

Release Date: October 12, 2006

## John Elderfield Talk Commemorates the Posthumous Publication of Kirk Varnedoe's Mellon Lectures



Washington, DC – John Elderfield, a leading art historian and chief curator of painting and sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, will give an illustrated talk titled “Rockets and Blue Lights (Close at Hand): Celebrating the Publication of Kirk Varnedoe’s Mellon Lectures,” at the National Gallery of Art. Elderfield’s talk will

take place in the East Building Auditorium on Saturday, December 16 at noon. The lecture is open to the public, free of charge on a first-come, first-seated basis.

Varnedoe, who died in August 2003 at age 57, was a professor of history of art at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, N.J. Prior to that, he served for 13 years (1988-2001) as chief curator of painting and sculpture at MoMA. An eminent art historian, Varnedoe was one of the most engaging and eloquent public speakers on art.

Varnedoe’s last major public appearance was at the National Gallery of Art in spring 2003, when he delivered the six-part A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts, one of the nation’s most prestigious series of public talks on art. According to an article in *The Washington Post*, “Record-breaking crowds turned up at the National Gallery for Kirk’s Mellon Lectures, and the numbers only seemed to grow as the weeks passed and word of mouth spread. By the end, fans were waiting hours in line for a chance to hear him speak, and they gave him a standing ovation when the series closed.”

Elderfield, prior to being appointed MoMA’s Marie-Josée and Henry Kravis chief curator of painting and sculpture in 2003, spent 10 years as the museum’s curator at

large. He curated or co-curated the exhibitions *Matisse-Picasso* (2003), *Bonnard* (1998) and *Piet Mondrian* (1995-96), as well as organized the celebrated *Henri Matisse: A Retrospective* (1992) and *Kurt Schwitters* (1985).

The author of numerous books and catalogues, Elderfield was also responsible for the reinstallation of the painting and sculpture collection in MoMA's new building in 2004. His exhibition *Manet and the Execution of Maximilian* will open in November, and he is currently preparing exhibitions for 2007 on the Venezuelan artist Armando Reverón and the American sculptor Martin Puryear.

*Pictures of Nothing: Abstract Art since Pollock* (Princeton University Press in association with the National Gallery of Art) includes a foreword by Earl A. Powell III, director of the National Gallery of Art, and an introduction by the writer Adam Gopnik, co-curator of Varnedoe's first MoMA exhibition, *High and Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture* (1990). The illustrated 340-page, hardcover book gives readers a fascinating and moving tour through a half century of abstract art, concluding with an unforgettable description of one of Varnedoe's favorite works.

The book will be available for \$45 in November at the National Gallery of Art Shops. To order, call (202) 842-6002 or 1-800-697-9350, fax (202) 789-3047, or email [mailorder@nga.gov](mailto:mailorder@nga.gov).

### **A.W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts**

The A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts were established by the National Gallery of Art's Board of Trustees in 1949 "to bring to the people of the United States the results of the best contemporary thought and scholarship bearing upon the subject of the Fine Arts." Previous lecturers include Sir Kenneth Clark (1953), E. H. Gombrich (1956), Kathleen Raine (1962), Sir Isaiah Berlin (1965), Stephen Spender (1968), Sir Nikolaus Pevsner (1970), Jacques Barzun (1973), Leo Steinberg (1982), Jennifer Montagu (1990), Anthony Hecht (1992), Salvatore Settis (2001), and Michael Fried (2002).

###

## General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets along Constitution Avenue NW and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. With the exception of the atrium and library, the galleries in the East Building will be closing gradually beginning in July 2013 and will remain closed for approximately three years for Master Facilities Plan and renovations. For specific updates on gallery closings, visit [www.nga.gov/renovation](http://www.nga.gov/renovation) (<http://www.nga.gov/renovation>).

For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's website at [www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov). Follow the Gallery on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt](http://www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt) and on Twitter at [twitter.com/ngadc](http://twitter.com/ngadc).

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

For additional press information please call or send inquiries to:

Press Office

National Gallery of Art

2000B South Club Drive

Landover, MD 20785

phone: (202) 842-6353 e-mail: [pressinfo@nga.gov](mailto:pressinfo@nga.gov)

Deborah Ziska

Chief of Press and Public Information

(202) 842-6353

ds-ziska@nga.gov