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FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
FRIENDS OF ART AND PRESERVATION IN EMBASSIES
THE WHITE HOUSE
MAY 27, 1998

It's a great pleasure to welcome everyone here to the White House, as we celebrate the accomplishments of the Friends of Art and Preservation in Embassies -- and express our appreciation for their efforts in sharing America's rich cultural diversity with the people of the world. The work of FAPE and all of you here this evening is even more valuable now -- as we begin to commemorate the next millennium -- and reflect on what gifts we want to leave to future generations. Because if there's anything that truly reflects our common values as Americans -- it's our enduring creative and

intellectual spirit, as reflected in the art and culture of this great nation.

I want to acknowledge some very special people here this evening: Jo Carole Lauder, chairman of the board of FAPE; Ann Gund, president; co-chairs of FAPE's Millennium Gift to the Nation, Robin Duke and John Whitehead; Lee Kimchee McGrath, executive director. And distinguished members of the board of directors. I'm also pleased to see Wendy Luers, FAPE's president emeritus, and Lee Annenberg, chairman emeritus.

We are also delighted to have some of America's leading contemporary artists with us tonight. We'll be hearing from Chuck Close -- and seeing one of his wonderful prints later on in the evening. We also have with us artists Frank Stella, Robert Rauschenberg and Ellsworth Kelly -- whose works are on display in embassies and residences around the world -- thanks to FAPE's Limited Edition Program. [I've just learned it will be Ellsworth Kelly's 75th birthday on Sunday -- so let's all wish him a Happy Birthday.] It's also a great pleasure to welcome Dorothy Lichtenstein -- who has also joined us. And of course, it's a thrill to have so many advocates for the arts gathered here at the White House -- particularly on a beautiful evening in May. There's something humbling about the exquisite beauty of the peonies on our tables tonight -- reminding us once again that perhaps nature is the greatest artist of us all.

Hosting the Friends of Art and Preservation in Embassies is a

special pleasure for both me and the President -- because we've seen first hand the wonderful results of your labors in embassies and residences around the world. I remember participating at an event in the Ambassador's residence in New Delhi, India, a few years ago, and I saw this beautiful mural in the dining room. I felt such pride when I was told it was painted by the American artist -- Karen Lucas -- who had been commissioned by FAPE. I'm also very excited about FAPE's efforts to restore the Ambassador's residence in Prague -- and those of you who have visited it know what a spectacular treasure that historic residence is. I know the chandeliers have already been restored -- and work is now beginning on the historic wood panels and draperies.

These are just a few examples of the wonderful work FAPE has done since it was founded in 1986, working in partnership with the Art and Embassies program at the State Department to showcase and preserve the works of America's visual artists around the world. But these efforts serve an even larger design. President Kennedy once said that -- "The life of the arts is very close to the center of a nation's purpose, and is a test of the quality of a nation's civilization." What better way of sharing that mission with the world -- than to display the best of America's art on the walls, and in the halls, of our embassies and residences overseas. We are indebted to so many of you here this evening for your generosity over the years in making this program so successful.

I want to tell you one of my favorite White House stories -- as a way of underscoring the enormous value that we, as Americans, have always placed on our artistic and cultural heritage. When this White House was in flames, during the War of 1812, and the British were marching on the Capital, word came to Dolley Madison that her husband was urging her to flee, that they were not going to be able to stop the British advance. She immediately began to grab a few things that she thought she should rescue. And what did she save? She saved a piece of art -- a portrait of our first President, painted by Gilbert Stuart. That portrait of George Washington still hangs in the East Room of the White House, because Dolley Madison saved something that she knew meant more than anything to the continuation of our country and its ideals of freedom and democracy.

Even as we learn from our past -- we anticipate the future with great excitement. So tonight, I want to say a few words about the White House Millennium Council, and how that effort ties in with this evening's celebration and preservation of the arts. The President and I created the Millennium Council to help develop ways to engage all Americans in marking this milestone in human history -- with the overall theme "to honor the past, imagine the future." And we're inviting all Americans to participate, and to think about what gifts each of us can give to enhance life for future generations.

Here at the White House, we've launched a series of Millennium Evenings, in which scholars, scientists, and creative individuals will help us honor that past, and imagine our future. We've already listened to a renowned American historian; a world famous physicist; and America's poet laureates -- as a way of celebrating our extraordinary creative and intellectual heritage -- and to help stimulate conversations about who we are -- and who we want to be -- as we enter the new millennium.

One of our major millennium programs is to "Save America's Treasures," because so many of our nation's cultural and historic treasures -- from the ancient Indian sites at Mesa Verde to Thomas Edison's laboratory -- are in danger of being lost. And we are inviting everyone -- from federal agencies to foundations to local communities -- to get involved in preserving our nation's documents, artifacts, monuments and historic sites. Already, the National Archives is planning to re-encase our precious founding documents, and the Smithsonian Institution is beginning the 3-year restoration of the Star Spangled Banner.

For the past twelve years, the Friends of Art and Preservation in Embassies has been working in that same spirit of saving -- and celebrating -- our nation's cultural and historic treasures. And tonight, you will hear how FAPE is adding to that legacy -- and contributing it's own unique "gifts to the future."

This evening, I've asked Jo Carole Lauder to talk about FAPE's historic contributions to our embassies and residences around the world -- and we will then unveil the newest addition to FAPE's Limited Edition Program, by artist Chuck Close. After the unveiling of this exciting new print, Robin Duke -- who has been such a tireless advocate for women and children around the world -- will tell us about FAPE's extraordinary Gift to the Nation program -- and some of the contributions that are being made as part of that effort.

So now, it's my pleasure to introduce Jo Carole Lauder -- whose passionate commitment to the Museum of Modern Art, to the promotion of American art in Vienna's embassy and residence, and to FAPE -- has made her one of America's leading cultural ambassadors.