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“The Newest Americans” exploring citizenship & immigration in the Trump era opens April 3 at the California Museum

New exhibit capturing experiences of immigrants from 23 countries prompts discussion on America’s legacy as a nation of immigrants & the future of the American dream

SACRAMENTO, CALIF. — Mar. 28, 2018: The California Museum announced “The Newest Americans,” offering a unique look at U.S. citizenship and the immigration process in the era of President Donald J. Trump, will open on Tues., April 3, 2018. The new exhibit features 28 portraits by Sam Comen and interviews by Michael Estrin capturing the experiences of immigrants from 23 countries of origin, promoting discussion on America’s legacy as a nation of immigrants and the future of the American dream.

“I commend the California Museum for presenting an exhibit examining the immigrant experience at this critical time in California and U.S. history,” said Secretary of State and Museum Board of Trustee Alex Padilla. “The display prompts much-needed discussion on civic engagement, citizenship and civil rights as the Trump administration enacts restrictive immigration policies that not only impacts families, but all California communities.”

Following the 2016 election, America’s political climate was polarized by the Trump Administration’s efforts to build a border wall, enact a Muslim ban and enforce mass deportations. Against this backdrop, Comen and Estrin set out to capture the experiences of new Americans in the moments following their naturalization after two Los Angeles, CA ceremonies held in February and March of 2017. Their resulting portraits and interviews led to the development of “The Newest Americans” as a traveling exhibit created in partnership with the California Museum.

“We wanted to explore the definition of ‘American’ and who has the right to become one in the aftermath of the 2016 presidential election,” said Sam Comen. “We wanted to document the stories of new Americans, to know why they came to this country, what the American Dream means to them. While their answers varied widely, to our surprise all the participants share the belief that America is still the land of opportunity, and the hope that their futures will be brighter as naturalized citizens of this country.”

Illustrating a wide range of ages and walks of life, the 28 exhibit participants represent 23 countries of origin, including Mexico, Rwanda, China, Russia and Syria. The exhibit includes photographs accompanied by text panels presented in English and Spanish sharing the subjects’ views on why they chose to become American citizens and what the American dream means to them. Highlights include:

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Freddy Castro, Ecuador: "I am transgender. I am able to be who I am without being discriminated against, at least that's true here in California. So, I'm looking forward to being involved in the politics here, so I can help people like me be protected by the law."

Ghassan Merrawi, Syria: "A lot of people say an immigrant can't be a Trump supporter, but I am. I love politics, and being a citizen means I get to be part of that, so I registered to be a Republican."

Paulina Larson, Mexico: "My American dream, when I was undocumented, was just to make sure my family and I were safe, and that we could live comfortably. Now, my American dream is to pay it forward to other people who were like me."

Continuing its debut installation at the California Museum through July 8, 2018, "The Newest Americans" will embark on a five-year national tour managed by Exhibit Envoy. For more information or to download press materials, visit CaliforniaMuseum.org/Press-Kits/Newest-Americans.

ABOUT CALIFORNIA MUSEUM:

A self-supporting 501(c)3 non-profit, the California Museum — home of the California Hall of Fame — engages, educates and enlightens people about California's rich history, its diversity and its unique influence on the world of ideas, innovation, art and culture. Through interactive experiences, the Museum inspires visitors to make a mark on history. Open Tues. through Sat. 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.; Sun.: 12:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.; closed Mondays. Admission: adults \$9.00; college students & seniors \$7.50 with valid ID; youth 6-17: \$7.00; kids 5 and under free. For more information, visit CaliforniaMuseum.org.

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Interviews & media tours available by advance request only.

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