



A new portrait of actor Kevin Spacey in his role as "House of Cards" President Francis J. Underwood on display at the National Portrait Gallery in Washington. — AFP photos



Jon Hamm plays a narcissistic advertising executive in US show Mad Men, which was the subject of the museum exhibition.



Clothes worn by US actor Bryan Cranston, who plays Walter White in the cult TV series "Breaking Bad", are on display at a Las Vegas museum.

## Top TV series getting museum treatment

Some say television is experiencing a new golden era, and America's museums are putting those highly acclaimed shows on display, showcasing popular culture in their prestigious spaces in hopes of attracting younger and more diverse visitors.

In the US capital Washington, the National Portrait Gallery houses the likenesses of all of the country's great leaders—George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln and... Francis Underwood? Underwood, Oscar-winning actor Kevin Spacey's cunning fictional president on the powerhouse Netflix series "House of Cards," sits cross-legged at a desk — his Oval Office, of course.

The work made its debut last week and will be on display until October. The display coincides with Friday's release of the fourth season of the political drama. "I'm one step closer to convincing the rest of the country that I am the president," Spacey joked the day the portrait was unveiled. But why would a museum feature a fictional TV character?

"Not only does it reflect the impact of popular contemporary culture on America's story, but it also exemplifies the fine art tradition of actors portrayed in their roles," explained Kim Sajet, director of the National Portrait Gallery. The National Museum of American History, also in Washington, gave a similar explanation when it added iconic objects from the cult TV series "Breaking Bad" to its collection last November. The yellow hazmat suit and the black porkpie hat worn by Walter White, a meek chemistry teacher who becomes a drug kingpin, won't be on public display until a planned 2018 exhibit on American culture. But fans who can't wait that long can visit a new exhibit at the Mob Museum in Las Vegas that features the protective suit and mask that White, played by Emmy winner Bryan Cranston, wore while cooking meth.

Other small screen sensations featured by American museums include early 20th century

clothing worn by the aristocratic characters and their household staff on "Downton Abbey" at Chicago's Driehaus Museum, on display until May 8. There was also last year's "Mad Men" exhibit at New York's Museum of the Moving Image, which coincided with the final episodes of the acclaimed show about a narcissistic advertising executive's professional and family life in the 1960s.

### 'New, younger, more diverse'

"There is nothing surprising about seeing the influence of television" in American museums, said Dustin Kidd, a sociologist at Temple University in Pennsylvania. The author of "Pop Culture Freaks" told AFP the country has numerous museums dedicated to film and television, and that "the influence of television on American art is as old as television itself."

But Vera Zolberg, a sociologist at the New School, a university in New York, said featuring TV series "may very well be" a new trend. She compared it to museums hosting visitors for sleepovers. Now routinely offered as an option, she said she "would not have imagined such a practice" a few years ago. Peggy Levitt, a sociologist at Wellesley College in Massachusetts, said pop culture exhibits are becoming more prevalent as museums realize they need to change their practices to bring in "new, younger, more diverse audiences." "There is a growing recognition in this country that the people inside museums do not look like the people outside them," she said. A 2010 study by the American Association of Museums showed that white Americans make up 69 percent of the population but account for 79 percent of museum visitors.—AFP

## Scientists use math to hunt identity of elusive Banksy

Elusive street artist Banksy may have been unmasked - by mathematics. Scientists have applied a type of modeling used to track down criminals and map disease outbreaks to identify the graffiti artist, whose real name has never been confirmed. The technique, known as geographic profiling, is used by police forces to narrow down lists of suspects by calculating from multiple crime sites where the offender most likely lives.

The researchers used the location of 140 Banksy artworks in London and Bristol, western England. Writing in the Journal of Spatial Science, they said the artworks "are associated with sites linked to one prominent candidate" - Robin Gunningham, previously named in media reports as Banksy.

They said the study is not conclusive but "does provide some support for the theory that he is Banksy." Banksy's spokeswoman did not immediately respond to a request for comment yesterday. The artist's satirical stencils - rats, kissing policemen, riot police with yellow smiley faces - first appeared on walls in Bristol before spreading to London and then around the world. His works have fetched as much as \$1.8 million at auction.

The researchers say their art-sleuthing "demonstrates the flexibility of geographic profiling." Lead writer Steven Le Comber, a mathematical biologist at Queen Mary University of London, said the technique had uses beyond criminology, such as working out where epidemics start. He said that during a malaria outbreak in

Cairo, "we found that if we used the addresses of people with malaria we could find the mosquitoes that were spreading the disease very easily."

Le Comber said the Banksy hunt suggested geographic profiling could even be used to track down terrorists before they commit an attack. "Some terrorists will engage in graffiti, banner-posting and leafletting to establish their credibility," Le Comber said. "You could potentially use the spatial pattern of leafletting to identify the location of terror cells." — AP



Workmen watch the media photograph a new artwork by British artist Banksy opposite the French Embassy, in London.



Bonhams employees adjust a spray paint work by urban artist Banksy at Bonhams auction house in London.— AP photos