

# NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

SIXTH STREET AT CONSTITUTION AVENUE NW WASHINGTON DC 20565 • 737-4215 extension 224

FOR RELEASE:

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October 21, 1972

MAJOR OLMSTED EXHIBITION  
OPENS IN NATION'S CAPITAL

WASHINGTON, D.C. Frederick Law Olmsted/U.S.A., a major exhibition highlighting the national achievements of the father of landscape architecture in America, opens at the National Gallery of Art today (Saturday, October 21). The exhibition culminates more than a year of special celebrations around the country in honor of Olmsted's sesquicentennial.

The exhibition is the eighth in the National Gallery's series on important American artists. It will remain on view at the Gallery through January 7, after which an exhibition derived from it will be circulated to other museums throughout the country under the auspices of the American Federation of Arts.

Olmsted (1822-1903) made an extraordinary impact on the shape and beauty of the American landscape, both in cities and in natural regions of the country. To him, cities were great democratic institutions to be preserved and maintained.

At a time when others were decrying the urban demoralization of the period, Olmsted reshaped large portions of 17 cities in the United States and Canada and established major urban parks. He combined pools and lagoons, meadows, malls, meandering paths, shaded dells and active recreation areas to introduce to the crowded industrial cities some of nature's most romantic and picturesque forms.

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Beyond the urban scene, the wilderness inspired Olmsted, and his efforts to preserve large tracts of natural land for refreshment, recreation and education eventually led to the foundation of the national park system, which in turn has served as a model for numerous other countries.

The Gallery's exhibition includes original plans, photographs and memorabilia covering more than 30 Olmsted projects. Its climax is an unusual panoramic presentation of Olmsted's work as it appears today. Projected on a cylindrical screen 31 feet in diameter and 10 feet in height is a series of over fifty 360° color panoramas of his urban parks, regional park systems, residential communities, campuses and major single projects, including the west grounds of the U.S. Capitol and the Columbian Exposition of 1893. The narrative is by Roderick MacLeish.

David W. Scott, Consultant for Planning at the National Gallery, has coordinated the exhibition. He has been assisted by Jane C. Loeffler, an urban planner who helped to establish the Olmsted Sesquicentennial Committee formed in Washington in 1971 to coordinate the year-long program.

William Alex, an Olmsted scholar and designer of shows on urban architecture, organized the exhibition. Exhibits designer Kathleen Haven installed the show for the National Gallery.

To introduce the visitor to Olmsted, Mr. Alex has chosen biographical materials, including some of the artist's own writings and tools. A section devoted to each of Olmsted's projects follows, using original drawings and plans, working sketches and photographs.

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Among the projects covered are:

Franklin Park, Boston  
Central Park, Manhattan  
Prospect Park, Brooklyn  
Jackson Park, Chicago  
Mount Royal, Montreal  
Belle Isle Park, Detroit  
Columbian Exposition, 1893, Chicago  
Biltmore House, Asheville, North Carolina  
Arnold Arboretum, Boston  
Stanford University, Palo Alto, California  
South Park, Buffalo  
Riverside, Illinois  
University of California, Berkeley  
Yosemite, California  
Niagara Falls, New York  
U.S. Capitol, Washington, D.C.  
Gallaudet College, Washington, D.C.  
American University, Washington, D.C.  
Forest Park, St. Louis  
Chicora Park, Charleston, South Carolina  
Iroquois Park, Louisville, Kentucky

The National Gallery's exhibition runs concurrently with an exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art focusing on Olmsted's work in and around New York. Another, on Buffalo's park system, will also open this month at the Birchfield Center in Buffalo.

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# THE OLMSTED SESQUICENTENNIAL COMMITTEE

*Sponsor of the 150th Anniversary Celebration of the Birth of Frederick Law Olmsted, 1822-1903*

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## THE SESQUICENTENNIAL OF A GREAT AMERICAN

The reasons for celebrating Frederick Law Olmsted's 150th birthday are two simple ones: to dedicate ourselves to the idea of human survival and to identify this dedication with America's first and greatest environmentalist.

As part of this nationwide celebration the Olmsted Committee is developing an exhibition that will focus, in a very special way, on the issues of our physical environment and man's way of living on this planet.

The exhibition is the cornerstone of a broad series of activities underway nationally, which are described below and form a body of effort necessary to this nation's well being, even its survival, and deserving, we believe, close attention and support.

These efforts will be sustained into America's Bicentennial year of 1976 when the Olmsted Committee will conclude its activities by presenting, possibly in an Olmsted Pavilion at the Philadelphia Bicentennial site, a cumulative major contribution to the planning of America's third century.

Here in Philadelphia, one hundred years ago at the 1876 Centennial, Olmsted himself exhibited a map of Buffalo with his park plans for the city, over whose unplanned industrial growth he then wrote: "As long as such progress of building continues without the adoption of comprehensive, systematic, scientific measures for providing drainage and sewerage outlets; for determining the course and grades of streets; and for the regulation of building upon and between them with reference to drainage and sewerage, another great evil will be growing upon the city; an evil that... will in time become intolerable. It will be brought to an end, if not sooner, when the whole city is in mourning and its business suspended because of the disease of which this region will have been the propagating ground."

Buffalo and its region now mourn the awful fulfillment of this century-old Olmsted prophecy of Lake Erie's death by pollution, while the nation mourns the demise of its lakes, rivers, and streams, the destruction of its openspaces and parks in its cities, and the entire range of abuses to which we have subjected our delicately balanced biosphere.

The Buffalo report is one of hundreds of such plans and reports, call them pleas, made by Olmsted during his lifetime.

We are also celebrating this man because we can still listen to him.

For listening to Olmsted in the present, the exhibition makes use of a remarkable new tool in educational communication: the enveloping 360 degree image. In any sequence and any speed a series of perfectly formed circular images, photographed with a special camera and then projected as 360 degree panoramas is presented to an audience for study, understanding or, if you will, evidence, as to the environments in question.

Initial photo documentation of the living environments, the parks and parkways that Olmsted created for New York, has been made possible by the J. M. Kaplan Fund, the study directed at Olmsted's role as New York's first master planner, his original park philosophy in this urban context, and current definitions of park use and misuse. In addition to Central Park, his most famous work, in New York he also designed Prospect Park, Riverside Park, Morningside Park, Ft. Greene Park and others, plus Eastern and Ocean Parkways, many of these with associate Calvert Vaux.

The exhibition, designed to circulate, will open in New York's Whitney Museum in June of 1972, occupying a full floor. Thereafter it will circulate under the auspices of the American Federation of Arts. In Washington the Architect of the Capitol has expressed interest in the possibility of its being shown on the West Front Terrace of the U. S. Capitol building. In Boston, Mayor Kevin White has indicated a site in Boston's new city hall. Other cities showing it will be Baltimore, Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Houston and Montreal. And in each of these cities particular local issues will be dramatized by the addition of photosequences into the cumulative body of exhibition material.

For example, in Washington, the proposed extension of the West Front of the Capitol involves the inevitable destruction of Olmsted's landscape design for the Capitol grounds, the system of terraces leading to the Mall below, an issue bearing heavily among the responsibilities of the Architect of the Capitol. In Boston, where Olmsted designed this nation's first metropolitan park and parkway system, while the state legislature is in the process of designating it the Olmsted Historic District, the Parks Commissioner is working desperately to secure funds to refurbish Olmsted's deteriorating "Emerald Necklace" of parks and greenways that helps make urban living tenable there. In this case the exhibition would provide a public-support focus. In Chicago the attempt, recently *successful!* defeated, to build a school in Jackson Park, where Olmsted's design also solved serious drainage problems for the lake shore, is currently motivating a case study on park values and users involving a spectrum of University of Illinois students (journalism, audio visual techniques, landscape architecture, urban planning) whose result will supplement the exhibition at its Chicago site.

While the exhibition permits identification and comparison of environmental issues between cities, it must be emphasized that any particular scene or locale is presented to the audience in a way never before possible in a circulating exhibition, wrapping its audience in the color and scale of environmental truth, be it summer or winter, broad or narrow, felicitous or shameful. Here are demonstrated certain qualities of life, as proposed by Olmsted, as now lived, as a basis for future choice.

The exhibition also intends to consolidate and extend the initial process by which Olmsted entities and interests identified themselves in various places, recognized their common purposes and then joined together. Current regional leadership is as diverse in this common cause as a corporate executive in Chicago, a foundation director in New York, a parks commissioner in Boston and an urban planner in Washington, Frederick Gutheim who, in his capacity as national chairman also administers the Washington office of the Olmsted Committee.

Among some of the projects underway listed below, those with regard to preservation and publication were clearly defined at the first Olmsted Scholars Colloquium, held in Washington on September 24, 1971.

Designation of the 17 major Olmsted urban parks as a National Historic Monument, a collective cultural treasure to be administered by a federally appointed commission.

Carrying out a case study project on 12 major urban parks, 6 of them by Olmsted, to determine their current status and method of public use, and their future potential in community structuring and growth.

Organization of a major seminar on the Environment of America's Third Century, planned for the Circle Campus of the University of Illinois, mid-1972.

Endorsement of the National Park Service Centenary Celebration of Yellowstone in 1972 in conjunction with Olmsted's formulation of the basis for our state and national park systems in his 1864 Yosemite and Mariposa reports.

Designation of the original Olmsted office-estate at Brookline, Massachusetts as a National Historic Site, to function as a research-study center on the environment and to preserve the Olmsted-designed technical center of that era (1870-1890) for production of plans and drawings.

Support for the major publication project of a five volume set of the Olmsted letters, now underway by Dr. Charles McLaughlin of American University. (The Olmsted papers are the most frequently consulted of any private papers in the collections of the Library of Congress.)

Support for microfilm and photocopy projects to preserve drawings in danger of fire and further deterioration at the Brookline office.



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Scan of photocopy of photograph. Photograph is located in the Press Release files.

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# ARCHITECT OF THE CAPITOL

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Project Proposed Terrace for the Capitol --- not carried out.

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