

10/21/94  
SCULPTURE EXHIBIT  
FIRST LADIES GARDEN

PHOTOCOPY  
PRESERVATION

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

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Remarks by the First Lady  
At Reception for the opening of 20th-Century Sculpture Exhibit  
The First Ladies' Garden

Good afternoon. Welcome. Welcome to the White House and welcome to this garden. I am particularly pleased that this event could be held during October, which is Arts and Humanities Month, and that so many of you who are such strong advocates and supporters of the arts and humanities could join us here this afternoon. There are many people whom I wish to thank and will do so toward the end of my remarks because it is an unusually large number of people who have contributed to this occasion.

Sculpture, has been one of my favorite art forms ever since I was a young girl. And not simply, as lore might have it, because my first date with my husband was in the sculpture garden of the Yale Gallery, but because of the way it spoke to me and what it has always meant to me.

I know that all of you believe, as I do, that art has the capacity to provoke our imaginations. And I believe where there is imagination there is hope, and where there is creative expression there is potential for human progress. And hope and progress are concepts and ideals that are as important to us today as they always have been in the history of our country.

Looking at the wonderful pieces that have been assembled in this garden, we can see the variety and diversity and richness of contemporary American sculpture. And we can also see reflections of ourselves and our society over the last one hundred years.

The idea for this exhibition was inspired, in part, by First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis. My brief, much too brief friendship with her, left an indelible impression on me as she did on the lives of so many. And of course, this garden, which is the Jacqueline Kennedy Garden, is a lasting, living tribute to the extraordinary contributions she made to the White House.

Now some of our finest American artists and their art will be available to an entirely new audience. The thousands of visitors who pass through the White House each day will be able to look out the Colonnade windows and will be able to share in the aesthetic beauty and the emotional power of these sculptures. That is extremely important to the President and myself.

We believe that art is not a marginal part of society, is not a luxury, but that it has such extraordinary power and is centered in our personal and collective experiences. Art therefore should be as accessible to as many people as possible.

I have been lucky in my own life to live in places where great art was close at hand. I grew up in Chicago, I went to college in Boston, I was in law school at Yale and was always exposed to the museums, galleries and other places where art thrived. And it was in New Haven that I first saw works of some of the sculptors represented here today.

I also want this exhibition to celebrate the artists themselves. Most of us don't have the courage it takes to be an artist. The courage to unveil one's most profound emotions and visions to outside scrutiny. By sharing their feelings and their ideas with us, these artists not only add beauty to our surroundings here and around our country, they keep us from becoming too sedate, too numb, too inured to the complexities and the challenges of life. So on behalf of the President and myself, I would like to thank all of the artists--not only those represented here, but those throughout our country who contribute so much to the richness of our culture. I would like to thank the supporters of art and artists who help insure that art reaches more and more of our people.

And I would like to thank all Americans for allowing us to display this exhibit in the White House, which is in fact the only home of a head of state anywhere in the world that does have tourists come in nearly every day. And we have now increased so dramatically the numbers of tourists, that there will be, in the months that this exhibit is on display, nearly a million people who will see this, in this garden for the first time.

I would like to thank particularly the people who have made this exhibit possible and I'd like to start with George Neubert, the curator of this exhibit and the Director of the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery and Sculpture Garden at the University of Nebraska, at Lincoln. He has been an extraordinary help and guide to this entire project and we are very grateful. I would also like thank Dr. Graham Spanier, the Chancellor of the University of Nebraska, for giving George Neubert and the Sheldon Art Gallery staff the time to work on this exhibit.

I also want to thank our dear friends from the Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Foundation, whose generosity helped make this possible. And the Cantors have been such great friends, not only of art and sculpture through the years, but of the President and mine and we are very grateful for your being here and seeing this come to fruition.

I'd also like to thank my friend, J. Carter Brown, who worked diligently to take a concept and bring it to this wonderful reality and also to wish him a belated happy birthday, which he spent here at the installation in the sculpture garden on Saturday.

And some of the artists whose works are represented in this exhibit are with us today. We thank, Richard Hunt, Bryan Hunt, Ellsworth Kelly and George Siegal, without whose artistry we would not be here celebrating this great occasion.

And those lending institutions from my part of the country, the Mid West, who have lent their treasures: the Sheldon

Memorial Art Gallery and Sculpture Garden, the Washington University Gallery of Art, the Akron Art Museum, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago and the Art Institute of Chicago, the Milwaukee Art Museum, the Minnesota Museum of American Art, the Laumeler Sculpture Park and Museum in St. Louis, the Columbus Museum of Art in Columbus, Ohio, and the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. I am particular pleased that all of these institutions could have contributed to this exhibit and that we can say to all who ask how proud we are that these institutions are a part of this White House first for us.

I also particularly want to thank and ask to stand as a group, the members of the White House Preservation Committee and the White House Historical Association, if you all would stand because certainly we could not do any of this without your help. Thank you all very much. I also want particularly to thank Rex Scouten, the Curator of the White House, who knows everything that happens here and ever did happen here. And Sylvia Williams, from the Smithsonian who is the President of the Association of Art Museum Directors who helped make this exhibit possible. And really to thank all of you for caring about this wonderful house and for caring about art.

It has been a real pleasure for both the President and me during the months we've been privileged to live here, to explore the nooks and crannies and to study with great interest and delight the wonderful book, **Art in the White House**, to uncover many of the treasures that are here and to try to add to the impact that the White House can bring to the art and culture of our times. So with that, let me say thank you and please join me for a reception up on the State Floor. Thank you all very much.