

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 1, 2024

Chair Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, 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 2025 federal budget request and to thank you for the fiscal year 2024 appropriation.

Paul Mellon, son of our founder Andrew Mellon, said at the National Gallery of Art's dedication in 1941, "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."

The federal commitment to operate and maintain the National Gallery originates in the 1937 Joint Resolution of Congress, which pledges that the United States will provide funds for the upkeep, administrative expenses, and costs of operations, including the protection and care for the works of art given to the nation, so that the National Gallery would at all times be properly maintained and be open to the public at no charge. The fiscal year 2025 President's Budget provides the funds necessary for such operations, including new requirements for cybersecurity and climate resilience, as well as for new efforts to reach the full breadth of the American public through digital outreach that brings the nation's collection in meaningful context to vast numbers of people who cannot visit us in Washington, DC.

As I mark my fifth anniversary as director of the National Gallery and look towards the future 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 founder, who, while rooted in his own time, dreamed of a museum that would continue "growing in usefulness." We are doing just that—moving forward while keeping our commitment to preserving our past and ensuring that we serve the nation by welcoming all people to explore and experience art, creativity, and our shared humanity.

Over the next decade, the National Gallery will strive to connect more Americans with our collections and education programs. As a museum created of and for the nation, we have a unique responsibility. Our collection and resources belong to the American people, and we need to share them more widely. We have plans to continue to expand our work beyond our Washington campus, serving Americans of all ages who are unable to travel to the nation's capital to see our treasures. Already a generous institutional lender, we will strengthen our national lending service for greater accessibility of our collection to communities across America through long-term loans and exhibition partnerships. We are working to increase digital content and programming for teachers, students, and the public to share our expert scholarship and research more broadly. Building on the bedrock of federal support for day-to-day operations, maintenance, and administrative support, private donors have generously matched the federal

funding since our founding to provide not only all of the funding for art purchases and construction of the West and East Buildings and Sculpture Garden, but also endowments to support education and scholarly programs, exhibitions, and, more recently, digital programs. This unique and symbiotic partnership of federal and private funding is a source of strength that allows the National Gallery to truly excel in meeting its mission.

Our strategic plan names four core priorities that drive our focus to increase our impact nationally. All our exhibitions, acquisitions, scholarship, core operations, innovative programs, and capital improvements are strategically aligned to reflect and attract the nation, provide an exceptional audience-focused experience, be the nation's primary resource for art and creativity, and operate a sustainable and equitable museum.

Since my last visit with this Subcommittee, we have established new structures, tools, and processes to maximize our resources and raise institutional effectiveness to achieve these priorities. In practice, this means unifying the National Gallery's divisions to both welcome and inspire nearly four million visitors to the museum annually. Examples of initiatives taken include standardizing key performance indicators across the museum, becoming more data-driven in our decision-making, hiring for a greater range of experience and expertise, and setting up more channels to solicit staff and community input. Together, these tactics enable us to secure and preserve the treasures the nation has entrusted to us as we find new means to reach broader audiences.

The fiscal year 2025 President's Budget provides \$215,453,000 for the National Gallery of Art and supports 766 full-time equivalent positions organized under four functional areas responsible for day-to-day operations: Art Care, Operations and Maintenance, Protection Services, and General Administration. The request includes \$188,453,000 for Salaries and Expenses and \$27,000,000 for Repair, Restoration, and Renovation. Relative to the fiscal year 2024 enacted budget, Salaries and Expenses increase by \$13,693,000, including \$6,582,000 for mandatory pay increases and \$7,111,000 for non-pay costs for contract security services, cybersecurity and fixed information technology costs, operational costs of the new art storage facility coming online in fiscal year 2025, facilities maintenance contracts, and other costs necessary to sustain day-to-day operations. The Repair, Restoration, and Renovation request includes the last increment of funds for the completion and occupancy of the art storage facility project and funding for necessary ADA improvements to East Building public restrooms and adjacent digital media production facilities, and restoration of West Building grounds following completion of roof and façade repairs this summer.

The National Gallery of Art closed calendar year 2023 with a remarkable onsite attendance of 3,829,812—a return to our pre-pandemic levels. This impressive figure represents an 18% increase from 2022 and stands as the highest visitation recorded since 2017. Nearly 43% of our visitors are experiencing our campus, collection, exhibitions, and programs for the first time. Notably, our attendance ranks as the second largest among art museums nationally and the eighth largest globally.

Through our permanent collection and special exhibitions, we welcomed visitors onsite to explore a diverse array of artistic wonders. Notable recent exhibitions included *Canova: Sketching in Clay*; *Going through Hell: The Divine Dante*; *The Land Carries Our Ancestors: Contemporary Art by Native Americans*; and *Dorothea Lange: Seeing People*. Additionally, we engaged visitors through interactive response walls, inviting them to enter in dialogue with other guests in exhibitions such as *Philip Guston Now* and *Called to Create: Black Artists of the American South*.

Our most recent blockbuster was the exhibition *Mark Rothko: Paintings on Paper*, which attracted tremendous crowds. More than 100 of Mark Rothko's most compelling paintings on paper were brought together, many on view for the first time. The final attendance exceeded 185,000, making it one of our most highly attended special exhibitions in recent years. The National Gallery of Art is home to the largest public collection of works by the beloved American artist, and we are proud to also share his genius with other museums in the US and around the world. We lent several of our most popular paintings on canvas by Rothko to a major presentation in Paris last year, in the first retrospective of his work in France.

Currently on view in our galleries is *The Anxious Eye: German Expressionism and Its Legacy*. This exhibition celebrates bold and inventive 20th-century German artists and their enduring influence on subsequent generations. We also recently unveiled *Woven Histories: Textiles and Modern Abstraction*, an exploration of the contributions of a variety of textile techniques to modern and contemporary abstract art.

The most highly anticipated exhibition of the year is still to come. In September, we will celebrate the 150th anniversary of the first impressionist art exhibition in Paris with a special exhibition, *Paris 1874: The Impressionist Moment*. This extraordinary exhibition reunites beloved French impressionist favorites with their lesser-known contemporaries. To date, no exhibition has been wholly devoted to this event and to the broader historical context of this crucial year in the Parisian art world. The exhibition is currently attracting record crowds at the Musée d'Orsay in Paris. We are thrilled to be the only other venue for this exhibition celebrating an art movement that has a strong American connection. Impressionism's survival can be attributed to American collectors and the holdings in museums across America, which surpass those in France.

Because we understand that not everyone can travel to Washington to see our exhibitions, we extend public access to art to local communities across the country and around the globe through traveling exhibitions and loans from our permanent collection. Over the past five years, traveling exhibitions were on public view in 41 museums across the country and abroad, and individual works of art were loaned to museums in 32 states and 24 foreign countries.

We also reach larger audiences through our print publications. This past year, we celebrated another popular season in print with the publication of four books: *Dorothea Lange: Seeing People*, *Mark Rothko: Paintings on Paper*, *Woven Histories: Textiles and Modern Abstraction*,

and *The Land Carries Our Ancestors: Contemporary Art by Native Americans*. The *Woven Histories* publication led the *New York Times*'s Best Art Books of 2023.

We remain committed to artistic excellence in all our collection building, as we strategically expand our historic collections of European and American art and widen the global scope of the art historical canon.

When Washington's Corcoran Gallery of Art was forced to close its doors permanently in 2014 due to financial struggles, we aided in the cataloging and subsequent redistribution of their collection, with more than 9,000 works acquired by the National Gallery and more than 10,000 distributed to regional museums. Our great collection of American paintings was made even greater, with works by renowned artists like Albert Bierstadt, Frederic Edwin Church, and Samuel Morse.

To showcase this remarkable collection, we established the Corcoran Legacy Gallery, where iconic works from the collection are on permanent display. Further expanding this collection's reach, in September 2023, we announced an update to the partnership we have with the Corcoran School of the Arts and Design at the George Washington University and the Trustees of the Corcoran Gallery of Art. The new plan draws on each of our respective strengths to amplify the Corcoran's historical legacy and supports students and emerging artists through robust programmatic and educational partnerships, benefiting millions of museumgoers and the next generation of students at George Washington University. Planning is underway and will positively impact exhibitions, performances, and curriculum at the school. The partnership is envisioned to include spaces for students, artists, community members, museum professionals, and faculty to collaborate as well as opportunities for students to gain hands-on learning under the mentorship of National Gallery experts.

Since last reporting on our acquisitions, we have sought to expand the presence of the vital contributions of women artists in our historic collections by adding important works by Lavinia Fontana, Fede Galizia, Gesina ter Borch, Claudine Bouzonnet-Stella, Caterina Angela Pierozzi, Luisa Roldán, Anne Vallayer-Coster, Karin Bergöö Larsson, Gretchen W. Rogers, and Elizabeth Paxton. Our modern and contemporary holdings also welcomed works by noteworthy artists such as Remedios Varo, a major figure in the history of global surrealism; abstractionists Sophie Taeuber-Arp and Loló Soldevilla; and acclaimed printmaker Belkis Ayón, who is celebrated as one of the most important 20th-century Cuban artists.

Other important historic works added include those by Italian Baroque artist Mattia Preti and Mexican artist Juan Correa, as well as David Drake, who was an enslaved African American potter who lived and worked most of his life in the Edgefield district of South Carolina. We received a major gift in the Ross J. Kelbaugh Collection of 19th- and early 20th-century American photographs, which includes rare photographs by celebrated early Black photographers James Presley Ball, Glenalvin Goodridge, and Augustus Washington.

The first works by contemporary artists Simone Leigh and Jeffrey Gibson recently entered the collection. Both artists were selected to represent the US at the 2022 and upcoming 2024 Venice Biennale. We also acquired a major work by Sir Isaac Julien, the British artist who is one of the leading film-based media artists of our time. Other firsts include a work by Aboriginal female artist Emily Kame Kngwarreye, one of the most acclaimed artists in the history of Australian art.

We continued to collect works that reflect the nation by including outstanding works by artists of Latino and Asian descent, as well as significant works by African American artists. Building on the success of our contemporary Native American art exhibition, *The Land Carries Our Ancestors*, we expanded our collection of works by Indigenous artists such as Jaune Quick-To-See Smith, George Morrison, Sky Hopinka, Eric-Paul Riege, Cara Romero, and Cannupa Hanska Luger.

The collection of modern art was enriched by a generous and historic gift of 20 box constructions and seven collages by Joseph Cornell, one of the most important figures of 20th-century art, from Robert and Aimee Lehrman. This transformative gift, joining four boxes, eight collages, and several other works already in the National Gallery's collection, makes the museum one of the world's leading repositories of Cornell's art.

The National Gallery continues to be a center for art and creativity, bringing multiple disciplines together for the enrichment of our audience. Public programs including a robust schedule of tours, lectures, gallery talks, concert series, and film screenings offer new entry points for connecting people with art and exploring our shared humanity. Our new First Saturday program, held on the first Saturday of each month, welcomes audiences of all ages to explore free artmaking, bilingual story time, artist talks, films, workshops, and a variety of performances in a family-friendly atmosphere. For the 2023 John Wilmerding Symposium on American Art and Community Celebration, entitled *Poetry is a country*, we invited celebrated American poets, including current US Poet Laureate Ada Limón, to compose works inspired by art in our collection.

National Gallery Nights continues to be a fan favorite. Six times a year, the evening program enlivens the East Building with music, dance performances, pop-up talks, and hands-on artmaking and features collaborations with regional artists and arts organizations.

Educational initiatives, supported primarily through private funding sources and offered free of charge, feature programs designed for diverse audiences—scholars, teachers, and students, and local, national, and international visitors. Programs for schools include tours, lesson plans, and activities designed for all grade levels. Our Art Around the Corner program turns 30 this year. This vital program supports DC Public Schools at a teacher, school, and district level, including professional development workshops for educators. This work runs parallel to our national teacher programs, which support educators across America through modeling ways to incorporate works of art to aid learning in various subject areas.

Leveraging lessons learned throughout the pandemic, virtual programs continue to play an important role at the National Gallery. Creating a balance of in-person and online experiences has allowed us to expand our reach and increase access to the National Gallery’s collection, programs, and educators. We also disseminate videos, DVDs, and teaching materials to affiliates such as public television stations, cultural institutions, and libraries, reaching millions more Americans every year.

The National Gallery’s Make an Appointment program offers scholars and members of the public access to our library and its image collections, curatorial records, and museum archives. The crown jewel of this program is that anyone can make an appointment to see any work of art on paper—photograph, print, watercolor, or drawing—in a special study room accompanied by our expert staff. This kind of accessibility is quite special among art museums and continues to be a beacon for donors of works of art near and far, offering the opportunity to study collections which primarily live in storage. For example, you or your constituents can make an appointment to view any of our stunning drawings and prints by Rembrandt, or better yet, view not one but three drawings by Leonardo da Vinci.

Through a strategic realignment to focus on reaching national audiences using our digital and social media channels, we have significantly increased the size and breadth of our digital audience. Our annual website visits reached 18 million in fiscal year 2023—more than triple our pre-pandemic average of 5.5 million. Each day, we reach two million global social media followers across all our channels by creating engaging and interactive content that grabs the attention of new generations of art lovers and creates a parallel experience to that lived in person for users worldwide.

As the world continues to consume more digital video, the National Gallery has adapted and invested in its offer, ensuring we remain relevant in a changing America. In fiscal year 2023, we reached over seven million views across our video channels, telling stories as wide-ranging and diverse as the creation of monumental land art in New Mexico and the rediscovery of a painter’s masterpiece from 18th-century France. This growth in video viewership represents nearly a ten-fold increase in views since before the pandemic.

Our daily art guessing game, Artle, has partnered with museums across the country to help people discover the nation’s art collections in over 14 million game-plays; beyond introducing new audiences to art, it has driven an additional four million views of our online collection, showing the possibilities of using “light” digital engagement as a gateway to deeper learning. This popular game has even gotten the attention of the writers at Jeopardy, where we now regularly appear on the program. We will soon launch a new series of online engagement games aimed at younger audiences, using fun and creative play as a way into learning about art. Finally, we are in the process of a major technical overhaul of our website, due to launch later this year, which will provide us with a platform for future growth.

Our Sculpture Garden turns 25 this summer, and it will soon come alive with Jazz in the Garden concerts beginning on May 31. Due to overwhelming interest, we will once again offer a free lottery for these concerts so that registration is equally accessible to all. This past November, the Sculpture Garden Ice Rink reopened with record-setting attendance for this beloved winter activity.

In commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the founding of the nation in 2026, the National Gallery looks forward to hosting a range of exhibitions and programs that explore the wide breadth of American experiences and celebrate creativity across all regions of America. For example, one of our planned installations for 2026 will bring together American artist George Caleb Bingham's popular 1846 painting *The Jolly Flatboatmen* with photographer Julie Blackmon's reimagining of that painting in a contemporary setting. Viewed together, these images of midwestern river life, depicting ordinary people enjoying themselves on a clear summer's day, evoke the Declaration of Independence's democratic ideal of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." This moment in our nation's history offers us the opportunity to recognize the vital role that the arts have played in shaping our society, and the role that the arts and artists can continue to play in shaping the nation's future.

Scholarship has long been an institutional priority at the National Gallery. Founded in 1979, the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts (the Center) is the National Gallery's research institute and fosters study of the visual arts from all places and periods. The Center supports a robust in-residence fellowship program as well as dozens of lectures, symposia, and convenings every year that highlight new insights into art, architecture, and material culture. With programs that are often livestreamed, the Center engages broader audiences from academia to the general public. Building upon the National Gallery's longstanding relationship with Howard University, the Center launched its Mellon Foundation-funded two-year undergraduate internship program, welcoming its first cohort in September 2022. This group participates in weekly seminars that introduce topics in art history, museum studies, and related fields while also undertaking professional exploration and skill-building. They now have assignments in various National Gallery departments. The second cohort of interns arrived in September 2023. The program's intent is to create pathways into careers in the arts for young people who may not have considered it an option. While building professional skills and networks, interns have also found new interests in arts careers, from curatorial work and conservation to librarianship and exhibition design. Since 2022, the Center has also stewarded six new publications to print, including three volumes in partnership with Princeton University Press based on the National Gallery's longstanding A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts.

We are also home to one of the largest and most comprehensive conservation centers in the world, with six departments working diligently to preserve our growing collection, currently comprising some 160,000 objects. Our conservation team works closely with museum curators, often undertaking technical art historical studies that unlock understanding of artists' materials, practices, and processes. In addition to preserving the nation's art collection, the conservation division conducts innovative scientific research and serves the broader public as a preeminent

resource for research and expertise for museums across the country and the world. For example, as a professional courtesy, we have performed X-radiography and analysis on a 1792 terracotta bust of John Jay by Giuseppe Ceracchi from the permanent collection of the Supreme Court. We also recently undertook the major treatment of *St. Michael Slaying the Dragon* by Sassoferrato, a painting on long-term loan from the National Museum of the Marine Corps near Quantico, VA. The division also publishes *Facture*, a biennial peer-reviewed journal that provides insights and scholarship in all aspects of the field.

All these activities are supported from our magnificent campus on the doorstep of the United States Capitol on the National Mall. Both of our buildings are approaching milestones in the coming decade. Our original building, the West Building, is approaching 100 years, and our second building, the East Building, is approaching 50 years. With the Committee's support of the Repair, Restoration, and Renovation appropriation, a program of major capital improvements will ensure these buildings are preserved for future generations to enjoy the nation's collection. Over the past five years, we have completed renovations to the East Building galleries, skylights, and critical systems. In the West Building, we are completing repairs to the façade stonework in conjunction with a roof replacement project. Smaller, but no less important, are numerous improvements for accessibility and fire and life safety. Furthermore, we recently began restoring the West Building grounds to remove temporary fencing and construction staging that has been in place for over 20 years.

Off-campus, the joint project with the Smithsonian Institution to incorporate art storage for the National Gallery's collection into the Smithsonian's Museum Support Center (MSC) expansion in Suitland, MD, is on schedule for construction to be completed early in fiscal year 2025. The shared "Pod 6" facility addresses 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. Upon completion of Pod 6, the National Gallery will have capacity for collections growth for the foreseeable future, permitting closed galleries in the West Building that are currently used for art storage to be returned to the public display of art. The fiscal year 2025 Budget request includes the last increment of funding for Pod 6 for moving and equipment costs.

With an eye to the future, we are planning our next generation of renovation and capital projects. A Comprehensive Campus Plan will encompass both capital renewal and planning for the best use of space to fulfill our public service mission in the 21st century. The planning will consider better circulation and access to our nearly one million square feet of galleries, enhanced education spaces across the buildings, and smarter gallery space, within a broader focus on sustainability and risk reduction, all while unifying the campus for an improved visitor experience. This fiscal year 2025 request includes the beginnings of this plan, such as funding for ADA improvements to our Concourse restrooms, as well as the digital media center located directly below the restrooms and preliminary design funds for future major projects.

As we approach our 100th anniversary in 2041, we are committed to further expanding our accessibility and impact. We plan to reach more Americans through lending services, digital content, exhibitions, and programs. We will continue to acquire creative masterpieces that reflect our shared humanity, and enhance our scholarship and conservation efforts. We are grateful for the support of this committee and look forward to continuing to serve and represent the entire nation with generosity, vision, and a commitment to excellence.

Thank you.