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National Gallery of Art Celebrates 25-Year Anniversary of Director Earl A. Powell III; 2019 Retirement Announced



National Gallery of Art Director Earl A. Powell III

Washington, DC—Autumn marks the 25th anniversary of Earl A. Powell III as director of the National Gallery of Art, Washington. Celebrated as the museum's longest-serving director (1992–present) and only the fourth director in the Gallery's 76-year history, Powell has announced plans for his retirement in early 2019.

Through cogent planning and high standards of execution, Powell leads an executive team that cultivates the Gallery's vitality and enables staff's unwavering sense of duty as curators, scholars, educators, and custodians of the world's great art.

Over the course of Powell's leadership, the museum has grown exponentially in the size and scope of the collection, in public educational offerings, and through landmark capital improvements, including expansion of both the West and East Buildings and addition of the Sculpture Garden. In addition, the Gallery received the largest consecutive federal appropriations during his tenure.

In Powell's time as director, the Gallery's governance has seen dramatic changes. Paul Mellon, having stepped down from 47 years of service (lastly as chairman of the board) to become an "honorary trustee," remained a benevolent presence until his death in 1999. A new, energetic group of leaders included: Franklin D. Murphy (originally put forward by Paul Mellon), as chairman, followed by Ruth Carter Stevenson, Alexander Laughlin, Robert F. Erburu, John C. Fontaine, John Wilmerding, and Sharon Percy Rockefeller; and John R. Stevenson as president, followed by Robert H. Smith, Victoria P. Sant, and currently Frederick W. Beinecke.

"Thanks to the trustees of the National Gallery of Art, I have been privileged to helm a period of extraordinary growth. For several years I had the honor of working closely with Paul Mellon, whose unparalleled contributions to the Gallery and the nation's cultural life live on in infinite ways," said Powell. "I also wish to acknowledge with gratitude all of the Gallery's trustees past and present and to express my profound appreciation for the service of the Gallery's presidents with whom I am honored to have worked closely: Bob Smith, Vicki Sant, and now Rick Beinecke. Their leadership, support, and friendship have made my years as director a true pleasure."

Frederick W. Beinecke, president, National Gallery of Art, Washington, adds: "The Gallery has benefited in unsurpassed ways from the distinguished leadership that Rusty Powell has provided over the past 25 years. Each of our collections has emerged under his guidance to be

competitive with the best in the world. The trustees are pleased to acknowledge that in the past year the Gallery has welcomed the largest number of visitors in the 21st century and that the Gallery's staff recruited and organized by Rusty has never been stronger. This is a legacy for which Rusty has every reason to be proud and we, every reason to be grateful."

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, 1992–Present

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

Dutch Cabinet Galleries, 1995

Made possible by Juliet and Lee Folger and The Folger Fund, three contiguous galleries were constructed for the National Gallery of Art's growing collection of small Dutch and Flemish paintings. These intimate spaces—similar in scale to cabinet galleries found in homes of 17th-century Dutch collectors—are situated adjacent to the expansive interiors of the 17th-century Dutch and Flemish galleries on the main floor of the West Building and house the finest collection of this school outside of Europe. While small paintings can be displayed throughout the space, built-in cases in one of the galleries can accommodate groups of smaller drawings, prints, books, and sculptures.

West Building Skylight Replacement, 1996–2002

Replacing the skylights was an immediate concern, even before Powell's arrival as director in 1992. Spanning 3.5 acres, the original 1941 skylights were whitewashed in the summer to diffuse natural light coming into the galleries; then autumn rains would crack the whitewash, and winter would wash it away. Over the years, the frames had deteriorated, panes cracked, and some sections required plastic coverings. Replacement of the skylights proceeded in five phases between 1996 and 2002 and required the serial closure of main-floor galleries, one quadrant at a time, with works of art displaced during renovations. The new skylights incorporate an outer layer of tempered glass with an applied ceramic dot pattern to filter light, two sheets of glass laminated with transparent polyvinyl film as an inner layer, and a sealed insulating air space in between. The materials and structure enhance not only energy efficiency but ultraviolet protection.

Master Facilities Plan, West Building, 1997–Ongoing

Initiated in Powell's first years as director of the Gallery and based on several commissioned sustainability studies, a Master Facilities Plan was developed to define a systematic program of renewal, repair, and restoration for both buildings. Beginning in the West Building, all of the work is completed in stages to mitigate any impact on visitors, staff, and collections. No fewer than 40 capital projects were identified across the two buildings and underground connecting link. A new department comprising architects and engineers planned, prioritized, scheduled, and allocated resources to each task—from exterior repairs to upgraded electrical systems, with new emergency generators and power supply networks—ensuring the safety of the art and the Gallery's visitors. Congress funds the Master Facilities Plan costs.

New exhibition spaces in the West Building created as part of the plan include the photography galleries and extensive sculpture galleries on the ground floor. Behind the scenes, new offices and state-of-the-art facilities and equipment were created for the Gallery's registrars, conservators, and digital media division. Refurbished galleries on the main floor house the Italian, Dutch, British, American, French, Spanish, and German painting and sculpture collections, which were emptied, renovated, and reinstalled by school/collection over the course of 15 years.

Sculpture Garden, 1999

The 1999 opening of the 6.1-acre Sculpture Garden marked the first major "outdoor room" making up the National Gallery of Art complex. With more than 20 monumental modern sculptures installed in verdant settings around a central pool—either a fountain or a skating rink, depending on the season—the Sculpture Garden is a setting for art and lively, refreshing entertainment. The Friday night summertime Jazz in the Garden concert series welcomes more than 13,000 attendees at each event. This majestic and popular space, along with several of its sculptures, was a gift to the nation from The Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation.

Situated on the National Mall between 7th and 9th Streets, it fulfills the centuries-old intentions of Pierre L'Enfant, who included a public landscaped garden on this site as part of his master plan for Washington in the 1790s. Initially controlled by the National Park Service, the land was the subject of an agreement in 1966, signed by Interior Secretary Stewart Udall and Paul Mellon that led to its eventual transfer to the Gallery in 1991 as an outdoor space to showcase modern sculpture. Early in his tenure, Powell crafted an agenda that would make year-round use of the space. Distinguished landscape architect Laurie Olin created a lush plan that would honor the significant restrictions imposed by the governing compact between the Gallery and the Park Service—among them preservation of the art nouveau-inspired pavilion designed in 1988; inclusion of a central water feature encircled by a ring of existing linden trees; and respect for the 8th Street axis that runs north-south through the site. Today the landscape is maintained by the Gallery's division of horticultural services.

Sculpture Galleries, 2002

In the northwest quadrant of the West Building's ground floor, a suite of 22 galleries was carved out of 24,000 square feet of contiguous space. The galleries showcase masterpieces of sculpture from the Middle Ages through the late 19th and early 20th centuries; 18th-century French decorative arts; and major collections of Renaissance medals and plaquettes as well as Chinese porcelains.

The project, made possible through a gift from the Richard King Mellon Foundation in honor of Paul Mellon, took more than four years to complete and included restoration of six galleries, major renovation of ten galleries and a study room, and construction of six new gallery spaces, with some 5,000 square feet (formerly offices) added to existing exhibition areas.

Galleries are proportioned to suit the art on display: intimate rooms house small medieval objects, Renaissance medals, and small bronzes, while an expansive space with a central fountain provides an elegant setting for works from the 16th to the 18th century, and a grand columned hall presents 19th- and early 20th-century sculpture. Abundant natural light streaming in from north and west windows provides ideal illumination for three-dimensional objects of any period.

The renovation and construction of these new galleries involved adding classical moldings and other architectural elements, raising the ceilings, and in some cases uncovering previously blocked windows to create airy, vaulted spaces. Care was taken to create harmony between the new suite of galleries and the existing exhibition spaces in the West Building designed by architect John Russell Pope.

East Building exterior recladding project, 2011–2014

I. M. Pei's 1978 East Building is clad in a sleek skin of Tennessee pink marble. The outer sheath consists of three-inch-thick marble panels, each held in place on the load-bearing wall by two stainless steel brackets at the bottom and two lateral anchors at the top. From the beginning, the panels were designed to be individually supported and "float," separated from one another by neoprene beading that allowed the outer walls to expand and contract with changes in weather and temperature. After 35 years of thermal movements, exacerbated by diminished flexibility of the system, structural stresses were evident in the anchors that supported the stone. A number of the panels on the East Building's exterior began to tilt out of alignment. An engineering analysis prompted the Gallery to replace the attachment anchors supporting all 17,026 panels (each weighing approximately 450 pounds and measuring five feet wide by two feet high). Powell again secured funding from Congress to carry out the repairs. (Only six panels had to be replaced with new stones).

Master Facilities Plan and Expansion, East Building, 2008–ongoing

The East Building's extensive renovation improves the Gallery's ability to show its vigorous modern art collection to the public. Two new tower galleries connected by a Roof Terrace overlooking Pennsylvania Avenue (home to the iconic *Hahn/Cock* by Katharina Fritsch, on long-term loan from Glenstone Museum, Potomac, Maryland) provide over 12,000 square feet of additional exhibition space. The new galleries are hexagonal in shape and 23 feet high, with wood floors (which match the West Building galleries), white walls, and skylights. Natural daylight is controlled by a state-of-the-art shading system and diffused through glass "laylight" ceilings. New stairs connecting all levels of the building and a new large elevator improve access and encourage visitors to explore a completely new configuration of the permanent collection of modern art.

In the spirit of the public and private initiative that created the Gallery in the late 1930s, in 2013 several Washington philanthropists gave a combined \$30 million to the Gallery, allowing for construction of new public spaces: Victoria P. Sant, trustee emerita (Gallery president at the time of the gift); her husband Roger W. Sant, a member of the Gallery's Trustees' Council; Mitchell Rales, a member of the Gallery's Board of Trustees; his wife Emily Rales; and David M. Rubenstein, a member of the Gallery's Board of Trustees.

The privately funded expansion occurred in coordination with the federally funded Master Facilities Plan, the first of many phases covering the East Building. This renovation included comprehensive improvements to infrastructure, including upgraded staircases and elevators connecting public exhibition spaces on all floors. Subsequent phases of the renovations in other parts of the East Building will be announced at a later date.

Andrew W. Mellon Memorial Fountain Renovation, 2015–2017

On September 25, 2015, the National Park Service transferred custody of the Andrew W. Mellon Memorial Fountain and the surrounding triangular park to the National Gallery of Art. A two-phase total restoration and renovation of the fountain and site—across the street from the West Building and dedicated to the Gallery's founder, Andrew W. Mellon—was made possible by a major grant from the Richard King Mellon Foundation. A gift to the people of the United States from Mellon's friends and associates originally dedicated in 1952, the fountain was conceived as a tangible memorial to Mellon and his gift of the National Gallery of Art. Rededicated on the occasion of the Gallery's 75th anniversary in 2016, the Andrew W. Mellon Memorial Fountain site comprises a circular fountain, a circular plaza around the fountain, a memorial bench, and the surrounding landscape.

GROWTH

With Powell's leadership and support over the last 25 years, every division at the Gallery has experienced tremendous growth and contributed to art historical scholarship, conservation, and museology at the highest standard of excellence. Since Powell's first year as director in 1992, the Gallery has welcomed more than 122 million visitors. The following areas are highlights from across the institution.

Digital

The Gallery's four-square mission—to preserve, collect, exhibit, and foster understanding of art—are at the forefront of advances in the digital realm, as technology has enabled new ways of seeing and accomplishing the museum's mission. Powell ushered the Gallery into the digital age,

with the launch of its award-winning website, www.nga.gov. Among the most exciting recent developments are its dramatically enhanced image repositories, open access to its wealth of digital resources, a new series of online collection catalogs, and free, downloadable backlist titles.

Early in Powell's tenure, major technological advances revolutionized every aspect of the Gallery's operations, from security and communications to curatorial records and exhibition design. Groundbreaking at the time and launched in 1995, the Micro Gallery (20 workstations in the Art Information Room off the West Building Rotunda) offered the public interactive computer access to the collection—the first of its kind in an American art museum.

The Gallery was also a pioneer in providing information about all of its art holdings online. The incorporation of provenance, exhibition history, and bibliographical information as part of these online records has been at the forefront of worldwide efforts to track art that was stolen or lost during World War II.

In 2004 the Gallery replaced film cameras, traditional photography studios, and chemical darkrooms with fully integrated digital imaging facilities. A new system of ultra-high resolution image capturing was developed using an electro-mechanical easel and high-end studio camera. The easel moves the painting while the camera and lights remain stationary, enabling greater precision and resulting in an image capture with astounding detail.

In 2012 images.nga.gov became an open-access repository representing a third of the 150,000 works in the collection—a percentage that is growing quickly.

Education

In the last 25 years the Gallery has expanded educational outreach through some 1,500 free programs every year, through social media platforms as well as audio, video, and live-streamed lectures. Yet the most dramatic change in the Gallery's approach to education and the museum visitor is the growing awareness of those whom the museum seeks to serve. In addition to traditional lectures, gallery talks, foreign language tours, and school tours, programming has broadened to include the award-winning Art Around the Corner program for under-served elementary schools in the District of Columbia; Stories in Art for families with young children; workshops and studios for young adults; extended summer institutes for teachers; Drawing Salon for anyone over age 18; and a robust selection of accessibility programs that address a wide range of audiences.

The creation and implementation of digital education programs has been a priority for Powell. *NGAkids* was launched in 2000. Numerous public programs are memorialized through high-definition audio and video available online, while others are live-streamed—the most extensive in any American art museum.

The production of interpretive materials for exhibitions has grown to include documentary films and a variety of digital offerings, including on-site touch-screen kiosks that feature the critical results of conservation and science investigations into works of art.

Science and Conservation

The National Gallery of Art has established one of the most important art museum science and conservation enterprises in the world. A combined team of more than 50 scientists, conservators, technicians, and fellows carry out pioneering conservation initiatives on works in the collection across all media. Powell has supported critical growth in this area, adding scientists who specialize in chemistry, botany, and imaging as well as conservators of paintings, objects, works on paper, photographs, textiles, and frames. Powell championed the creation of state-of-the-art facilities in the West Building for the Gallery's scientists and conservators.

Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts (CASVA)

Established by Gallery trustees in 1979, CASVA has a mandate to explore the visual arts beyond the collecting interests of the museum—and with a global scope. Its founding vision was broad and flexible, intended to inspire new generations to conceive new agendas for inquiry and bring them to the Gallery. Over the past 25 years the publications and research projects produced by members of the Gallery's resident community of scholars have greatly expanded, reaching an international audience through online resources. Witness the podcasts of lectures on the Gallery's website, including the esteemed A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts.

Publications

A cross section of the Gallery's vibrant publishing program in the past quarter century reveals a broad spectrum of titles on the museum's collections and special exhibitions, written by curators, conservators, scientists, and others. One project in particular was transformed with Powell's support: the traditional multivolume publication of systematic catalogs of paintings, sculptures, and decorative arts in the Gallery's collection took new form as the National Gallery of Art Online Editions. The inaugural catalog, a dynamically revised and enlarged version of the out-of-print *Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century*, won a prestigious award from the Art Libraries Society in 2014 for the best art publication in any format. Subsequent volumes have appeared on trecento paintings and on American modernism—along with periodic updates to existing catalogs, a great advantage of online publishing.

Another ambitious publication stems from the Gallery's stewardship of the largest public collection of works by Mark Rothko. A catalogue raisonné of more than 2,600 drawings, watercolors, and paintings on paper is being prepared that will be offered both online and as a two-volume print publication.

At the same time, the Gallery continues to win scholarly and design awards for its lavishly illustrated exhibition catalogs and educational materials, carrying on the Gallery's tradition of excellence in publishing.

Major Acquisitions: Highlights, 1992–2017

A significant component of any museum director's mandate involves cultivating the collection, and during Powell's tenure the art collection has grown as never before. In addition to accessioning gifts offered in honor of the 50th anniversary in 1991, the Gallery received major gifts of modern art from such donors as the Meyerhoffs and the Vogels, American masterpieces from John Wilmerding, Dutch paintings from Lee and Juliet Folger, and French impressionist works from John Hay Whitney and from Paul and Bunny Mellon.

One of the earliest major acquisitions under Powell's directorship was Bernardo Bellotto's monumental Venetian landscape *The Fortress of Königstein* (1756–1758), made possible by the Patrons' Permanent Fund. More recent revelatory acquisitions, also made with contributions from the Patrons' Permanent Fund, include Gerrit van Honthorst's *The Concert* (1623), Salomon van Ruysdael's *River Landscape with Ferry* (1649), and Glenn Ligon's *Untitled (I Am a Man)* (1988).

Promised gifts include exquisite early American furniture from the George M. and Linda H. Kaufman Collection and some 80 superb examples of Renaissance bronze, boxwood, and ivory sculpture assembled by Robert H. Smith. In addition, the Gallery acquired classic works from Thomas Moran's *Green River Cliffs, Wyoming* (1881) to both the Ratjen Collection and the Woodner Collection of old master drawings.

Notably, a new department of photographs expanded dramatically under Powell, along with a collection that spans the history of the medium and features in-depth holdings of such photographers as Robert Frank and Irving Penn as well as new types of photography by artists such as Carrie Mae Weems and Rineke Dijkstra. He also supported major acquisitions of modern prints and drawings, with three archives—those of Crown Point Press, Gemini G.E.L., and Graphicstudio—bringing thousands of important prints by prominent artists into the collection and the Reba and Dave Williams Collection adding another 5,200 American prints.

Powell gave new emphasis and energy to site-specific art, such as Leo Villareal's *Multiverse* (2008) in the connecting link and Roxy Paine's *Graft* (2009) for the Sculpture Garden. He promoted the vitality and growth of the Gallery's collection of modern paintings and sculptures, through gifts from artists, private collectors, and dedicated contributions from the Collectors Committee—and oversaw a complete reinstallation in the newly refurbished East Building.

Corcoran Collection, 2014

On August 18, 2014, in response to an ongoing financial crisis faced by the Corcoran Gallery of Art, the District of Columbia Superior Court approved agreements to transfer ownership of the Corcoran's 17th Street Flagg Building and College of Art and Design to George Washington University and custody of the art collection to the National Gallery of Art. Since then, Gallery curators and staff have reviewed the collection, selected some 8,901 works of art to join the nation's collection, and made recommendations to the Corcoran trustees for distribution of the works not accessioned by the Gallery. Especially notable has been the harmonious melding of American paintings from these kindred collections.

Notable Exhibitions

Renowned for its special exhibitions, the Gallery has presented more than 1,100 scholarly and popular shows since 1941. While at the Gallery in the 1970s and most recently as director, Powell has had direct involvement in several once-in-a-lifetime exhibitions, including *Splendor of Dresden* (1978), John Wilmerding's trailblazing *American Light: The Luminist Movement, 1850–1875* (1980) *Johannes Vermeer* (1995), *Van Gogh's Van Goghs* (1998), *Edo: Art in Japan 1615–1868* (1998), *Colorful Realm: Japanese Bird-and-Flower Paintings by Itō Jakuchū (1716–1800)* (2012), and several unannounced upcoming exhibitions.

Preparing for the Future

Most recently, in celebration of the Gallery's 75th anniversary in 2016, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation awarded the Gallery a grant of \$30 million in endowment funds, to be matched over five years by \$45 million in new gifts from other donors. This is the largest grant in the Mellon Foundation's history. The farsighted grant, ensuring the future of the Gallery's most innovative programs, will prioritize digital programs and collaborations, education and outreach, scholarly research, conservation and conservation science. The grant, and the support it will generate, secures these crucial programs in perpetuity and reinforces the Gallery's leadership role as one of the nation's preeminent institutions.

EARL A. POWELL III (b. 1943)

Universally called "Rusty," Powell was born in Spartanburg, South Carolina, in 1943 and grew up in Rhode Island, where he learned to sail and played football at Providence Country Day. At Williams College he earned a BA in 1966 in art history (with honors) and European history, then

accepted an officer's commission in the U.S. Navy and saw active duty as a navigator in Vietnam. In 1974, after receiving a master's degree at the Fogg Art Museum in 1970 and a doctorate at Harvard in 1974 (his dissertation examined Thomas Cole's early work), Powell joined the faculty at the University of Texas, where he continued to make a scholarly name for himself in the field of 19th- and 20th-century American art.

In 1976 Powell was hired by J. Carter Brown (director, 1969–1992) to work for the Gallery as a special assistant for major projects. He helped organize several exhibitions in Washington, including *Edvard Munch: Symbols and Images* (1978), then became director of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) in 1980 and oversaw a time of extraordinary growth, presenting highly regarded exhibitions, opening a new museum wing, and tripling the endowment.

After 25 years, Powell's tenure as director has exceeded those of his three predecessors. David Finley served as director for 19 years, after helping Andrew Mellon realize his plan to found the Gallery. Finley recruited the first donors and cultivated both political and private support to nurture the unique provisions established in its charter. His successor, John Walker served 14 years as director (after 18 years as chief curator) and secured the museum's place in local, national, and international cultural landscapes. Walker's protégé and successor, J. Carter Brown, served 23 years, oversaw the design and construction of I. M. Pei's East Building and presented some of the first museum "blockbuster" exhibitions, from *Treasures of Tutankhamun* in the 1970s to *Treasure Houses of Britain* in the 1980s to *Circa 1492: Art in the Age of Exploration* in 1991. Brown announced his retirement in January of 1992. Powell's tenure as Gallery director began in September of 1992, just after the museum's landmark 50th-anniversary celebrations.

Powell resides with his wife, Nancy Landry Powell, in Washington, DC, and Easton, Maryland.

Awards

Honorary Doctorate of Fine Arts, Williams College, 1993

King Olav Medal, awarded by King Olav V of Norway, 1978

Grand Official Order of the Infante D. Henrique medal, awarded by Portugal, 1995

Williams College Bicentennial Medal, 1995

Mexican Cultural Institute Award, 1996

Commendatore dell'Ordine al Merito della Repubblica Italiana, awarded by Italy, 1998

Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur, awarded by the French Government, 2000

Officier dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, awarded by the Minister of Culture and Communication of France, 2004

Mexican Order of the Aztec Eagle, awarded by the Mexican Government, 2007

Centennial Medal, awarded by the Harvard Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, 2008

Officer's Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Hungary, 2009

Officer's Cross of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany, 2014

Positions

Chairman, United States Commission of Fine Arts

Trustee, American Federation of Arts

Trustee, Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation

Trustee, John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts

Trustee, National Trust for Historic Preservation

Trustee, Norton Simon Museum

Trustee, White House Historical Association

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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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