

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

Statement by Kaywin Feldman, Director of the National Gallery of Art, to the Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies, United States House of Representatives, March 3, 2020.

Chair McCollum, Ranking Member Joyce, Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to meet with you today. It is my pleasure to talk to you about the National Gallery of Art.

This month marks one year since I began my work as Director. Representing the Gallery in this role is an extraordinary honor and I am grateful for the confidence and support of the Gallery's Board of Trustees. I hope to use this opportunity to build on the work of my predecessors and explore new ways for the Gallery to connect with audiences throughout the country. On a personal note, returning to the capital region is especially meaningful to me as my father, a Coast Guard Captain, is laid to rest in Arlington Cemetery. I am proud to continue his tradition of service to the nation. Thank you for welcoming me to Washington so warmly and for the honor of addressing you today.

Since arriving in Washington, the concept of generosity has taken on a new significance for me. The Gallery was founded with an unprecedented act of generosity by an American citizen, Andrew W. Mellon, who was Secretary of the Treasury at the time. He offered the nation his incomparable collection of paintings and sculpture and the funds to construct the Gallery's monumental West Building. President Franklin D. Roosevelt's acceptance of the gift and the subsequent Joint Resolution of Congress signed in 1937 established the Gallery and authorized the government to provide funds for the upkeep, administrative expenses, and costs of operations, including the protection and care for the works of art for the purpose of exhibiting the collections to the public free of charge. Mr. Mellon's generosity, supported by the commitment of Congress, informs everything we do. Our board, donors, and staff are committed to Mr. Mellon's vision to welcome all Americans and visitors to our nation's capital to enjoy this rich cultural inheritance. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Congress and the Appropriations committees and staff for your continued support of the National Gallery of Art.

The National Gallery of Art is proud to serve one of the largest visitor audiences of any museum in the world. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2019, we welcomed more than 4 million people to our campus on the National Mall and reached an additional audience of more than 7 million people through the website and social media. Additionally, original works of art from the Gallery's permanent collection were loaned to 116 museums in cities across the United States. The Gallery also disseminates videos, DVDs, and teaching materials to affiliates such as public television stations, cultural institutions, and libraries, reaching millions more Americans every year.

The West and East Buildings that comprise the National Gallery of Art are landmark buildings, as significant as the great works of art that they contain. The West Building, designed by John Russell Pope, opened in 1941 and the East Building, designed by I. M. Pei, also a gift of the Mellon family and foundation opened in 1978. The Sculpture Garden, given to the nation by the

Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation, opened to the public in 1999 and is one of the most popular outdoor spaces in Washington. Private donors have generously supported federal funding over the past 79 years and contributed artworks that built upon Mr. Mellon's original gift to create a world-renowned collection of over 156,100 works of art.

A robust program of repairs and renovations to keep the buildings and grounds functioning efficiently, securely, and safely is essential to protect and preserve the buildings and their priceless contents for future generations. Since 1997, the Gallery's Master Facilities Plan (MFP), a comprehensive capital renewal program, has guided planning and execution of major capital projects. The Gallery appreciates the Committee's enduring support for this program through annual appropriations. As stewards of the Gallery's buildings, this investment allows us to better protect our collections and visitors and also re-build our critical engineered systems.

In 2019, with your support, another major phase of public space renovations in the East Building began. This project includes fire and life safety improvements, building systems renovation, replacement of the atrium skylight, which has not been renovated since the East Building opened in 1978 and has begun to leak, and accessibility improvements. Construction scheduled to start in the year ahead includes replacement glass for the atrium skylight, a new fire stair and major electrical and other systems renovations. These renovations will preserve the East Building, a timeless masterpiece, reduce risks to the collection, staff, and public, and increase public accessibility.

This past year the Gallery partnered with the Smithsonian Institution to incorporate art storage for the Gallery's collection in a future expansion at the Smithsonian's Museum Support Center. The new shared facility, an efficient and cost-effective joint initiative, will address the needs of both the Smithsonian and the Gallery at a significantly lower cost than two independent facilities. When completed, the new facility will provide for permanent secure off-site storage of the Gallery's collection and permit closed galleries in the West Building, currently used for art storage, to be returned to the public display of art.

The Special Exhibitions Program is the cornerstone of the Gallery's educational mission and demonstrates the public and private sectors working together for the benefit of the American people. Major works of art are loaned from public and private collections around the world to be shared with the millions of visitors to the Gallery and to our website. The Gallery plays a significant leadership role nationally and internationally through the organization and presentation of special exhibitions, many of which travel to art museums outside Washington.

This past year, the Gallery focused attention on both familiar and unexplored artists and collections. Two artists, separated by six centuries, received well-deserved individual attention in the breathtaking exhibitions *Oliver Lee Jackson: Recent Paintings* and *Verrocchio: Sculptor and Painter of Renaissance Florence*. Oliver Jackson, a senior figure in contemporary painting whose expressive, figurative work, treating universal themes from the perspective of an African sensibility, has been a force in contemporary art for 50 years. Renowned in his generation but

never featured in a monographic exhibition in the United States was the towering Andrea del Verrocchio (c. 1435–1488), who was also the teacher of artists Leonardo da Vinci and Sandro Botticelli. The exhibition used groundbreaking technical research to explore Verrocchio’s materials and techniques, offering revelations about his artistic choices.

In recent weeks, we have opened two additional extraordinary exhibitions, *True to Nature: Open-Air Painting in Europe, 1780-1870* and *Degas at the Opéra*. *True to Nature* addresses the tradition of sketching outdoors in oil paints, a crucial part of art education since the later 18th century. Generally small and informal, often on paper or cardboard, these pictures have been chosen for their immediacy, freshness and “truth to nature.” *Degas at the Opéra* explores Edgar Degas’s lifelong attachment to the world of the Paris Opéra. His enduring fascination with this world - its physical spaces, its people and its performances—profoundly shaped his art, resulting in the creation of some of the most beloved and iconic works in history.

Educational initiatives, supported primarily through private funding sources and offered free of charge, feature programs designed for diverse audiences—scholars, teachers, students, and local, national and international visitors. Each week, visitors to the Gallery can attend a variety of lectures, tours, concerts, and films. Programs developed for schools include tours designed for all grade levels and high school seminars for local teens, as well as a national teacher training institute held each summer.

In January 2019, the education department launched a Massive Open Online Course to provide a framework for developing critical thinking through art to teachers throughout the United States and around the globe. Other new educational offerings included Storytime, the Gallery’s first bilingual children’s program, occurring on the first Friday of each month. Two new programs were launched that are rooted in strategies to cultivate empathy and perspective-taking in art: Creating Connections and Art of Looking. Facilitators in both programs invite visitors to slow down, to articulate observations, ideas, and questions about a single work of art over a sustained period of time, and to practice active listening to stay open to different points of view in a shared experience.

In the past fiscal year, the Gallery has significantly grown existing community programs, more than doubling attendance at our NGA Nights events, which feature live music and dance performances, pop-up talks from Gallery educators, and hands-on art-making activities. Also, we have more than quadrupled attendance at our education studio’s drop-in art making programs that serve families with children of all ages.

Through the Gallery’s Make an Appointment program, scholars and all members of the public are given access to the library and its image collections, the print study room, the photograph study room, curatorial records, and Gallery archives.

The Gallery is a world-renowned center for scholarly study of the visual arts. The Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts (CASVA) was founded in 1979 to host scholars from

universities and sister institutions across the United States and abroad to study the production, use, and cultural meaning of artworks. CASVA programs include fellowships, seminars, and scholarly publications. The Gallery's art research library is one of the world's most respected resources with over 517,000 volumes on the history of art available on-site to scholars and the general public and through interlibrary loan. The library also contains a rare book collection of over 16,000 volumes.

The conservation department is one of the largest and most comprehensive facilities among the world's art museums. It is not only dedicated to the preservation of the Gallery's works of art, but also conducts scientific research to advise the field and collaborates widely across the nation. The division houses specialized departments for the treatment and care of paintings, works on paper, objects, photographs, textiles, and frames.

The FY 2021 President's Budget provides \$161,587,000 for the National Gallery of Art and supports 785 full-time equivalent positions. This total includes \$147,174,000 for Salaries and Expenses and \$14,413,000 for Repair, Restoration, and Renovation.

The National Gallery of Art provides its millions of visitors with an enjoyable and rewarding experience with the world's artistic heritage through the permanent collection and special exhibitions. In my first year as director, I have spent time looking at our collections and acquisition plans to identify gaps and to explore how we can fill those to include a greater diversity of artists. This great institution will become even more significant by representing the expansive diversity of the American people. I am extremely excited to report that the Board of Trustees recently approved the accession into the collection of its first major work by a Native American artist – a monumental mixed media work by Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, entitled *Target: I See Red*, now on view in the East Building along with other exceptional art of the 20th century.

We look forward to continuing the vision and the high standards of excellence established by Andrew W. Mellon. I am deeply grateful for the support this committee has provided me in fulfilling changes to the organizational structure that will help continue and grow the Gallery's service to the American people. During my first year, I have met with nearly every employee across the Gallery in almost 100 meetings to learn more about what they love and value at the National Gallery of Art, and the ways in which we can improve our service to our visitors. I am excited about the new executive officers who are focusing on building a national strategy to serve more Americans where they live, expand audience engagement, and enhance the visitors' experiences.

We believe that art is essential in enriching the lives of all Americans. The National Gallery of Art is a world-class art museum and we hope that every American will share in this gift. In the coming years, I look forward to updating you on new developments and enhancements as we undertake a strategic planning process and embrace this living institution that connects people with some of the greatest triumphs of human creativity. Thank you.