



National Gallery of Art

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NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART HOLDS EIGHTH DINNER

IN HONOR OF FOUNDER ANDREW W. MELLON

AND IN CELEBRATION OF ITS NEW SCULPTURE GALLERIES

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The National Gallery of Art presents its eighth dinner in honor of founder Andrew W. Mellon on Wednesday, September 25, 2002. The Gallery recently marked the sixty-fifth anniversary of its establishment in March 1937, when the U.S. Congress accepted Mellon's gift to the nation of his art collection and funds for a building and an endowment. The total gift was one of the largest ever made by an individual to a government. The Gallery opened to the public in March 1941, nearly four years after Mellon's death.

On the occasion of this dinner, the Gallery also celebrates the opening of its new sculpture galleries, encompassing 24,000 square feet on the ground floor of the West Building and presenting for the first time the full range of the Gallery's sculpture collection, from the medieval period through early modern figure sculpture. Among the 900 works on view are gifts from the National Gallery's founding benefactors, including the twelfth-century *Chalice of Abbot Suger of Saint-Denis* and the French period rooms from the Widener family, Leone Battista Alberti's fifteenth-century bronze self-portrait plaque from the Kress family, and superb original waxes and bronzes by Edgar Degas from the bequest of Paul Mellon, son of the Gallery's founder.

A special installation of a distinguished collection of sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century bronzes, on loan from Robert H. Smith, president of the Gallery, will be on public view for the first time. It will be seen in a long vaulted gallery illuminated by natural light and graced by a central fountain featuring *Venus and Cupid*, the Gallery's sixteenth-century sculpture by a follower of the great sculptor Giovanni Bologna.

Among the speakers at the dinner in the Gallery's rotunda will be Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist, who is a member of the Gallery's board of trustees; Robert F. Erburu, chairman of the board of trustees; Robert H. Smith, president of the Gallery; and Earl A. Powell III, director of the Gallery since 1992.

Dinner guests include members of the administration, Congress, and diplomatic corps, as well as major benefactors and lenders to the Gallery. The Andrew W. Mellon dinners have traditionally been held to commemorate special occasions, such as the opening of the sculpture galleries.

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