

Sculpture Garden Reception
East Room
November 6, 1998

**Remarks by
First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton
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I hope all of you have a chance to see this latest exhibit about which we are so pleased and of which we are so proud. There are a number of very distinguished guests here today. I know the Committee for the Preservation of the White House was announced into the room, and I am personally very grateful to each of them who serve with the permanent staff of the White House to make sure that we are constantly taking care of this house and presenting it in the best possible way to the people who visit here.

I am also pleased that Bill Ivey, the Chair of the National Endowment for The Arts, is here with us. I am very excited about Bill's leadership in Washington on behalf of the arts, and I want to thank Congressman Engel for being here. We are honoring some of his constituents as well. And to all of you, we are extremely grateful for your commitment and advocacy for the arts, and particularly for your commitment and advocacy for these sculptures.

Just yesterday here at the White House we held an awards ceremony at which the highest honors of the arts and humanities were given. The great outpouring of enthusiasm and excitement about the honorees is reflective of the growing appreciation around our country of the importance of the arts and humanities in our lives. It is not a luxury that a few people are entitled to or have access to, but a necessity for how we live our lives together and how we understand one another and our own humanity.

So again today, we are gathered to celebrate the indispensable role the arts play in shaping our nation and enriching our lives. I know that most of you have had the opportunity to view the sculptures, and I think that this exhibit certainly helps us appreciate the inspiration of one of the greatest sculptors of all time, and gives us yet another insight into sculpture and what it means to us and our lives.

Yesterday, I told the story about my husband's and my first date. I loved the art gallery at Yale, especially the sculpture garden there, and that was where we had our first date. It was closed because of a labor dispute, but we talked our way in--Bill was able to do that--in return for cleaning up the yard, which we were happy to do as well.

When we arrived here at the White House, we were so impressed with the permanent collection of pieces and other objects of historical significance to this

house and to the American people. We were surprised, however, that there was no sculpture exhibit here at the White House, particularly outdoors, where millions of visitors could see it. We began to talk about that, and with the support of the Preservation Committee and the expertise of J. Carter Brown, in addition to the assistance of Khaki Hockersmith, we were able to begin these exhibitions and showcase American contemporary artists. We came up with the idea of using the Jacqueline Kennedy Garden for sculpture. Certainly, the easiest part of putting the sculpture garden together was to put it in the Jacqueline Kennedy Garden, because of her very strong commitment to the arts.

This is the seventh exhibit here since 1993. And this one does have a special excitement because each of the pieces reflects the breathtaking diversity of America's artistic tradition. In each of these magnificent works, you can see the inspiration of Rodin, who I think has, for many of us, well earned the title the "father of modern sculpture," both by adhering to convention and by daring to break away from it.

There is no more important tribute to Rodin and the meaning of his work than the presence of our guests today. Iris Cantor and her husband, as you know, have been among the significant lenders as well as educators about the work of Rodin. Whether it is limestone and granite or marble and bronze, Rodin interprets the complete work of humanity, challenging us to examine images that are as familiar as a child's hand, a body reaching upward, or a family portrait. We can see the genius of this artist, and we are required to use our imagination, too.

As we approach this next millennium, we are paying tribute to our artists, our musicians, our philosophers and poets to express who we have been as a nation and who we are becoming. And I think that through this exhibit we are provoked into thinking a lot about those questions.

There are many people to thank for this current exhibition. I am particularly pleased that we have several of the artists here and I want to ask them to stand as I mention them. I want to welcome Stephen De Staebler, Bryan Hunt, George Segal, and I know there are a number of family members of William Zorach. I know that artists create on their own but then are dependent on others to make sure their work is put on exhibit. Certainly here, we could not have had this exhibition without some very important and generous support.

First, I want to thank Arnold Lehman, director of the Brooklyn Museum of Art in New York, for organizing this exhibit. The sculptures themselves were lent by the Iris and Gerald Cantor Foundation; the Brooklyn Museum of Art; the town of Greenwich, Connecticut; the Museum of Modern Art in New York; the National Gallery of Art here in Washington; the Neuberger Museum of Art at Purchase College, New York; the Isamu Noguchi Foundation in Long Island City, New York;

and the Whitney Museum of American Art. I want to thank all of those institutions for their contributions.

I also want to thank Betty Monkman, the White House Curator, and members of the Committee for Preservation. But most of all, I want to thank my friend Iris Cantor, who along with her late husband, Gerald Cantor, and her foundation, not only helped with this exhibit, but with others as well. She has also lent the two centerpieces of the current show: the castings of Rodin's "The Three Shades" and "The Thinker."

I first became acquainted with Iris and her late husband Bernie, in 1992, shortly after the presidential election when I learned that the Cantors were donating a bust of Balzac by Rodin to the Arkansas Arts Center in honor of our commitment to education. And in 1992, there was a celebration at that arts center. Up to that point I was so exhausted, and a friend of mine said that there were these wonderful people who were donating this bust, and so I quickly pulled myself together-- as much as I could-- and went up to meet Mrs. Cantor. It was a wonderful beginning to a friendship for us, and I am grateful that because of her cooperation "The Thinker" is placed in this exhibit. And, as some of you know, a cast of Rodin's "The Thinker" was placed in the Oval Office on Inauguration Day. It was Bernie's prized piece and it had never traveled until it was placed there. That is why it is a special pleasure that it found its place in this exhibit today. And in addition to this support of the arts, Iris Cantor has been a staunch supporter of the Breast Cancer Center at UCLA and many other good causes, particularly the arts and museums, from the Stanford Gallery to the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

And so I am particularly pleased that she could be here with us today so that all of us could thank her for being such a devoted friend to the arts and such a valued friend to the White House and a personal and valued friend to the President and me. I join with the President in thanking her. Iris, on behalf of all of us, we thank you. We only wish Bernie could be here today.

One of the unique aspects of America is the extraordinary philanthropy of so many Americans. We are blessed to have so many who are willing to share their good fortune with the community at large. We are grateful to everyone who understands the importance of the kind of commitment to the arts that is represented in such generosity.

I am grateful to so many Americans who, whether they make a magnificent gift of millions of dollars such as the Cantors or a small gift of tens of dollars, understand that part of what makes our country unique is this comprehension of ours that each of us has a role to play in supporting the quality of our lives through arts education and so many Americans are willing to do that on a regular basis.

So for me this is not only a wonderful way to say thank you to those who have given so much to the White House and particularly this sculpture exhibition, but to so many others around us who have given so much to so many institutions and have made such a difference in the life of arts and humanities. I want to thank all of you for appreciating the role the arts play and for your continuing support of giving gifts to the future which is one of the themes of our millennium celebration. By honoring the past we are imagining the future. We are continuing that tradition here today and you have given an extraordinary gift to so many of us. It is a great blessing that all of you and the thousands of visitors who come to the White House will be moved and inspired by the magnificent tributes to the imagination that stand here today.

Thank you all very much.