

Cade Tompkins Projects
198 Hope Street Providence Rhode Island 02906
www.cadetompkins.com cadetompkins@mac.com
Telephone 401 751 4888



Official portrait shows serious, solitary Chafee + Poll

January 7, 2015

by Tom Mooney

PROVIDENCE, R.I. -- Lincoln Chafee may best be known as the party-switching politician who stubbornly blazed his own trail whether it landed him in thorns or not. Soon, his image of nonconformity will hang in the State House in perpetuity.

State officials are expected to receive his official portrait next week. Based on a partial image of the work released online Wednesday by the artist's dealer...well, let's just say you won't find any flag in the corner, or family photos adorning the executive desk.

Cade Tompkins Projects
198 Hope Street Providence Rhode Island 02906
www.cadetompkins.com cadetompkins@mac.com
Telephone 401 751 4888

Think more wistful Captain Ahab staring into a black abyss.
And no, the former governor will not attend his portrait unveiling.

Chafee, who chose not to seek a second term, informed the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts, which oversees the portrait project, that he “would like to leave office with a minimum of fanfare and a maximum of opportunity” for Governor Raimondo “to hit the ground running.”

“There will be some kind of unveiling process or some activity,” said Randall Rosenbaum, the council’s executive director. “But we’ve heard from former Governor Chafee that he is not interested in participating in the ceremony.”

Rhode Island law calls for the commissioning of an official portrait of each governor before he or she leaves office.

Some 124 portrait artists answered the council’s call last spring to paint Chafee. A panel that included representatives of the arts community, the governor’s office and the Historic Preservation Commission narrowed the field to 14 before Chafee decided on Providence artist Julie Gearan, a part-time faculty member at the Rhode Island School of Design and Roger Williams University.

Gearan told The Journal in April that she looked forward to “working with the governor to capture his unique character as well as his specific place in Rhode Island history.”

Gearan could not be reached for comment Wednesday. But she was quoted in a Providence Monthly interview in October about working with Chafee on the project: “I know he wants something different, or else he wouldn’t have chosen me to do this.... And one of the things I’ve come to after talking to him is that he feels sort of isolated there at the State House. I can’t not think in metaphor, so I want to imbue [the portrait] with some sense of what this term has been like for him.”

The latest poll taken in October showed Chafee’s favorability rating with voters at around 36 percent, which might explain why Chafee posed in a black coat in front of a black curtain.

But the portrait’s dark tones also have the feel of early history. Gearan said she drew inspiration partly from Gilbert Stuart, one of 18th-century America’s master portrait artists. Stuart, a Rhode Islander, is best known for his unfinished Athenaeum portrait of George Washington.

Cade Tompkins Projects
198 Hope Street Providence Rhode Island 02906
www.cadetompkins.com cadetompkins@mac.com
Telephone 401 751 4888

Rosenbaum cautions about drawing any conclusions about the painting until it is seen in full. He says the images he has seen of it on Twitter and on the website of Providence art dealer Cade Tompkins are only part of the portrait.

“The work has not yet been received by the state, and until that time we have asked the artist not to share additional images of the work,” Rosenbaum said. “We do plan to hold a press availability with the artist and an opportunity to see the work itself, and not just a digital representation of the work.”

A photograph posted on the Cade Tompkins Web page appears to show more completed vertical renderings. And one photograph shows Chafee holding what resembles a white book in his left hand as Gearan directs him in place. His arm and that book are not seen in the released images.

Still, Chafee’s portrait stands in sharp contrast to the portraits of Gov. Lincoln Almond, captured sitting in an office chair with an opened book in his lap, and that of Gov. Donald Carcieri, posing on the corner of his desk with photographs of his wife and family nearby.

Neither Chafee, nor his former spokeswoman could be reached for comment Wednesday. Rosenbaum said the Chafee portrait was being framed this week. Gearan will receive \$15,000, the same commission paid the artists who painted the portraits of Almond and Carcieri.

Secretary of State Nellie Gorbea will accept the portrait, probably next week, on behalf of Rhode Island. Then it will be turned over to the Department of Administration for hanging in the State House.