

Women & Arts Opening
Washington, D.C.
November 8, 1997

PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION

FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
REMARKS FOR THE OPENING OF ELISABETH A. KASSER WING OF NATIONAL
MUSEUM OF WOMEN AND THE ARTS
WASHINGTON, D.C. -- NOVEMBER 8, 1997
(As Delivered)

It is such a great honor for me to be part of this celebration, for it is my second visit this week to the Museum. I was here on Thursday to see the textile and ceramic works by Native American women and saw, once again, what makes this such a special place. It is a remarkable testament to the creativity and originality of the Museum and its staff that we are celebrating all kinds of art here in this building. And I want to thank all of you who had anything to do in helping to realize the extraordinary dream that Wilhelmina Holladay had.

I remember -- it was, we think, in 1984 or '85, visiting the Holladay home here in Washington and being given a tour by Mrs. Holladay of all of the extraordinary works that she and her husband had collected. They were crammed everywhere. Many were very well displayed, but others were there to be part of the collection and with some apology Wilhelmina would say "We haven't had time to hang these, but that doesn't matter because they are going to have a home of their own in a museum."

Now, those of you who were part of helping this dream to come to pass can remember perhaps some of the debate and discussion about whether or not this museum was necessary or needed. There were a lot of heated discussions, as I recall as part of just a few of them, because there were those who argued strenuously that it was not necessary to have a whole museum devoted to women and the arts. But instead, there should just be the natural evolution of appreciation that would come to the work of women going back through the millennium and that eventually, women are just going to find their way into the annals of our history and to the appreciation of so much of the public.

Thankfully, Wilhemina and others had the winning side of the argument, that there was a necessary commitment that should be made to showcase the art of women. I can recall not so long ago when I was in college that the leading art history book don't even mention women. Now that was later edited but in a rather, I thought, begrudging way. And there were others who said that women's arts were part of collections around the world now and there was no need for us to do anything special.

So this Museum proves all of the doubters wrong. The kind of grassroots support that it has engendered around the country, and now around the world, speaks volumes about the feelings that so many have about the important role the Museum is playing. I was pleased to be a charter member of the Museum and to have the privilege of hosting an exhibit of Little Rock women artists -- organized by the Museum's Arkansas Chapter. And I am pleased that you have chosen to honor Arkansas by naming part of this wing the Arkansas Gallery.

In just ten short years, the Museum has celebrated the works of hundreds of women artists by teaching about the great talents that went before them, by exhibiting their art and introducing them to a new and wider public, and by teaching the next generation of girls that creativity, expression, and artistic greatness are all within their reach.

I also must make a special tribute to Elisabeth Kasser and her family for recognizing the importance that this museum holds and for enabling it to continue and expand its mission. You have added immeasurably, Mrs. Kasser, to what this Museum will be able to do in the years to come. And I hope that all of us will do our part in celebrating how far the Museum has come, but also in helping it realize the potential that Wilhemina just referred to.

This new wing opens an important moment. We stand at the threshold of a new century and a new millennium. It is a time, as my husband has said, "to honor the past and imagine the future." It is for this reason that the President has launched the White House Millennium Program to recognize and celebrate our cultural and artistic heritage. Well, what better place to think about how we will accelerate than here in this museum.

The arts are not a luxury. The arts are an integral part of our lives as individuals and as a nation. And I hope that all of us who are so pleased to be here, at this museum on this special day, will join our voices on behalf of the importance of the arts. We need those voices, we need all of us to be proclaiming loudly and clearly that the arts by all of us -- men and women, from the past and the present and the future -- can enrich and expand our understanding of who we are as human beings, help us to reach out, not only to each other, but within ourselves as well.

That's why I'm so pleased to have the Girls Scouts here today because really this museum -- although we honor those who have helped to bring it to this point and imagined what more we can do to make it realize its full potential -- really this museum is not mostly for us, it is for all of these young women and girls who are here today. It is for them and the generations of Americans who will come after us-- who will be enriched and inspired by this wonderful place for years to come.

I add my congratulations to all of you who helped bring this day to pass. Thank you very much. (Applause)