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**PHOTOCOPY  
PRESERVATION**

**FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON  
MASSACHUSETTS COLLEGE OF ART  
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Thank you. Thank you very, very much. You know I have been privileged and honored to speak at many events throughout our country and even around the world. I have been introduced by many distinguished men and women from one end of the world to the other. I don't know that I have ever been introduced by anyone for whom I have greater admiration and love than Johanna, and I don't know that anyone has ever been as effective in delivering an introduction that makes us all stop and think. There is a little bit of caution I would advise if someone who has known you for 33 years, who's as smart as Johanna is, introduces you. Take notes, because you are going to learn something that will be beneficial as you move forward to navigate your way. I want to thank Johanna because I am really here because of her. I have heard about the wonderful work that is done here at the Massachusetts College of Arts for many years -- ever since she began teaching here part time and then when she assumed full-time responsibilities. She wrote me back in July of 1997 to tell me about the 125 years that would be celebrated tonight, and asked if I would please be part of that celebration. Of course I was honored to say yes.

So it's a great pleasure for me to join her and to join all of you. I want to thank Kay Sloan and all of you who work here, the staff, and the administration, and the students. I want to thank the co-chairs who have done such a great job of putting together this evening. I want to thank the trustees who have shepherded this institution to the position that it holds today. And I want to thank all of you who are here to support this unique public institution.

In preparation for coming here, I read a little bit about the history of this remarkable place and how it grew out of an amazing consensus reached by leaders here in Boston and throughout Massachusetts in the late 1800's who were determined to foster the study and practice of the arts. Now think about what that means. A group of businessmen coming together and saying to themselves, "The kind of society we want to build will cause the arts to flourish, and we want that to be part of our legacy." The Massachusetts State Legislature passed a law in 1870 mandating both drawing classes for young people in the schools and free after work art classes for adults. That's a visionary position even today. So many of our public schools are cutting back on arts and music education. So many of our public colleges are closing departments and cutting back on offerings in the arts. And this institution stands alone amongst all the art colleges and art instruction programs as being the only public art college in America.

You know, the founding of this College of Art was perhaps even more revolutionary than the beginning of classes and the training of teachers because it literally began changing the idea of who could and should study art in this country. In a time when many people associated art

with affluence and privilege, the doors that opened here in 1873 opened wide enough to permit people from every walk of life and background. Ordinary working citizens began to view art as something that they too could aspire to, could practice, could appreciate. I've read that descendants of those first students still talk about how this school opened the world of art to an entire family and generations of families, because a great aunt or a great grandmother or an uncle could study here for free.

What an extraordinary legacy therefore you celebrate tonight. A legacy that embraces a deep commitment to teaching, to the tradition of service that this college represents, to a history of diversity among the student body, and an inspiration to all of us who believe that art plays a vital role, not a marginal role, but a vital role in our every day lives, in the lives of our children, and indeed in the lives of our fellow citizens. T.S. Elliot once said that "culture may be described simply as that which makes life worth living." And if that is the case, than you've done a lot to make a lot of lives worth living during the past 125 years. We could run down the list of alumni who've made their contributions, and we'd be here all night. Think of N.C. Wyeth's remarkable illustrations of favorite books like *Treasure Island* and *Robin Hood*, or Annie Lou Rogers' compelling cartoons depicting the early struggles for women's suffrage, or Warren Newcombe's memorable scenes in the *Wizard of Oz*. And as we saw in the wonderful depiction on television last night, William Wegman's whimsical photographs of his dogs. They and so many others have spread their creativity, their bold ideas, their path breaking visions across our nation and the world.

You know that Boston is a very special place in our country. There is so much history. There is so much that has happened here that has truly made America what it is today. Earlier I visited two historic sights, not too far from here, that reflect the same kind of creative spirit and imagination that has always been at the core of what we mean when we say the word America. I think about the Henry Wadsworth Longfellow House that I visited today because in preparing for that I read through some of his writings and his poetry and I came across this particular line: Art and poetry, he said, "will not till our lands; nor freight our ships; nor fill our granaries and our coffers; but they will enrich the heart, freight the understanding, and make up the garnered fullness of the mind." Longfellow understood, as did the founders of this institution, that much of what we value in life happens in the spaces that are filled by art and culture.

I often talk about how we can envision society as being a three-legged stool. There's the government that has to do it's job on behalf of the public good. There's the economy, the free marketplace that has to create the wealth and opportunity for people to lead their lives productively. Then there's the civil society, which embodies what happens between the government and the economy. Where really the stuff of what makes life worth living occurs, our family life, our religious and spiritual beliefs, our associations and friendships, and yes, our arts and culture.

We in America today have to recognize that as we stand on the brink of a new century and indeed a new millennium, we are likely to be judged far more in the future by our arts and

our culture than by anything else we might do or say. I felt that way again when I visited the African Meeting House on Beacon Hill later in the morning. Because there too it was people who came together, who expressed ideas, who fought for those ideas, who we now look back on and recognize and honor.

Yet we are living in a time where there is so little space devoted to public support for the arts. This institution stands alone. Why, despite its success, despite what it has already done to increase opportunity for people with creativity and imagination and artistic talent, why has it not been replicated all across our country? Why do we have battles year in and year out as to whether or not there should be any public support for the arts? Well, we have to stop and ask ourselves, do we really, as a nation, understand the significance that arts and culture play in defining who we are as individuals, and defining who we are collectively? I often ask that question because I think that there has been a real misunderstanding in our country about the role of the arts. There have been too many who still believe that those who pursue the arts do so out of personal pleasure or because they have a different bent of mind than others -- but that there is no real benefit in supporting their efforts and in trying to make sure that we have enough public space and resources devoted to ensuring that the creativity that flows from individuals can be nurtured so that it can be shared with the rest of us.

I sometimes think that this is not just an American phenomena but that it probably goes back to our earliest human ancestors. After all, they did not, after they began to gather in small clans and family groups, first express their feelings by inventing money. Instead, they drew. I think that is one of the real lessons that we can look back on. Here we have these earliest human beings and what were they striving for, what did they believe in, what were they trying to say? They were finding that special human trait that separates us from every other creature -- that attribute of imagination -- and they were using it. I sometimes imagine the scenarios of a young man or a woman wandering around not paying much attention while the rest of the clan is off on a mammoth hunt. All of the relatives are saying, you know, he just isn't with it. He's going to get all of us killed. And then back in the cave at night, when everyone else is asleep, from the flickering fire he takes a piece of charcoal, and starts drawing a mammoth. Out of his imagination comes an opportunity to share an experience that someone who had never seen a mammoth hunt would now understand.

That use of the imagination, that spark of creativity has always been recognized as one of the most significant attributes of humanity. And yet today at the end of this century, we have, as Johanna said, an ocean of information. We have a lot of commercial space devoted to creative endeavors. We have a lot of people who make their living in the mass media. And yet we have to wonder, is that kind of activity in and of itself, privately financed, enough? I would argue that it isn't.

It is important, particularly in a democracy, that those of us who are a part of this great democratic experience support the arts, and not leave it just to the commercial marketplace, as important as that is. There needs to be a constant replenishing of our public commitment to the

arts as well.

There is much we have to learn that we cannot learn solely from the consumer culture. There is much we have to learn by making it possible for individuals who see the world differently and in ways that are not commercially successful immediately to share that vision and point of view with us. We're learning a lot about the importance of art in the lives of young people who are otherwise disadvantaged.

I can make arguments on behalf of the arts that range from the economic in terms of what it does to promote economic development to the individual satisfaction that it gives to the deeper understanding of ourselves. But I would also like to make the argument that we now understand clearly how important arts education is to the full education of our young people. Isaac Edwards Clarke, a great promoter of the arts and arts education in the late 1800's, was concerned even back then about how -- if we did not have arts education in the schools, if we did not have places like this wonderful college available for young people -- we would not provide the backing and the background for people to find their own best talents. In today's environment, as I hear more and more about how budget cut backs are removing the arts and humanities from schools, how children are being deprived of opportunities to participate in art classes or music classes, I think we are doing a great disservice to the educational capacity that we should be building in this country.

It is something that all of us should be concerned about. In the last several years we have done a great deal of research and study to try to prove what I think is self evident to many of you in this room: that children learn in different ways. Different children bring different talents to the classroom. Some of them are stimulated by listening to a lecture, others are stimulated by getting their hands into a lump of clay. Some learn by doing, others learn by listening or reading. And we do a great disservice by cutting back on the ways that children can be enticed into learning, and can find the spark that might light up their lives.

In the last several years, because of this research and study, we have been able to prove that providing arts education -- starting in elementary school and moving through the middle school, junior high school, and high school years -- is one of the best ways to engage children in learning. It enhances their academic performance, their attendance at school, and their willingness to go on with further schooling. The President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities has published a series of studies which demonstrates very clearly that when children are given an opportunity to participate in the arts -- whether it be performing arts or visual arts or music, and when those programs are well organized and presented -- it can literally make the difference between lives of accomplishments and lives of hopelessness and failure. As the President's Committee showed in last year's report, called "Coming up Taller," arts and music education offered children safe and productive alternatives to crime, violence, gangs, and drugs.

We saw one young man who is now engaged in designing shoes who I think could stand for the thousands and thousands of other young people with talents that the arts can encourage if only given a chance. I've been in so many different schools around our country, and I've seen

the results of exposing young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to the arts, and I understand what that means to those children, to their families, to their teachers, and to the rest of us. Yet in place after place, I've been told that the first course that is cut when the budget crunch comes is the arts course, or the music course. Any of you who have seen the movie *Mr. Holland's Opus*, and can remember what kinds of programs and courses were available in the 1950's and 1960's to many of us growing up in middle class or working class communities and going to very large high schools would be astonished to learn now how little of that is still available to our children.

What does that mean? It means several things. It means that as a nation, we have retreated from the kind of commitment to the arts that we had at the end of the last century and through most of this century. Because in the years preceding the 1980's, arts education classes were offered much more widely than they are today. We have examples in our history going back to the Civil War; and going back to the Depression, where despite the economic difficulties and terrible conflicts, leaders decided to continue to move forward with education and arts because they understood that that was a part of what they were fighting for and striving for. In fact in 1962, when President Kennedy asked for public support for the arts, he reminded Americans that Abraham Lincoln ordered work to go on on the Capitol dome during the Civil War. Lincoln himself believed that being part of an artistic experience enabled him to clear his mind, to see a different perspective, and to continue the struggles that he was confronted with. President Lincoln said often during the war that the poetry he read and wrote, and the plays that he saw, and the people that he met through the arts, kept him going. Franklin Roosevelt, in the midst of World War II, dedicated the National Gallery of Art in Washington. They were not deterred by circumstances that today would seem daunting. They understood what they were fighting for.

President Kennedy said about them, "These leaders understood that the life of the arts, far from being an interruption, a distraction in the life of the nation, is very close to the center of a nation's purpose, and is the test of the quality of a nation's civilization." Well, we are facing that test ourselves, in large ways and small. It is one of my hopes that in the next several years, as we end this century and begin the next, that we will again have a renaissance of support for the arts, particularly arts education.

Those of us who care about the arts and the students that come here to this college I hope will also care about putting the arts back into our public schools. I want to applaud MassArt for the important role you are playing in promoting the arts in Boston's public schools, including your role in establishing Boston's first public high school for the arts. I also commend your efforts, including the event this evening, to promote the study of technology in the arts and to explore new ways of opening up the technology of the future not only to your students but to the broader community. One of the ways that we are hoping to celebrate the millennium through the White House Millennium Council is to encourage more public support for arts education. One of the reasons that I wanted to come here today, besides my deep and long lasting friendship with Johanna, was to bring attention to this institution which is not as widely known outside of

Massachusetts as it deserves to be -- so that more people would understand that the commitment that was made 125 years ago has not wavered.

With the announcement this evening that Kay made that the state will be providing \$2 million additional dollars, you can see that this Commonwealth understands well the role that this institution has played in the development of the people of this state. I hope that more states will follow suit. I hope that more people who understand what art means in their own lives will take the time and create the opportunity and provide the resources to make sure that art reaches as many people, particularly young people, as possible.

I recently was privileged to attend an event sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts in the company of Robert Pinsky, a poet well known to many of you and the current poet laureate. He and I went to something called a poetry slam. Now if you've never seen a poetry slam, it is a high speed, high spirited competition in which poets and students face off against one another by reading their own poems and then they are scored by a group of judges. Robert Pinsky and I and Robert Hass and Rita Dove, the former poets laureate, went to a middle school in Washington D.C. that served a housing project. All of these students were African Americans, all of them from very poor homes, and most of them were from single parent homes. And they recited the poems they had written.

Some of them had written poems about their own names, others about the plight of a homeless man or a fellow student who got caught up in the drug wars in their neighborhood. One wrote about the contributions of Duke Ellington. They talked of their pride and their joys and their pains. And they also talked about how poetry, and learning how to write poetry, helped them to express themselves and to communicate feelings they did not otherwise know they even had. Poetry enabled them -- as one young man said -- to put their anger on paper instead of acting it out. One boy recited a poem with wonderful lines like this: "I am so musical that when I write songs, you sing them for the rest of your life."

Shortly after that event, I attended a conference of the wives of heads of states in Santiago, Chile. As part of that conference, we were each asked to invite an artist from our country to come to Santiago to work with poor children and to produce a painting. I invited an artist by the name of Jesse Trevino, a Mexican American artist. He was a young man who was really down and out when he was a teenager, who came from a family he felt didn't support or understand him. And then in school, in one of those magical moments, he had a teacher -- an art teacher -- who recognized his skills and began to draw him out. And all of a sudden, he discovered painting and he painted up a storm.

He was then drafted and he served in Vietnam. He was in the medical corps, and during a fire fight he was badly wounded. When he woke up in a hospital, he found that he had lost his right hand. His painting hand. Instead of a hand, he has a hook.

As part of his rehabilitation he had to learn to use his left hand and he thought he would

never paint again. Finally, after a year in the hospital and a year of rehabilitation, he tentatively began to try to paint with his left hand. It got stronger and stronger, and now he is a painter of some renown -- painting with his left hand. He was down in Santiago with these children, and as we went from painter to painter, looking at the work that had been produced with the artist working with the children, I was told over and over again in English and in Spanish how much it meant for the artist to work with these children because of the way the children responded. It was especially meaningful for Mr. Trevino, because he felt that he was working with children who were like him -- even though they lived in a different country. Kids who weren't understood, who were left out. He later came to the White House, where he was part of our presentation of the awards to the various arts groups around our country that we're trying to recognize because of the work they are doing to reach out to young people, and to use the arts as a way of lifting up their spirits and their aspirations.

In the East Room of the White House, listening to the presentations, listening to the citations being read of art schools that were reaching out into communities; of after-school programs being run by not-for-profit community agencies in schools that had lost their art programs; of parents who came together and scraped up enough money for a part-time art teacher to keep teaching these children -- story after story. And I saw the faces of the young people who had come with the artists and the teachers to accept the awards. And I knew, as all of you know, that art in the lives of these young people was not marginal. It was not a luxury. But instead, it went to the real core of who they are and who they can be.

So I want to thank all of you. I want to thank you for believing in this institution. I want to thank you for supporting the public mission of MassArt. I want to thank you for reaching out into the community and providing opportunities to give young people from many different backgrounds a chance to show what they can do to learn the skills and discipline they will need to make a living at their art. One of my fervent hopes is that what you've done here will serve as an example to others and will inspire like-minded people in different parts of our country to do more at the collegiate level for the arts, and that you will inspire all of us to recommit ourselves to arts education for all of our young people. If we make that commitment, and we do the work that is necessary, then I believe we can look forward to a new century of energy like we saw with these young fashion designers. I was exhausted after they finished. The kind of attitude that they brought into this room, the sort of commitment that they demonstrated by their work, that's the sort of energy that is really at the core of what this democracy is, and what it needs to go forward into the future. I'm grateful for what you do. And I am hopeful that by doing it you will create an even broader constituency. And I am looking forward to the day when there are no longer any acrimonious debates about whether or not -- in the United States of America -- the arts deserve public support. Thank you very much.