

National Gallery of Art

NEWS RELEASE

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NATIONAL GALLERY BREAKS GROUND FOR NEW SCULPTURE GARDEN

A Gift to the Nation From The Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation

Washington, D.C., June 12, 1997 -- The National Gallery of Art broke ground today for a new sculpture garden on the Mall which will open to the public in the fall of 1998. A gift to the nation from The Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation, the National Gallery Sculpture Garden is designed to offer year-round enjoyment for the American public.

Key design improvements and comprehensive landscaping will build on the existing site, creating flexible spaces to display a variety of sculptures. The Sculpture Garden will be located in the 6.1 acre block adjacent to the West Building, bounded by Madison Drive, Constitution Avenue, and Seventh and Ninth Streets, N.W. In August, 1991, the National Park Service and the National Gallery of Art signed an agreement, which was approved by the National Capital Planning Commission, transferring total jurisdiction over the sculpture garden site from the Park Service to the National Gallery.

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"We are deeply grateful to The Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation for their generous gift, which has made possible the fulfillment of a magnificent outdoor sculpture garden on the Mall," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "The significance of this gift to the people of the United States will be matched only by the thoughtful design and important sculptures that will soon occupy this space."

The design for the National Gallery Sculpture Garden was created by Laurie D. Olin, landscape architect, Olin Partnership, in association with key members of the National Gallery staff: Mark Leithauser, chief of design; Carl Campioli, assistant senior architect and project manager for the sculpture garden; and the former and current curators of twentieth-century art, Mark Rosenthal and Marla Prather. Construction on the site will be done by the Chas H. Tompkins Company, the same firm that constructed the East Building of the National Gallery of Art. Highlights of the plan include:

- Overall Site Design. Flexible, organic spaces will be created to gracefully accommodate a wide range of additional sculptures. The goal of the design is to create an informal yet elegant setting that will feature works of art of the highest quality. The overall site geometry will remain and the plan is essentially symmetrical. The circle of linden trees around the central pool will be retained and the north-south and east-west visual axes will be maintained. The sculpture garden will also be accessible to visitors in wheelchairs.
- Sculpture. The versatile nature of the design will allow for sculptures to be changed as the Gallery collection grows, and will accommodate works on loan

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for special exhibitions. Sculptures from the permanent collection that may be installed include Alexander Archipenko's Woman Combing Her Hair (1915), Joan Miró's Personnage Gothique, Oiseau-Eclair (1974, cast 1977), and Isamu Noguchi's Great Rock of Inner Seeking (1974).

- Landscaping and Plantings. Rich, textural settings for sculptures and summertime shade will be provided with the addition of a variety of native American species of canopy trees, flowering trees, shrubs, groundcovers, and perennials. The National Gallery is committed to preserving the existing trees, which include the lindens and American elms, as well as other canopy trees. They provide a visual link to the Mall and welcome shade in the summer.
- Fountain and Ice Rink. The reflecting pool will be redesigned to function as a fountain during warm weather. During the winter the pool will be transformed into a public ice skating rink, as it has been since the late 1960s.
- Pavilion/Dining Area. The existing Pavilion, completed in 1988, was designed by Charles Bassett of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill's San Francisco office. It will be repainted dark green to allow it to recede visually and blend with its surroundings. The current contractor, Guest Services Inc., will renovate the Pavilion building, and plans to provide café service, along with indoor seating and outdoor terraces with tables and chairs. There will be service for ice skaters during winter months.
- Walking/Seating Areas. The major walks in the garden will be granite including the great arcs along the north and south sides of the garden,

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the main axis from the east, the plaza around the circular pool, and the terraces around the pavilion. These will be supplemented by minor paths.

Wood benches will be placed throughout the sculpture garden to offer visitors a chance to rest and reflect upon the works on view. Stone benches will surround the central plaza around the circular pool.

- Pedestrian Access. Six points of public access will include a ceremonial entryway directly across from the West Building's Seventh Street entrance, an entryway from the Mall at the center of Madison Drive on the Eighth Street axis, and additional gateway entrances at the four corners. A decorative metal fence will be installed for both security and spatial definition.
- Gateway Plinths. Constructed to mark and articulate entrances to the garden, gateway plinths will be in keeping with the historic character of the West Building. The stone used in construction will match the marble of both the West and East Buildings of the Gallery.

After construction on the site begins, the area will remain closed to the public until the fall of 1998, when the Sculpture Garden is scheduled to open.

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