

Friends of Arts & Preserv.

The White House

April 30, 1999

**PHOTOCOPY  
PRESERVATION**

THE WHITE HOUSE  
Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

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REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT AND THE FIRST LADY  
AT FRIENDS OF ART AND PRESERVATION IN EMBASSIES RECEPTION

The East Room

7:18 P.M. EDT

MRS. CLINTON: Good evening. Please be seated. Welcome to the White House. Tonight, the President and I again have the honor of expressing our appreciation for the contributions of the Friends of Art and Preservation in Embassies. Time and time again we have seen firsthand the fruits of your extraordinary generosity.

Imagine what a thrill it is to walk into the Ambassador's residence in Moscow and find Jasper Johns' "Two Flags." Or New Delhi, where I saw Robert Rauschenberg's "Visual Autobiography." And just this past February I was entrusted with the assignment of delivering Chuck Close's "Roy" to the Hague, which assignment I was happy to complete in the presence of Robin Duke and our Ambassador.

The President and I are certainly fortunate to be living in the White House at this special moment in history, as our nation and the world celebrates a new century and a new millennium. We have chosen as our theme for the millennial celebration, Honor the Past, Imagine the Future. And over the course of the last 14 months we have hosted a series of lectures and other activities designed to showcase the art, history and scientific achievements that define us as a nation. Our own White House Millennium Council is helping Americans all over the country preserve our cultural heritage and, in so doing, give permanent gifts to the future.

Well, that is what FAPE has been doing and you've been way ahead of the curve. Since 1986, you have been instrumental in helping to showcase America's extraordinary artistic heritage all over the world. And, now, with your millennial gift to the nation, you will make an even greater contribution to the preservation and protection of our priceless cultural heritage for future generations—generations that are likely to judge us more by our arts and culture than by, perhaps, some of the other things we do in our daily lives.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow said that art and poetry "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." Well, Longfellow understood, as do each of you, that much of what we value in life happens in that space filled by art and culture. I'm very pleased and proud that my husband and his administration have given unwavering support to the arts. And I'm very grateful that here in America we have the most unique public-private partnership in the history of the world to support our arts and culture.

Now, this house and this room that you're in, it's hard to imagine, has been the home of presidents for nearly 200 years. We will celebrate the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary, because it was on November 1, 1800, that John Adams moved from Philadelphia to what was then called The President's House. And it was in this room that Abigail Adams, who complained bitterly about how cold this place was and the lack of firewood to stoke the 13 fireplaces necessary to keep it even habitable, she hung her laundry in here because there were no fences around the property and she couldn't imagine just hanging it outside.

Well, in our time, we have different challenges than trying to figure out where to hang the laundry. But we do have the same continuing obligation to use this wonderful house, not only for the business that is conducted here on behalf of our nation, but also to continue the tradition of a real commitment to the arts and culture.

I know that for many of us trying to make that contribution is an integral part of who we are and how we live. I'm pleased that we've been able to start a sculpture garden in the Jacqueline Kennedy Garden, that we've been very privileged to bring 20<sup>th</sup> century American art to the White House on loan, and there are several paintings that I hope you'll have a chance to see before you leave, if you have not noticed them already. Gilbert Stuart's portrait of Dolley Madison now hangs in the Red Room, which Mrs. Madison used as her sitting room.

And, of course, if it were not for Mrs. Madison, the famous Stuart portrait of George Washington hanging right there would have been lost in the War of 1812, when the British burned the White House in 1814. Whenever I say that I always get a note or a call from the British Ambassador—and it's just history, I'm not making any comment whatsoever. (Laughter.)

In 1996, we added the first work by an African American artist to the collection. And I'm very pleased and I hope you'll see the Tanner, "Sand Dunes at Sunset" in Atlantic City, interested Green Room; and the first work by a 20<sup>th</sup> century woman artist, Georgia O'Keeffe, also hangs in the Green Room and we added that in 1997.

So there is much to celebrate as you gather for this annual event. And I'm very grateful that each of you has made it part of your mission to really promote American art and culture around the world.

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THE PRESIDENT: Well, let me say to all of you, first, welcome. I want to thank Jo Carole Lauder, Robin Chandler Duke, Ann Gund, everyone else who has worked on this program.

You know, I look forward to this every year. This is a night when I can appreciate what is constant about our embassies, rather than what is changing in our relationships with the countries involved. (Laughter.) And I must say that tonight is especially important. I want to welcome the artists, those who have made such generous gifts. Any number of representatives of the governments of other nations are here tonight, and we welcome them, as well. I want to say a special word of thank you to Joel Shapiro for helping to make our new embassy in Ottawa a showcase of the best in American art.

The Arts in Embassies program is quite a success all around the world. And as you might imagine, Hillary and I, because we have had the opportunity and the responsibility to travel quite a lot, have seen more of the fruits of your labors than almost any other Americans. I can tell you,

having spent the night in any number of embassies, held any number of receptions, one of the things that people always comment on is the art. And many, many people come to see the President when I'm in a given country who don't know anything about our Arts in Embassies program, and so I have become one of your better ambassadors of goodwill—(laughter)—in explaining how we come to have all this magnificent art in our embassies throughout the world.

Senator Specter, I have never claimed that Congress spent taxpayers' money on it, but neither have I denied it. (Laughter.)

And as all of you know—and Hillary was talking about some of the art we have in the White House—one of the great pleasures of living here is just living around the art that is here. And to all of you who have contributed to the art in the White House, many over several decades, I am profoundly grateful for that, as well.

Robin mentioned that this is not the easiest of moments for our country because of what we are trying to achieve in Kosovo. And she said that it was, therefore, especially appreciated that Hillary and I would have you here tonight. I would argue that it's especially important that you be here tonight. And I'd like to read you something that I hope makes the point.

In the springtime of 1941, as fascism spread across Europe, destroying lives and liberties, President Roosevelt spoke at the dedication of the National Gallery here in Washington. His words seemed to me particularly relevant today and I'd like to share a few of them with you.

He said, "Art is part of the present life of all the living and creating peoples—all who make and build. These paintings...are symbols of the human spirit. To accept this work today is to assert that the freedom of the human spirit shall not be utterly destroyed."

All around the world our American embassies are helping people to follow the path of freedom and democracy. Our efforts and those of our NATO allies are standing for that freedom and against the principle of ethnic cleansing, racial and religious exclusivity as a basis for killing and uprooting people and destroying their cultures.

This is a particularly painful thing for any American with any sense of history, for the Serbs were our grand allies in World War II. They stood against Hitler and they fought bravely. And they have their legitimate historical grievances, as do most ethnic groups in Europe, Asia, Africa or any other part of the world. We hope to be reconciled with them.

But one of the things we all have to learn is to affirm our common humanity, even it means setting aside our legitimate historical grievance. And that is what we are working for. That is what art, the advancement of art, the defense of the freedom of expression and creativity represent—our common humanity, the triumphs over all the differences that, when contained, make life more interesting; when unleashed as a weapon of war, make it unbearable.

So I ask you to stay with this program long after Hillary and I leave the White House, as the best expression not only of artistic creativity, but the universal rights of human beings to be free.

Thank you and God bless you.

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7:41 P.M. EDT