11-9-00
Sculpture Garden Receipts

REMARKS BY FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
THE VIEW FROM DENVER SCULPTURE GARDEN EXHIBIT
THE STATE DINING ROOM
NOVEMBER 9, 2000

Thank you all. Welcome to the White House for a celebration of our 8th exhibit of 20th century American sculpture -- "The View from Denver." I know many of you have already visited it -- and I am so grateful to the Denver Museums for extending their loan of these extraordinary works so that more people can see them over the next few months.

As with all the exhibits we've had these past six years, this one wouldn't have been possible without the artists whose works grace the Jacqueline Kennedy Garden. Many of them are here with us today. And I want to thank Deborah Butterfield, Preston Duwyenie [Dew-weeney], Richard Hunt, Robert Mangold, Manuel [Man-you-el] Neri, and Isaac Witkin for being part of this exhibit, and educating and inspiring us all. I also want to thank all of those who helped bring these works to the White House, especially Lewis Sharp and the Denver Art Museum; Cynthia Madden-Leitner [Light-ner] and the Museum of Outdoor Arts; and Ginny Williams and her Family Foundation.

This latest exhibit is part of the month-long celebration we are having to mark the 200th anniversary of the White House.

Last week, as part of a reenactment ceremony, my husband welcomed the very first Presidential inhabitant of the White House. This visitor looked very much like President John Adams as he arrived at the South Portico 200 years ago with a single steward in a carriage pulled by four aging horses.

But the White House itself has certainly changed since then. When John Adams arrived, the beautiful lawn where we now welcome visitors from around the world was a swampy forest. The plaster walls of the House were still damp and only six rooms were habitable. When Mrs. Adams came a few weeks later, she took to drying her laundry in the East Room. Just a half dozen staff members were available to help her manage the drafty house. And most of her china had been broken on the trip down.

And yet, President and Mrs. Adams, like all those who followed them, understood the importance of the White House in all its essential roles -- as a home for the First family, as a living museum for all citizens to enjoy, and as a emblem of democracy for the world. You know, I think about this a lot as I travel from country to country, and meet people who look to America and Americans for inspiration as they struggle and sacrifice to build their own democracies.

What more powerful symbol is there of our values and ideals as a nation than the White House. And that's why, for the past eight years, we have tried to make this House a showcase for the best of America. We've tried to make sure that every State visit, every concert, every exhibit, every tour, and every event, represents the depth and breadth of our history, culture, ideas, and innovations.

That has meant hosting Millennium Lectures that featured, for example, Stephen Hawking talking about the future of science and Elie Weisel warning about the perils of indifference. It has meant telling the stories of all Americans by adding to the White House collection the first painting by an African American and the first work by a 20th century woman to be displayed in the public rooms. It has meant featuring the best of American wine and food in the White House again -- and showcasing a diversity of art forms – from gospel to jazz, and from crafts to the sculpture we celebrate today.

I have always loved sculpture, especially contemporary sculpture. And, in fact, as many of you know, my first date with Bill Clinton took place at the Yale University Art Gallery. We went to see a Mark Rothko exhibit and pieces by Henry Moore in the sculpture garden. But when we arrived, the museum was closed. So, Bill told the janitor we'd clean up the garbage in the garden if he'd let us in. The rest, as they say, is history.

Shortly after Bill's 1993 inauguration, I spent a lot of time walking around the 18 acres of White House grounds, and fell in love with the Jacqueline Kennedy Garden. With its beautiful alcoves, it seemed like a perfect place to feature outdoor sculpture, something that was, at the time, missing from the White House grounds. I knew that in that same spot, Edith Roosevelt had built a colonial garden reminiscent of those at Mount Vernon. And that in 1965, Lady Bird Johnson had created the current garden as a way of paying tribute to Mrs. Kennedy.

As you all know, one of Mrs. Kennedy's greatest legacies was her work to improve the White House art collection and make culture part of everyone's lives. And so, when J. Carter Brown, Kaki Hockersmith, and I began planning for a series of sculpture exhibits, we felt it was only fitting for her garden to become the setting.

It's hard to believe that it's been six years since we mounted that first exhibit of sculptures from museums in the Midwest -- and I want to thank its curator George Neuberg who is here with us. Since that time, more than 12 million people have walked through the East Colonnade of the White House, and looked out at one of the most visited art spaces in the country. They have seen exhibits featuring works from museums in regions all over the country. They've seen works by Native American artists and those inspired by Rodin.

Many have come up to me later to tell me how moved they've been by Elizabeth Catlett's image of a mother tightly embracing her small child. Or Alexander Calder's Five Rudders which maintained its perfect balance as it was pushed about by the wind. Or works by Georgia O'Keeffe, Roy Lichtenstein, Allan Houser and all the other artists we've featured.

All and all, more than 100 sculptures have graced this garden. And I hope that far more people will be able to enjoy these exhibits because of a recently published book by my good friend David Finn. His volume, 20th Century American Sculpture in the White House Garden, was published in October by Harry Abrams. It is truly a beautiful book, with color photographs of the works by David and a wonderful essay on the history of the garden by White House Curator Betty Monkman.

I am grateful to David for many things, not the least of which is the care he took in immortalizing these exhibits. And I am grateful to Betty for all she does every day, including her invaluable help in making this book and the exhibits it portrays possible.

"The View from Denver" will be the last exhibit mounted during the Clinton Administration. But I hope with all my heart that it will not be the last group of sculptures showcased in the Jacqueline Kennedy Garden. I hope that the future First Families who have the privilege of living in the White House will continue sharing America's greatest sculptures with more of our citizens.

I often talk about how when the British came to burn down the White House during the war of 1812, the one thing that Dolley Madison was determined to save was the Gilbert Stuart portrait of George Washington, which still hangs in the East Room. She knew that art was not marginal, but central, to America and the White House.

For me, art has always been a great source of personal inspiration. And I have always believed that our paintings, dance, sculpture, and music help us define who we were as a nation, who we are, and who we want to become.

And as I get ready to start this new chapter in life, I am profoundly grateful for the privilege I've had to share some of our greatest art and culture with people from all over America and the world. And I'm very grateful, as well, to all of you not only for joining us today, but for all you have done to give art the place it deserves in American life – at the White House, in the schools, and in the hearts and minds of people everywhere.

Now, no one has worked harder to make that possible than our next speaker. J. Carter Brown is the Emeritus Director of the National Gallery of Art, a member of the Committee for the Preservation of the White House, and an adviser and friend to the White House since the Kennedy Administration. Whenever I need wonderful advice about preserving the house, or expanding the collection, I always know where to turn. Please join me in welcoming my friend, J. Carter Brown.

[He speaks]

The fact is, the dream to bring sculpture to the White House only came true because of the inspiration, imagination, support and dedication of so many people. It happened because of J. Carter Brown, Kaki Hockersmith, Rex Scouten, Betty Monkman, and her staff in the White House Curator's office.

It happened because of the artists, the directors and staff of the eight museums who organized the exhibits, and the institutions that so generously agreed to lend us part of their collections. But we know that none of these organizations could have absorbed the expense of creating this series alone.

So, as we celebrate this eighth and last exhibit, I want to take a moment to thank one person who made this dream possible. It was Iris Cantor, who, along with her late husband, B. Gerald Cantor, agreed to underwrite the expense of the exhibits and lend two of her own pieces to the Inspired by Rodin exhibit. Iris is a dear friend to me, and my entire family. But, even more than that, she is a great friend to the arts -- and to all of those who are able to experience them because of her great generosity.

It is a great personal honor to present Iris Cantor with a certificate from the Committee for the Preservation of the White House in appreciation of all she's done to support the Sculpture Garden exhibits. I've also framed all eight brochures from these exhibits, as a reminder of the art that she's made available to the White House and the millions who have come from all over the world to see it. On behalf of them, on behalf of my husband, and on behalf of a very grateful nation, I want to say: thank you, Iris.

[present certificate]

And now I'd like to invite all of you to tour the Sculpture Garden on your way out.