



News Release

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WETA/26 CELEBRATES ELEVENTH ANNIVERSARY OF NATIONAL GALLERY OF
ART'S EAST BUILDING WITH ENCORE PRESENTATION OF 'A PLACE TO BE,'
FRIDAY, JUNE 16 AT 9 P.M.

WASHINGTON, D.C., May 31, 1989 -- WETA Channel 26 will celebrate the 11th anniversary of the National Gallery of Art's East Building by broadcasting the one-hour film **A PLACE TO BE**, which traces the building's construction from inception to its June 1, 1978 opening. The program will air on Friday, June 16 at 9:00 p.m.

Artists Henry Moore, Joan Miró, Jean Dubuffet and Alexander Calder were among those commissioned to create a work of art for the museum. They appear in the film -- in their studio or on the construction site of the museum, talking about their work and its place in the Gallery. All four artists have died since the film was produced.

In a moving scene near the end of the film, after tension about the construction of his giant mobile is at last resolved, Alexander Calder walks slowly away from the camera, among the scaffolding of the partially completed building. Just before he disappears from sight, Calder turns and waves. It was to be his last visit to the museum. Calder died a week after approving the

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fabricated pieces of his untitled mobile, which now spans 70 feet under the vast skylight of the East Building's central court.

Calder, Moore, Miró, Dubuffet...Each in his 70's or 80's, at the time of production, each was wrestling to create a work of art exactly suited to its setting.

In 1979 producer Charles Guggenheim and co-director Steve York talked about the artists and **A PLACE TO BE**, produced by Guggenheim Productions, Inc., for WETA, Washington, D.C., with the cooperation of the National Gallery of Art.

"Pei [the architect] had impressed upon me the fact that every time he sees the picture he says that these men will not be with us forever," Guggenheim said.

"The Gallery purposely selected men who did monumental work," he continued. "But they also purposely picked men who in a sense were in the latter stages of creativity...They wanted to make important commissions to important people who might not be living long. They're all older men. Miró... Calder... Dubuffet... And when Pei sees the film he says, 'Thank God we got them.'"

Co-director Steve York spoke especially of Calder, in his brilliant red shirt a vibrant presence in the film. There were problems with translating the lightness of a Calder mobile into the colossal dimensions required for the courtyard, and the film records the tension of a meeting at a foundry in France when the problem first became inescapable.

The solution was found by engineer-artist Paul Matisse, grandson of painter Henri Matisse, who used techniques from the

aircraft industry to sharply reduce the weight of the mobile.

"This was the first time his work had ever been fabricated with mid-20th century technology," York said. "...space-age technology. He just couldn't get over the fact that they weren't going to use stainless steel."

Calder's speech in the film is slurred. "You probably come away understanding less than 10 words that he said," York remarked. "But you somehow feel that you've gotten some communication from him, more than from the words."

Repeatedly an interviewer tries to draw from Guggenheim and York the story of the making of their film -- shot over seven years, reduced from 50 hours to one -- but repeatedly the conversation gravitates to those Titans of modern art and to the breathtaking building itself.

Guggenheim: "There probably will not be another building built in the next hundred years that will equal this building. Or in the past 50 years has there been a building like this in Washington, just in terms of money and resources and talent that's been used in every aspect of the construction.

"The per-square-foot cost of that building is probably higher than any building ever built in the United States...except maybe for an atomic reactor or something like that. It's a Medici concept. The government couldn't have built it...couldn't possibly have built it. In this day great buildings are not built by governments. They're built by corporations or benefactors." (The East Building is a gift to the nation from Paul Mellon, his sister Ailsa Mellon Bruce and The Andrew W.

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Mellon Foundation.)

"That's what's unique about this one. Allowing creative people to make a statement."

His film, Guggenheim hopes, captures that creativity.

A PLACE TO BE: The Construction of the East Building of the National Gallery of Art, 1968-78 is made possible by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and Champion International Corporation.

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