

Sara Lee/Art Institute
Chicago, Illinois
June 3, 1998

Remarks by Hillary Rodham Clinton
Sara Lee Corporation Donation at the Art Institute of Chicago
June 3, 1998 -- Chicago, Illinois
(As Delivered)

I am truly thrilled and delighted to be a part of this very important announcement. It is always wonderful for me to be back in Chicago, to have an opportunity to be at the Art Institute -- for today is very special. Because, as John Bryan just said, this gift is a Millennium gift to America by one of America's great corporations. And what that means is that we have yet another example of the extraordinary and very much needed contributions by the private sector for the vitality of the public and not-for-profit sectors. You know, our country is unique in the way we have created this extraordinary synthesis among our private, for-profit companies that do so much to enhance our standard of living and provide opportunities here and around the world; our public sector which represents our collective efforts to find a connection with where we are going and to carve out what we believe to be in the common good, and the not-for-profit sector which is unique in the development of any civilization that has reached its highest point here in the United States as we end this century.

As the President announced last year at the National Archives, that our country would mark the passing of the century and the millennium by looking at how we could honor the past and imagine the future, he spoke about how each of us in our private and our professional and our public capacities could give gifts to the future. It might be something as simple as cleaning up the Civil War sculpture in the middle of the town square. Or perhaps going through one's attic and finding those letters from grandparents and great grandparents that can be shared with grandchildren and great grandchildren. Or it might be as great as looking for ways that we can find in America to save America's treasures. But...it was clearly a call to action for all of us. And I could never have imagined standing with my husband in the archives last summer, that we would begin this extraordinary effort with a gift such as this conceived by Sara Lee and to be given to museums around the country and indeed to museums around the world.

Now, Sara Lee and its leadership -- John Bryan and Steven McMillen and the Board of Directors -- clearly understand, as you heard John say, that we are all just passing through. We all make a contribution through our families and the work we do. But certainly, in order for us to have some sense of meaning in our own lives and to believe that the values and traditions that we have cherished will live on, we have to do more. We have to make them more creatively. And the artistic treasures, the cultural treasures of our country -- although they are rarely as old as the Millennium -- and the way that the rest of the world has contributed to what makes America unique, as we see from these extraordinary paintings, is truly one of the gifts that America has given to humanity over the course of our existence. The challenge for us now is how do we maintain and continue that American tradition?

Well, I can think of no better way than what we are doing this morning. For a great corporation to share these gifts of art with men and women and particularly children all over our

country is a statement of values. We may be holding this event in the old home of the Chicago Stock Exchange but it is now a part of an art museum. That, to me, is a perfect synthesis of what we mean when we think about how America has really recreated a whole concept of citizenship. So these pieces of art will be available now for children and others to see for them to honor the past and imagine the future. I'm particularly pleased that this collection will be available in all of the cities that we saw on the map and it will be, I hope, an inspiration and a challenge to others in the private sector as well as the non-profit sector to imagine how we all can give gifts to the future.

President Kennedy once said that the life of the arts is far from being a distraction to the life of a nation. It's very close to the center of a nation's purpose and a test of the quality of a nation's civilization. That's why we are making the celebration of American arts and culture into a part of the life of the White House, and it is also a central focus of our Millennium activities. What better way to honor the past and imagine the future than by celebrating and preserving the best that we have and by giving it the widest possible audience.

I was thinking as I listened to the descriptions of the art, how much art has meant to me. For someone who has absolutely no talent, who has no ability to try in any way to replicate artistically, musically or in any other capacity -- but what I admire so much in others. But I was very lucky, because I went to public schools where arts education was available, where we were exposed to the arts, where I can remember to this day the music teacher coming into the third grade playing opera for us -- she chose Aida because it had lots of animals in it -- she thought that would keep our attention. I can remember very well being shown works of art. I can remember so well coming to the Art Institute. I can't say that my life would have been entirely different if had not been for that experience, but I often have thought that it probably would have. And I think many of you in this audience can say the same. We have a special obligation to ensure that our public museums are available to the next generation of Americans and provide the same opportunities for imagining the future.

So thank you so much, Sara Lee Corporation, for this Millennium gift to America. You have set an extraordinary example for corporate citizens and support for the arts. I hope and trust that others will follow in your footsteps in the months and years ahead. And that all of us can look back and say that at the end of this century into the beginning of the next, that it was one of the most fertile eras in American history in terms of what we gave to and took from the arts in our country. Thank you very much. (Applause)