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Andrew W. Mellon Memorial Fountain Restored by National Gallery of Art in Honor of 75th Anniversary with a Major Grant from Richard King Mellon Foundation
—Monumental Bronze Fountain Operational on March 17—



Andrew W. Mellon Memorial Fountain
National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Gallery Archives

Washington, DC—The National Gallery of Art announced today that the Andrew W. Mellon Memorial Fountain, situated at the apex of the Federal Triangle complex in downtown Washington, DC, will operate once again beginning March 17, 2016—the Gallery's 75th anniversary. On September 25, 2015, the National Park Service transferred custody of the fountain and the surrounding triangular park, which are dedicated to Gallery founder Andrew W. Mellon, to the National Gallery of Art. The two-phase total restoration and renovation of the fountain and site is made possible by a major grant from the Richard King Mellon Foundation.

To be unveiled on March 17, 2016, phase one of the project includes conservation of the three-tiered bronze fountain (which has not operated since 2008), revival of the original landscaping plan, and replacement of sophisticated mechanical waterworks that power the fountain jets and cascades. Phase two includes rehabilitation of the plaza and memorial bench around the fountain and will be completed in summer 2017.

"A gift to the people of the United States from Mellon's friends and associates, the fountain was conceived as a tangible memorial to Mellon and his gift of the National Gallery of Art. This is an important site to the Gallery and we are delighted to accept the transfer of responsibility from the National Park Service," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "We are very grateful for the generosity of the Richard King Mellon Foundation and their major leadership gift for the restoration and renovation of the site in honor of the Gallery's 75th anniversary."

The Andrew W. Mellon Memorial Fountain site comprises a circular fountain, a circular plaza around the fountain, a memorial bench, and the surrounding landscape. The site is approximately 23,000 square feet (approximately 1/2 acre) and is bounded by Sixth Street, Pennsylvania Avenue, and Constitution Avenue NW. The fountain will operate from March through November, weather permitting. During winter months, the fountain will be off and will undergo routine maintenance by the Gallery's object conservators and division of facilities management.

Richard King Mellon Foundation

For more than 60 years the Richard King Mellon Foundation has invested in the competitive future and quality of life in Southwestern Pennsylvania, and in the protection, preservation, and restoration of America's environmental heritage.

The Foundation was created in 1947 by Richard King Mellon (1899–1970), president and chairman of Mellon Bank, a conservationist and leading figure in the financial and civic life of Pennsylvania. The son of Richard Beatty Mellon and Jennie King Mellon, and nephew of Andrew Mellon, Richard King Mellon served his country in both World Wars and in peacetime, attaining the rank of Lieutenant General, United States Army Reserve, and receiving the Distinguished Service Medal. Following his service in World War II, he returned home to begin work transforming the Pittsburgh Renaissance into a nationally recognized architectural, civic, social, and educational venture.

As a banker and director of major corporations, he envisioned philanthropy as an investment and partnership to improve the city and region where he worked and lived. As a lifelong outdoorsman and sportsman, he, along with his wife, Constance Prosser Mellon, had an equally strong commitment to preserving wildlife habitat and the natural world. Mrs. Mellon served as chair of the Foundation from 1947 until her death in 1980.

The Richard King Mellon Foundation has supported the Gallery for many years, beginning with a generous grant for the Patrons' Permanent Fund, an art acquisition endowment, in the 1980s. The Foundation sponsored the *Matisse in Morocco: The Paintings and Drawings, 1912-1913* exhibition in 1989 and supported the *Johannes Vermeer* exhibition in 1996. In June 1999, the Foundation gave a major gift for the renovation of the West Building ground floor sculpture galleries in honor of Paul Mellon following his death that February. The Foundation has made a leadership commitment in honor of the Gallery's 75th anniversary, including this grant for the Mellon Memorial Fountain restoration and a grant for photography acquisitions.

History of the Fountain

In 1936, Pittsburgh financier and art collector Andrew W. Mellon gave the nation his collection and funds to establish the National Gallery of Art. He intentionally stipulated that the museum would not be called the Mellon Gallery, but several of Mellon's friends felt that a monument should bear his name. Mellon died in 1937, four years before the West Building opened on March 17, 1941.

Mellon's friends and the Andrew W. Mellon Memorial Committee raised funds for a memorial fountain through private contributions. A Joint Resolution of the Senate and House of Representatives on July 16, 1947, granted authorization to erect the fountain at the apex of Federal Triangle. Approved by the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts and the Washington DC Highway Commission, a triangular plot of land with a monumental fountain and elegant granite bench inscribed to Mellon was dedicated on May 9, 1952. At that ceremony, Chief Justice of the United States Fred Vinson said: "Let us consider this fountain as another symbol of the inspiration and intangible values that have come to us through Mr. Mellon's contributions."

With the Mellon Memorial Fountain at the apex, the remainder of the Federal Triangle accommodates numerous historic government buildings—including the Federal Trade Commission, National Archives and Records Administration, the Department of Justice, and the Department of Commerce. These buildings were planned and most of them erected during the period that Andrew Mellon served as Secretary of the Treasury (1921–1932) and as chairman of a committee that oversaw the development of this area. The Mellon Memorial Fountain site, managed by the National Park Service until jurisdiction transferred to the Gallery in 2015, lies just north of the Sixth Street entrance to the National Gallery of Art's West Building.

Design, Construction, and Landscaping Details: 1952, 1984, and 2016

Otto Eggers, of the firm Eggers & Higgins, designed the park and the memorial fountain. Both principals had worked with renowned architect John Russell Pope, who had designed the Gallery's West Building, and when Pope died in 1937, Eggers & Higgins succeeded him in business. Although Eggers worked with American sculptor Sidney Waugh on several ornate designs for the fountain, Paul Mellon, Andrew Mellon's son, selected Egger's graceful and understated three-tiered fountain.

Fashioned after a fountain in Genoa, Italy, the Mellon Memorial Fountain consists of three nested bronze basins, from which water cascades into a low granite-curbed pool, measuring 55 feet, 4 inches in diameter. Water is supplied from the central jet or plume, and flows from the two top tiers into largest and deepest of the bronze basins. The water is kept at a constant level by sophisticated controls and is tempered and smoothed by means of a bronze baffle, so that when it finally pours over the lip of the basin, it becomes a clear transparent sheet of water.

Cast by Roman Bronze Works and General Bronze Corporation in 1952, it is thought that this was the largest bronze fountain known at the time of construction. The material is known as statuary bronze—a quaternary alloy made of copper, zinc, tin, and lead, and traditionally golden brown in color.

Sidney Waugh, commissioned to design the reliefs for the lowest basin, created twelve high-relief symbols of the zodiac that were cast in bronze and applied to the fluted wall. The sign of Aries is situated so that the sun shines on Aries on March 21—the vernal equinox.

Constructed by John McShain (Philadelphia, PA), the fountain required 12 months to build. While excavating on the Pennsylvania Avenue side, the engineers discovered an abandoned and unidentified tunnel, measuring approximately seven by eight feet. The tunnel had to be backfilled with concrete to provide proper bearing for the fountain.

Builders achieved the precise leveling of the foundations and top rim of each basin—important for the even flow of water—by constructing two concentric rings of 30-ton concrete piles, driven 30 to 40 feet into the ground. The pump room, housing two centrifugal pumps necessary to run the fountain, lies within the inner ring of the foundations below the fountain. Surrounding the fountain is a seven-foot wide walkway of Swenson's Pink granite with an eight-cut finish. The granite bench dedicated to Andrew Mellon is 25 feet long.

The original landscaping designed by Clarke, Rapuano & Holleran (New York City)—known for their designs for Manhattan's Bryant Park and the Garden State Parkway, among other projects—included four large elm trees. Extensive ground cover made the site attractive even in winter when the fountain was not operating. Over time, the original site and landscaping were modified. Several generations of variations included tall boxwood hedges and low shrubs. The Gallery's horticulture division has renovated the landscaping in the spirit of the original Clarke, Rapuano & Holleran design.

In 1984, the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation (PADC) redesigned the traffic pattern around the site and extended the property to the east. A ramp for disability access was added to the granite plaza surrounding the fountain. Redirecting Constitution Avenue NW into Pennsylvania Avenue, the PADC essentially turned the old eastbound lane of Constitution Avenue into a narrow plaza, otherwise known as the Gallery's "north plaza."

To coincide with its 75th anniversary, the Gallery is reconfiguring this "north plaza" to separate vehicular and pedestrian traffic. Large, circular concrete planters and one large triangular planter have been replaced with new low triangular planters in Milford Pink granite guide pedestrians and shield the service lane.

Fountain Renovation and Restoration Highlights

Together with object conservators, the Gallery's architects and facilities management division designed and implemented the renovation of the fountain. The Gallery's object conservators worked with Washington-area firm Conservation Solutions, Inc. to assist in carrying out the treatment on the bronze fountain. In order to preserve the bronze patina while removing a green mineralization buildup, the team used a special method of blasting dry ice (CO₂) on the metal surface instead of using strong chemicals or an aggressive mechanical process to remove the multiple corrosion layers. The process revealed a stunning surface, with original brushstrokes of protective wax visible across the bronze. Several layers of a new protective wax coating were added to help preserve the bronze surface. Annual maintenance will be carried out in the winter when the fountain is not operating.

Under the fountain a pump room houses the mechanical systems. An upgraded exhaust/ventilation system as well as state-of-the-art controls are just a few of the necessary renovations to make the fountain functional. The fountain will not operate in winter to prevent potential ice damage to the bronze and to the sophisticated mechanical system of pipes.

National Gallery of Art's 75th Anniversary

In March 2016, the Gallery commemorates its 75th anniversary with a variety of public programs and presentations that highlight the generous gifts of art from many individuals since the museum was established.

Andrew W. Mellon founded the Gallery and gave not only the West Building and his priceless art collection but also a substantial endowment. Believing that the museum should be a truly national institution, Andrew Mellon insisted that it not bear his name. When the Gallery opened on March 17, 1941, Paul Mellon presented the museum to the nation on behalf of his late father, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt accepted the gift on behalf of the American people.

Other major donors were already beginning to give their collections to the Gallery before its opening. In 1939, Samuel H. Kress donated 375 Italian paintings and 18 sculptures, while P.A.B. Widener's art collection, later enhanced by his son Joseph, was offered to the Gallery in 1939 and given in 1942. In 1943, Lessing J. Rosenwald made his first major gift to the Gallery, donating approximately 22,000 old master and modern prints and drawings over the years. Chester Dale, made his first gift to the Gallery in 1943 and eventually bequeathed most of his remarkable collection of French and American paintings to the museum in 1962. Andrew Mellon's two children, Ailsa Mellon Bruce and Paul Mellon, also became lifelong benefactors. The Gallery became a "collection of collections," and these early gifts set a precedent for giving to the nation that continues to this day.

PRESS CONTACT:

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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 at 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. For information call (202) 737-4215 or visit the Gallery's Web site at www.nga.gov. Follow the Gallery on Facebook at www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt, Twitter at www.twitter.com/ngadc, and Instagram at <http://instagram.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:
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