

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, WASHINGTON

FOR RELEASE NOT BEFORE
10:00 PM MARCH 17, 1941

MR. PAUL MELLON'S SPEECH
NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART DEDICATION

This building, which we are dedicating tonight, is the realization of a plan formed by my father many years ago, soon after he came to Washington as Secretary of the Treasury.

He felt the need of a national gallery in Washington, with a collection of art which might serve as the nucleus of a great national collection. He saw in his imagination a building adequate to contain that future, great collection.

He hoped that the gallery would become a joint enterprise on the part of the Government, on the one hand, and of magnanimous citizens, on the other. That hope is already being realized.

Mr. Kress, with extraordinary generosity and self-denial, has given his important collection of Italian paintings and sculpture, which you see here tonight. We know of other gifts that are coming in the future, such as the great Widener collection.

Some of the most distinguished American painters of our earlier period are already well represented in the gallery, which will in time, of course, acquire the greatest available works of our later painters and sculptors, as they become eligible for the permanent collection. Mr. Chester Dale most kindly has loaned a group of splendid examples of American painting, augmenting the present collection.

Through the generosity of Miss Ellen Bullard and three anonymous donors, the Gallery has been given a collection of prints which forms the nucleus of a very important print collection.

In addition, it is expected that this building will contain, eventually, a library of books and photographs available for students, in order that it may serve more fully the cause of education in art, and become a center of scholarship in this country. For it was my father's hope, and it is ours, that the National Gallery would become not a static but a living institution, growing in usefulness and importance to artists, scholars and the general public.

It has been a great privilege for all of us, who have been associated in this work, to have had the opportunity of carrying out my father's plan.

To you, Mr. President, we are particularly grateful, as my father was, for all that you have done to make the task easy, both in establishing the Gallery and in securing for it the continued support which it must have, if it is to fulfill its highest function.

May I express also our sincere thanks to the Senators and Members of Congress, whose sympathetic support made possible the necessary legislation:

To the Commission of Fine Arts:

To the National Park and Planning Commission:

To the late John Russell Pope, the distinguished architect, and to his associates, Mr. Otto R. Eggers and Mr. Daniel P. Higgins, who have ably carried on the architectural work:

To Mr. Percy S. Vermilya, President of Vermilya-Brown and Company, and his associates, the general contractors:

And to the thousands of craftsmen who contributed their skill to the erection of this building:

And finally to the staff of the Gallery, which has labored with untiring devotion to bring into this building the beauty and harmony of arrangement and decoration which you see all about you.

This building is the product of many minds, intent on giving America their best; and we are happy to turn it over to you, Mr. President, with my father's collection, to be dedicated forever to the use and enjoyment of the people of the United States.