

INSTITUTIONAL BACKGROUNDER

The National Gallery of Art is the nation's art museum, welcoming all people to explore art, creativity, and our shared humanity. Through its renowned collection, special exhibitions, and public programming, the institution shares the ever-changing story of how art reflects our nation and world. The National Gallery's collection—featuring over 160,000 works spanning the history of Western art from classical to contemporary—includes some of the most iconic works of art ever made and is a singular resource for the nation.

Situated in the heart of the nation's capital and occupying nearly a quarter of the National Mall, it is one of the world's most visited art museums, and welcomes nearly 4 million visitors per year. Admission to the National Gallery of Art is always free, allowing local, national, and international visitors to experience the transformative power of art.

The National Gallery was built on the spirit of generosity. Its collection and resources belong to the entire nation, with opportunities for discovery both within and beyond the museum's walls, including dynamic exhibitions, musical programs in the Sculpture Garden, and digital content that enables audiences of all ages and from all places to engage with art.

Collection

The National Gallery's collection features more than 160,000 works reflecting the history of Western art. Its holdings of works by American and European artists are unparalleled in the United States, including the most extensive public collections of works by Mark Rothko and Alexander Calder; the only Leonardo da Vinci painting in the Americas; one of the largest impressionist collections outside of Europe; and among the largest collections of works by Johannes Vermeer and Amedeo Modigliani in the world.

The collection can be experienced well beyond the walls of the museum. The National Gallery shares its renowned collection and original scholarship with broader audiences through special exhibitions that tour institutions throughout the United States and around the world. The "Across the Nation" lending program, taking place from 2025-2026, brings key works of art from its collection to partner museums across the United States, creating unprecedented access to masterworks in the nation's art collection in communities throughout the country. Through a robust and growing suite of digital content across the National Gallery's website, video platforms, and social media channels, anyone can engage digitally with the National Gallery's online information, activities, and educational resources.

History

The National Gallery of Art was founded as a gift to the American people. It was conceived by Andrew W. Mellon, a financier and art collector who served as secretary of the treasury under four presidents from 1921 to 1932 and believed that the United States should have a world-class national art museum. In 1936, Mellon wrote to President Franklin D. Roosevelt offering a gift of his art collection to establish a new museum. It was to be built and financed with Mellon's own funds and located on federal land in Washington, DC. With Roosevelt's endorsement, Congress accepted Mellon's gift in 1937. President Roosevelt dedicated the National Gallery's first building, designed by American architect John Russell Pope and now known as the West Building, on March 17, 1941.

The East Building was added to accommodate the National Gallery's growing collection of modern art and scholarly programs. Designed by architect I. M. Pei & Partners, the East Building was dedicated by President Jimmy Carter on June 1, 1978. Today, the East Building houses the National Gallery's significant

collection of modern and contemporary works, its library and archives, and the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts (the Center), the renowned cultural research institute established in 1979.

The National Gallery of Art Sculpture Garden was a gift of the Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation, and first Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton dedicated it on May 19, 1999. The garden showcases iconic 20th-century works by artists including Alexander Calder, Joan Miró, Louise Bourgeois, Ellsworth Kelly, and Claes Oldenberg.

Conservation and Scholarship

The National Gallery of Art serves the nation by advancing art historical research, scholarship, and public dialogue.

The National Gallery of Art is home to one of the most highly respected art conservation and scientific research laboratories in the world. With a staff of more than 40, the conservation department includes experts in conservation treatments, preventive conservation, chemistry, hyperspectral imaging, and art history, as well as a host of interns and fellows who train at the National Gallery. The scientists, curators, and conservators of the department work collaboratively on topics related directly to its own collection and beyond. Through conservation research and development, and by investigating artists' methods and materials, they contribute to the international conservation and art historical community.

The National Gallery of Art Library is one of the world's foremost resources for the study of art history. Its publicly accessible, constantly growing collection spans more than 16 million images and 500,000 volumes. These include thousands of rare books dating back centuries, and many of these resources are available online.

Programming

The National Gallery of Art prioritizes visitor experience as a cornerstone of its mission to serve and reflect the nation. Its exhibitions, programs, and initiatives are informed by ongoing visitor research and are developed to reach many audiences—from local to national, in-person to virtual, and seasoned art lovers to first-time museumgoers.

The National Gallery of Art presents more than 4,000 free programs and events each year that welcome visitors to connect and engage with art, including tours, lectures, educational and family programs, films, concerts, and large-scale community events like Jazz in the Garden and National Gallery Nights. In partnership with local schools and educators, the museum presents its flagship "Art Around the Corner" educational program, which offers something for every member of the school community, including student visits, teacher workshops, and family programs, both at the museum and in schools. Over its 30-year history, "Art Around the Corner" has engaged approximately 21,000 students.