

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, May 12, 2022

Chair Pingree, 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 and our fiscal year 2023 federal budget request and to thank you for the fiscal year 2022 enacted budget which provided the funds necessary as we reopened to an audience eager to return to seeing the nation's collection in person.

Like the nation we serve, the National Gallery of Art has endured two tumultuous and challenging years marked by a global pandemic. We confronted temporary closures of our galleries, the postponement of long-awaited exhibitions, and curtailment of our hundreds of free public programs onsite, from concerts, films, and tours to gallery talks and symposia. As warranted, we implemented mitigation protocols throughout the pandemic, introducing ticketing procedures, masking and vaccination protocols, and flexible telework for staff with sufficient portable work. The National Gallery of Art has become adept at pivoting to keep the museum open and available for our visitors, while protecting the health and safety of our staff and guests.

We have been a museum that persevered and innovated. Through many challenges, the National Gallery's powerful mission and vision for the future, matched with a talented and dedicated staff and generous and patriotic supporters, helped us continue our vital service to the nation.

Paul Mellon, son of our founder Andrew Mellon, said at the National Gallery's 1941 dedication, "It was my father's hope . . . that the National Gallery would become not a static but a living institution, growing in usefulness and importance to artists, scholars, and the general public." Taking inspiration from his words, the museum has renewed our efforts to reach national audiences and offer programs with an enhanced focus on public service.

One year ago, the National Gallery adopted a new mission statement: The National Gallery of Art serves the nation by welcoming all people to explore and experience art, creativity, and our shared humanity. Concurrently, we unveiled a set of strategic priorities centered on serving the nation and engaging diverse audiences with excellent collections, exhibitions, and programs. We also created a new logo and visual identity, enabling us to add additional signage for visitors navigating our 25-acre campus. The emphasis on National in our new logo reflects our renewed commitment to serve as the nation's art museum and to becoming more open, inclusive, and welcoming to everyone.

The FY 2023 President’s Budget provides \$209,240,000 for the National Gallery of Art and supports 793 full-time equivalent positions. This total includes \$170,240,000 for Salaries and Expenses and \$39,000,000 for Repair, Restoration, and Renovation. Relative to FY 2022 Enacted, Salaries and Expenses increase by \$13,821,000 including \$6,781,000 for mandatory pay increases and \$7,040,000 for non-pay costs for cybersecurity and fixed information technology costs, security command center renovations, facilities maintenance, and other costs necessary to sustain day to day operations. The Repair, Restoration, and Renovation account increases by \$14,919,000 for the joint art storage project with the Smithsonian.

The National Gallery of Art provides its millions of visitors onsite with an enjoyable and meaningful experience with the world’s artistic heritage through the permanent collection and special exhibitions. Our engaging special exhibitions, adjusted by scheduling challenges, carried on with stunning presentations that provided rewarding experiences for 1.7 million of visitors in 2021. These exhibitions included *Lynda Benglis; Clouds Ice, and Bounty; Aquatint: From Its Origins to Goya; The New Woman Behind the Camera; and James Van Der Zee’s Photographs: A Portrait of Harlem*. We also enlivened spaces in unexpected ways with three temporary East Building installations by contemporary artists Sarah Cain, Avish Khebrehzadeh, and Kay Rosen.

Last month we opened *Afro-Atlantic Histories*, which takes an in-depth look at the historical experiences and cultural formations of Black and African people through the eyes of artists since the 17th century. At the end of May, we debut *American Silence: The Photographs of Robert Adams*—a remarkable selection of works that show us the wonder and fragility of the American West, a subject this Subcommittee knows well. Later in 2022 we will offer a wide range of presentations including *The Renaissance in the North: New Prints and Perspectives; The Woman in White: Joanna Hiffernan and James McNeill Whistler; The Double: Identity and Difference in Art since 1900; Called to Create: Black Artists of the American South; Sargent and Spain; and Vittore Carpaccio: Master Storyteller of Renaissance Venice*.

Travelling exhibitions and loans from the permanent collection extended public access to the artworks to local communities across the country and around the globe. Over the past five years, travelling exhibitions were on public view in 61 museums across the country and abroad and individual works of art were loaned to museums in 36 states and 24 foreign countries.

Since 2020, the National Gallery has improved collections and acquisition plans to better reflect the diversity of the nation. This great institution will become even more significant by representing the expansive diversity of the American people. We welcomed our first painting by Faith Ringgold—her iconic *The American People Series #18: The Flag is Bleeding* from 1967.

A significant number of works have entered the collection by Black and international artists including Emma Amos, Roy DeCarava, Leonardo Drew, Melvin Edwards, Oliver Lee Jackson, Wayne Miller, Joe Minter, Christopher Myers, John Outterbridge, Gordon Parks, Howardena Pindell, Betye Saar, Rosie Lee Tompkins, and Carrie Mae Weems, among others. A selection of these acquisitions including Njideka Akunyili Crosby, David C. Driskell, Daniel Lind-Ramos, Zanele Muholi, Hank Willis Thomas, and Mickelene Thomas are currently on view in the current exhibition *Afro-Atlantic Histories*. The National Gallery also acquired over 40 works by Black artists from the American South represented in the Souls Grown Deep Foundation that will be featured in an upcoming exhibition in September 2022.

Among the outstanding works acquired by artists of Latinx descent are a painting and a sculptural relief by Cuban artist Carmen Herrera, as well as works by María Berrío, Manuel Alvarez Bravo, and Guillermo Galindo. Works by Native American artists include Jaune Quick-to-See-Smith, whose paintings are the first by a Native American artist to enter the collection, G. Peter Jemison, James Luna, and Marie Watt.

Several works by women artists spanning the globe have also recently entered the collection including works by Carla Acardi, Chakaia Booker, Sarah Cain, Nicole Eisenman, Lavinia Fontana, Sonia Gomes, Susan Hiller, Orit Hofshi, Dora Maar, Louise Nevelson, Rozeal (formerly known as Iona Rozeal Brown), Yvonne Thomas, JoAnn Verburg, and Zarina.

Katharina Fritsch's *Hahn/Cock*, affectionately known as the Blue Rooster, which keeps watch over Capitol Hill now calls the East Building Roof Terrace, its permanent roost. The adored 14-foot-tall sculpture of a blue rooster, an animal often associated with regeneration, awakening, and strength, was officially donated to the nation's art museum on its 80th anniversary in March 2021 by Glenstone Museum in honor of the resilience of the American people during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We are committed to the European canon of work, and we recently acquired works by artists such as Giovanni Boldini, Jan Brueghel the Elder, Adriaen Coorte, Dosso Dossi, Jean Dughet, Giorgio Fossati, Anne-Louis Girodet de Roussey-Trioson, Dirck Hals, Aurelio Lomi, Francesco Marcolini, Achille-Etna Michallon, Morazzone, Isack van Ostade, Frans Snyders, and Friedrich Sustris, among others.

The National Gallery is home to one of the most highly respected and extensive conservation laboratories in the world. Staff work hand-in-hand with colleagues in many disciplines to preserve works of art, support exhibition and loan programs, study the materials and techniques of artists, advance the conservation profession, provide educational opportunities for art-care professionals, and foster an understanding of works of art. Founded in 1972, the Conservation Division is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. The division is comprised of a world-class team of conservators with specialties in paintings, three-dimensional objects, works on paper, photographs, textiles, and frames, as well as scientists, technicians, administrative support staff, specialists in preventive care, fellows, and interns. The division's extraordinary achievements include research and publications that advance the fields of conservation, conservation science, and art history. The conservation department is dedicated to public service and acts as a preeminent resource for research and expertise for museums across the country and around the world.

The National Gallery of Art is proud to serve one of the largest visitor audiences of any museum in the world. Since I last testified before this Subcommittee in the spring of 2020, after multiple closings and reopenings, I am proud to report that our 2021 attendance was 1.7 million, the second largest attendance for an art museum in the United States and the fifth largest globally.

Through a robust program of engagement across the National Gallery's digital channels, we increased digital attendance by nearly 50%. Our website and social media platforms featured 360-degree virtual exhibition tours, a new storytelling blog, a podcast that brought musicians together with visual works of art in the collection, and a fresh approach to video on YouTube.

We have grown to nearly 17 million unique visitors to the website annually, and from January 2020 to today there has been a 13% increase in total followers and 32% increase in engagement across our social media channels, and 2.3 million views of videos on our website and YouTube.

In addition, despite supply-chain and logistics challenges caused by the pandemic, the National Gallery's traditional publishing program produced ten volumes and a journal on a variety of art-related topics researched by staff curators and conservators as well as by other national and international scholars.

The National 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.

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 continued throughout the pandemic. 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. Popular educational lesson plans were reconceived to serve teachers working with remote classrooms and included art activities. Our scholarly lectures engaged large audiences in a virtual format. A particular highlight was the 2021 John Wilmerding Symposium on American Art and Community Celebration held in honor of Alma Thomas, a pioneering DC artist. This year our daylong in person festival took place in late April and highlighted the arts and cultures of the African Diaspora.

I am pleased to report that our community and public programs will fully return this summer, with a full slate of lectures, tours, concert series, and film programs. Back by popular demand, the evening program National Gallery Nights features live music and dance performances, pop-up talks from National Gallery educators, and hands-on art-making activities. For the first time ever, this program is scheduled for the West Building this spring. In fact, the second event takes place tonight.

For more than two decades, the Sculpture Garden has been a respite for visitors to the National Mall. In November the Sculpture Garden Ice Rink reopened with record-setting attendance to this beloved winter activity after the prior year's season was canceled due to the pandemic. A favorite DC summer tradition, Jazz in the Garden also returns after a two-year pandemic hiatus with ten free concerts beginning next week, with performances ranging in style from jazz to Afro-Cuban and bluegrass.

Scholarship has long been an institutional priority at the National Gallery. Founded in 1979 as an essential part to the National Gallery's East Building, the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts (the Center) is a research institute that fosters study of the visual arts globally, from prehistoric times to the present. The Center welcomes collaboration between fellows in-residence and the National Gallery's art collection, library, and museum colleagues. Recently developed initiatives and partnerships to enhance the Center's work include a new partnership with the Smithsonian Latino Center. In January 2021, the Center welcomed our first intern, who worked with the Afro-Atlantic Histories team members on object research and exhibition design. In March 2021, the Center announced a multiyear undergraduate paid internship program in partnership with Howard University and with the support of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

The first paid undergraduate internship offered by the National Gallery, this four-year pilot program aims to create pathways to careers in museums and arts-related organizations for students attending historically Black colleges and universities and other institutions that serve populations historically marginalized in museums and academia. The internship program builds upon years of partnership with Howard and the Center, including the cosponsorship of the annual James A. Porter Colloquium on African American Art and Art of the African Diaspora since 2019. We look forward to welcoming the first Howard interns to the Center and the National Gallery in September.

With the Committee's support of the Repair, Restoration, and Renovation appropriation, we are nearing completion of public space renovations in the East Building, which began in 2019. This project focused on replacement of the massive atrium skylight and includes fire and life safety improvements such as a new fire stair, building systems renovation including upgrades to the main electrical service, and accessibility improvements. The skylight glass installation is now complete with 400 new glass units installed and the East Building is currently closed to safely remove the suspended work platform in the atrium. Completion is expected in June at which time the East Building will reopen to the public while the remaining electrical and HVAC work continues through the end of the year.

At the end of 2021, a major construction contract was awarded to replace the West Building roof and for exterior stone repairs to perform essential repairs to preserve the building envelope and exterior façade. Art relocations will begin soon, with one quadrant of the main floor galleries off-view at a time. The project is expected to take two and a half years. This work is essential to maintaining the building envelope and restoring the exterior façade.

With this Committee's continued, generous support, the National Gallery has partnered with the Smithsonian Institution to incorporate art storage for the National Gallery's collection in a future expansion at the Smithsonian's Museum Support Center (MSC) in Suitland, MD. The shared "Pod 6" facility will address the needs of both the Smithsonian Institution and the National Gallery at significantly lower cost than two independent facilities and takes advantage of the existing supporting infrastructure at the MSC. Current plans call for a construction contract to be awarded at the end of this fiscal year with completion in FY 2025. Upon completion of Pod 6, the National Gallery will no longer rely on a third-party provider for our off-site art storage and will have capacity for collections growth for the foreseeable future. Pod 6 will also serve the National Gallery's significant swing space needs for collections and library storage that would otherwise need to be leased for future East Building study center and library renovations. When completed in 2025, the new collection's storage facility is expected to meet LEED Gold standards, and will provide for permanent secure off-site storage of the National 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.

As I look towards the future of the National Gallery under my tenure, I think about a return to our founding words and mission – to serve and represent the entire nation, with generosity, vision, and a commitment to excellence. I am inspired every day by the words of our founders, who, while rooted in their own time, dreamed of a museum that would always grow and change, "expanding in its usefulness" and maintaining a high standard of quality.

In Andrew Mellon's world, an excellent museum was an institution of exceptional European old masters. While we will always regard our collection of old masters as extraordinary and core to our mission, there are additional qualities that enable a museum to be the standard bearer of excellence. Today, the National Gallery of Art must be inclusive and sustainable, and it must attract and reflect the diversity of our great nation to maintain its excellence today and in the future.

In these challenging times for our nation and our global community, I cannot help but recall President Roosevelt's reflection upon the dedication of the National Gallery of Art, that art reminds us of our shared humanity, and therefore the mission and work of this great institution is needed now more than ever.

Thank you.