

# NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

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## NATIONAL GALLERY'S FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY

### PLANS FOR YEAR-LONG CELEBRATION ANNOUNCED

Washington, D.C., October 15, 1990 -- The fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the National Gallery of Art will be celebrated with a host of programs and activities taking place over the year that began October 1, 1990, Gallery Director J. Carter Brown announced today. The National Gallery owes its founding to Andrew W. Mellon who, in giving his collection of masterpieces and the original West Building to the American people, made the largest gift ever from an individual to a government. The National Gallery was dedicated by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on March 17, 1941. It has grown into one of the most renowned art museums in the world, receiving five to seven million visitors every year.

The National Gallery represents a unique partnership between the federal government, which supports its daily operations, and private citizens, who make up the majority of its trustees and have provided all the works of art in its collections. Andrew Mellon's philanthropy immediately inspired major donations from other collectors -- a tradition that continues and one that will be celebrated in the fiftieth anniversary year. Among major

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donors are the Gallery's Founding Benefactors: Samuel H. Kress, Rush H. Kress, Joseph E. Widener, Chester Dale, Ailsa Mellon Bruce, Lessing J. Rosenwald, and Paul Mellon. The National Gallery's holdings have grown from these core gifts into one of the finest national collections anywhere in the world. Moreover, the Gallery has what many consider to be the finest collection of early Italian painting and sculpture in the Western hemisphere, the country's best collection of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century German art, and strong holdings of impressionist and post-impressionist French art, including extensive collections of paintings, sculpture, drawings, prints, and illustrated books.

In the 1960s the Gallery broadened its collecting to include twentieth-century art, and in 1978 the East Building, designed by I. M. Pei, was opened, in part to provide suitable exhibition space for the growing collection of art from this century. Since the East Building was completed the Gallery's holdings in this area have significantly increased in all media.

Highlights of the fiftieth anniversary include an exhibition of new gifts of art to the nation in honor of the National Gallery's first half century; an audiovisual program on the career of National Gallery West Building architect John Russell Pope and an exhibition on the design and construction of the West Building; and a special concert series featuring five world premieres of commissioned scores, an American Music Festival with concerts by Dizzy Gillespie and George Shearing, and solo concerts with the National Gallery of Art Orchestra by musicians who performed at the Gallery early in their careers.

The anniversary will also be marked by the reinstallation of the permanent collection, the production of a documentary film, the publication of a major commemorative volume and a book on the exhibitions and programs made possible at the National Gallery by corporate patronage, and a fellowship program to bring teachers from each state to the 1991 summer teacher institute at the National Gallery.

"From the beginning, an important mission of the National Gallery has been to reach an ever broader constituency. Our activities over the next year to celebrate this important anniversary will reflect the many areas of concern to the Gallery -- maintenance and expansion of the permanent collection, special exhibitions, scholarship, education, publications, and outreach. The half-century mark also provides an opportunity to salute the extraordinary combined role the private and public sectors have played in the life of this institution," said Mr. Brown.

March 17, 1991, the anniversary date, will highlight this celebration. That day gala events, including the openings of two exhibitions and an important musical performance, will take place.

### Exhibitions

The exhibition Art for the Nation: Gifts in Honor of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the National Gallery of Art, on view in the East Building March 17 through June 16, 1991, will feature a selection of more than 200 works of art committed to the Gallery by private donors throughout the country and abroad in honor of

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the anniversary. The exhibition and its accompanying catalogue will present works of art from all the categories in which the National Gallery collects -- paintings, drawings, prints, sculpture, illustrated books, and photographs, representing old master, classic modern, and contemporary periods. Art for the Nation will honor the continuing commitment of private citizens and foundations to the Gallery and the strength of the tradition of private generosity to the nation.

In addition to donations of works of art, members of a special National Gallery 50th Anniversary Gift Committee, chaired by Trustee Robert H. Smith, have contributed more than five million dollars for the purchase of works of art in honor of the anniversary. The acquisitions made possible by the 50th Anniversary Gift Committee, whose members include individuals, foundations, and corporations from across the country, will be exhibited in Art for the Nation: Gifts in Honor of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the National Gallery of Art.

The other special exhibition to mark the anniversary, John Russell Pope: Architect of the National Gallery, will commemorate the origins of the Gallery. On view in the West Building March 17 through July 7, 1991, the two-part show will feature an exhibition of original drawings for the West Building and related photographs, as well as an extensive audiovisual program exploring Pope's distinguished career and his relation to the capital city that culminated with the National Gallery, his last work.

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Andrew Mellon selected Pope as the architect of the West Building and together they gave visible form to Mellon's intentions. Pope's earlier achievements in museum design included portions of the Frick Collection and the Roosevelt Memorial in the American Museum of Natural History in New York; The Baltimore Museum of Art; the National Archives; and selected galleries of the Tate Gallery and the Elgin Marbles gallery at the British Museum in London.

#### Reinstallation of the Permanent Collection

A program to reinstall the West Building main floor galleries of the permanent collection for the fiftieth anniversary has already begun with the recent rehangng of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century French, English, and American galleries. The collection is being reorganized to enhance its art historical context and its relationship to the building's architecture. Selected sculpture has also been integrated into paintings galleries. Changes also include relabeling the works of art, repainting galleries, and improving lighting. In conjunction with the reinstallation some works of art are undergoing conservation. Leonardo's Ginevra de'Benci, one of the Gallery's most famous works, was recently cleaned and will be featured in a new location in the Italian Renaissance galleries. In the fall of 1991, the reinstallation will culminate in the integration of fiftieth-anniversary gifts into the permanent collection.

Music

The National Gallery's fiftieth anniversary concert series, beginning this month and featuring 39 free concerts, includes a gala 2,000th concert, five world premieres of commissioned scores, an American Music Festival featuring jazz artists Dizzy Gillespie and George Shearing, and solo concerts by celebrated musicians who performed at the Gallery early in their careers. The 2,000th concert of this series, which is one of the oldest series of free concerts in the world, falls on March 17 -- the exact date of the Gallery's fiftieth anniversary.

The Gallery inaugurated the Sunday night concerts in 1942 for the benefit of the many servicemen and women stationed in Washington. The concerts were inspired by the example of the great English pianist Myra Hess, who remained in London during the Blitz to entertain the troops with recitals at the National Gallery there. Since 1965, the concert series has been made possible by the William Nelson Cromwell Fund and the F. Lammont Belin Fund.

In December the National Gallery invites the public to sing Christmas carols in the Rotunda of the West Building on a series of evenings. The caroling will be followed by tours through selected areas of the permanent collection.

In December 1990 a digital recording of the National Gallery Vocal Arts Ensemble in concert will be released on compact disc and audio cassette for international distribution in collaboration with Koch International. This project is supported by The Circle of the National Gallery.

Publications and Film

In honor of the fiftieth anniversary, the National Gallery has commissioned Philip Kopper to write a book on the history of its collections and programs. Magnificent Gifts: The National Gallery of Art's First Fifty Years will feature many previously unpublished archival photographs as well as a text that focuses on many chapters of the Gallery's history, including the tenure of its first director and the long service and many gifts to the Gallery by Paul Mellon, son of founder Andrew W. Mellon. The book will be published in May 1991 by Harry N. Abrams, Inc. in association with the National Gallery. The project has been made possible by the Charles E. Smith Companies and the Artery Organization, Inc.

A second book illustrating and celebrating fifty years of corporate support at the National Gallery will be published by Fortune magazine in conjunction with the National Gallery in May 1991. In addition, Fortune will include a special advertising supplement in its May 1991 issue, paying tribute to the Gallery and its corporate sponsors. That same month, the trustees of the National Gallery will host a special gala event for chief executive officers and other leaders of corporations that have supported its programs.

The Gallery is producing a sixty-minute film for release in March 1991 focusing on a behind-the-scenes look at its operations and activities. A tribute to all museums, the film will provide the viewer with a sense of how the National Gallery has developed from the vision of founder Andrew Mellon into the institution

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that it is today. It will be shown at the National Gallery and made available for broadcast on public television. It will also be available to educational organizations free of charge through the National Gallery's Extension Service. Academy Award winner Aviva Slesin is the producer/director of the project, which has been supported in part by Edward Elson and The Circle of the National Gallery.

### Educational Projects

Fellowships will be awarded to exemplary school teachers from each of the 50 states to attend the Gallery's 1991 summer teacher institute. The institute seeks to better prepare teachers to teach art and the humanities, using museums as a resource for learning.

The National Gallery's Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts (CASVA) plans to hold two symposia involving critical issues in the history of museums: "The Formation of National Collections of Art and Archaeology" (spring 1991) and "The Building of Museums in the 1980s" (fall 1991). The Center will publish the papers presented at both gatherings in the Gallery's Studies in the History of Art. Established in 1979, CASVA is one of the most visible signs of the National Gallery's commitment to advanced research in the visual arts. The Center promotes the study of history, theory and criticism of art, architecture, and urbanism from a variety of approaches including the awarding of



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fellowships, the formation of a community of scholars, and the sponsoring of scholarly meetings and publications.

The National Gallery archives, established in 1984 to bring together for future generations the Gallery's historical records, photographs, and architectural documents, has begun an oral history project in honor of the anniversary. Individuals who have been significant participants in or observers of the Gallery's past are interviewed and the transcripts added to the archives for use by researchers. Among those who have been interviewed to date are Paul Mellon, National Gallery chairman Franklin Murphy, and Jane L. Ridgway, daughter of West Building architect John Russell Pope.

In January 1991 the Gallery will publish a detailed guide to the resources and educational programs available free of charge to groups, institutions, scholars, and the general public. There will also be a handbook published on the Gallery's extensive collections, which can be used as an educational resource and guide for visitors, teachers, and secondary schools.

### Horticultural Projects

The National Gallery's horticultural staff maintains plants in nine greenhouses that are used to enhance public spaces and exhibitions. The newest addition to the extensive plant holdings are one hundred rare and prize-winning azaleas, a gift from Boston horticulturist Allan Haskell, who for over 20 years has

maintained the azaleas originally collected and given to him by industrialist John S. Ames. The Ames-Haskell azaleas will be installed in full bloom in the Rotunda of the West Building in March 1991, and annually thereafter.

The East and West Garden Courts in the West Building and the two outdoor fountain gardens on the Mall side of the West Building are being redesigned and refurbished with new stock.

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