St. Johns River, which is also an important element to the Cummer's existence," McMath said.

The comprehensive list of restorative amendments will position the Cummer Museum as "an important concept within Jacksonville, while still building on the legacy of the Cummer family, donors, partners, and future generations." A special emphasis will be placed on programs like the Weaver Academy of Art, which reaches thousands of children in Jacksonville's urban core, and VSA initiatives that will serve unprecedented numbers of adults and children with disabilities.

As the Cummer embarks on a renewed mission to "engage and inspire through the arts, gardens and education," a vision of bigger and better public sculpture gardens, an infinitely creative art collection, greater community participation, and technological expansion beyond the Jacksonville area is guaranteed to be unveiled fifty years from now.

The Cummer Museum of Art & Gardens is committed to engage and inspire through the arts, gardens and education. A permanent collection of nearly 5,000 objects and historic gardens on a riverfront campus offers more than 109,000 annual visitors a truly unique experience on the First Coast. For more information on future events at the Cummer Museum of Art & Gardens, call 356-6857.