

May 10, 1951

[Dedication - Museum of Modern Art, NYC]

FDR Speech File

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RADIO ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT
DEDICATION OF THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, N. Y. CITY
MAY 10, 1939

PRESIDENT ROCKEFELLER, FRIENDS OF THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART:

When men dedicate a new edifice for a common enterprise they are at once celebrating an achievement and announcing a purpose. They cannot refrain nor could they properly be excused from making clear what that purpose is.

From all that has been said by the speakers to whom we have been listening tonight the mission of this Museum is plain. We are dedicating this building to the cause of peace and to the pursuits of peace. The arts that enoble and refine life flourish only in the atmosphere of peace. And in this hour of dedication we are glad again to bear witness before all the world to our faith in the sanctity of free institutions. For we know that only where men are free can the arts flourish and the civilization of national culture reach full flower.

The arts cannot thrive except where men are free to be themselves and to be in charge of the discipline of their own energies and ardors. The conditions for democracy and for art are one and the same. What we call liberty in politics results in freedom in the arts. There can be no vitality in the works gathered in a museum unless there exists the right of spontaneous life in the society in which the arts are nourished.

A world turned into a stereotype, a society converted into a regiment, a life translated into a routine, make it difficult for either art or artists to survive. Crush individuality in society and you crush art as well. Nourish the conditions of a free life and you nourish the arts, too.

In encouraging the creation and enjoyment of beautiful things we are furthering democracy itself. That is why this Museum is a citadel of civilization.

As the Museum of Modern Art is a living museum, not a collection of curious and interesting objects, it can, therefore, become an integral part of our democratic institutions -- it can be woven into the very warp and woof of our democracy. Because it has been conceived as a national institution the Museum can enrich and invigorate our cultural life by bringing the best of modern art to all of the American people. This, I am gratified to learn, will be done through the traveling exhibitions of the Museum.

It is most important that the Museum make these traveling exhibits an essential part of its work. By this means the gap between the artists and American industry, and the great American public, can be bridged. And most important of all, the standards of American taste will inevitably be raised by thus bringing into far-flung communities results of the latest and finest achievements in all the arts.

These traveling exhibits will extend the perspective of the general public which too often has been accustomed to think of the fine arts as painting, and possibly sculpture. But the proposed traveling exhibitions and nationwide shows will make all of our people increasingly aware of the enormous importance of contemporary industrial design, architecture, including the great social art -- housing -- which by its very nature is one of the most formidable challenges to a democracy, as well as photography, the printed book, the illustration, the advertisement, the poster, the theatre, and the moving picture. Thus, a nationwide public will receive a demonstration of the force and scope of all these branches of the visual arts.

Art in America has always belonged to the people and has never been the property of an academy or a class. The great Treasury Projects, through which our public buildings are being decorated, are an excellent example of the continuity of this tradition. The Federal Art Project of the Works Progress Administration is a practical

relief project which also emphasizes the best tradition of the democratic spirit. The WPA artist, in rendering his own impression of things, speaks also for the spirit of his fellow countrymen everywhere. I think the WPA artist exemplifies with great force the essential place which the arts have in a democratic society such as ours.

In the future we must seek more widespread popular understanding and appreciation of the arts. Many of our great cities provide the facilities for such appreciation. But we all know that because of their lack of size and riches the smaller communities are in most cases denied this opportunity. That is why I give special emphasis to the need of giving these smaller communities the visual chance to get to know modern art.

As in our democracy we enjoy the right to believe in different religious creeds or in none, so can American artists express themselves with complete freedom from the strictures of dead artistic tradition or political ideology.

While American artists have discovered a new obligation to the society in which they live, they have no compulsion to be limited in method or manner of expression.

The opportunity before the Museum of Modern Art is as broad as the whole United States. I trust that the fine example which this institution is affording will be widely copied and that the good work will continue until the influence of the best and the noblest in the fine arts permeates every community in the land.

Franklin D. Roosevelt

Original reading copy

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May 10, 1939

CAUTION: This address of the President, to be broadcast from the White House on the occasion of the dedication of the new building of the Museum of Modern Art, New York City, MUST BE HELD IN CONFIDENCE UNTIL RELEASED.

NOTE: Release to editions of all newspapers appearing on the streets NOT EARLIER THAN 9:45 P.M., E.S.T., May 10, 1939.

CARE MUST BE EXERCISED TO PREVENT PREMATURE PUBLICATION.

STEPHEN EARLY
Secretary to the President

PRESIDENT ROCKEFELLER, FRIENDS OF THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART:

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It is most important that the Museum make those traveling exhibits an essential part of its work. By this means the gap between the artists and American industry, and the great American public, can be bridged. And most important of all, the standards of American taste will inevitably be raised by thus bringing into far-flung communities results of the latest and finest achievements in all the arts.

Franklin D. Roosevelt Library

This is a transcript made by the White House stenographer from his shorthand notes taken at the time the speech was made. Underlining indicates words extemporaneously added to the previously prepared reading copy text. Words in parentheses are words that were omitted when the speech was delivered, though they appear in the previously prepared reading copy text.

These traveling exhibits will extend the perspective of the general public which too often has been accustomed to think of the fine arts as painting, and possibly sculpture. But the proposed traveling exhibitions and nationwide shows will make all of our people increasingly aware of the enormous importance of contemporary industrial design, architecture, including the great social art -- housing -- which by its very nature is one of the most formidable challenges to a democracy, as well as photography, the printed book, the illustration, the advertisement, the poster, the theatre, and the moving picture. Thus, a nationwide public will receive a demonstration of the force and scope of all these branches of the visual arts.

Art in America has always belonged to the people and has never been the property of an academy or a class. The great Treasury Projects, through which our public buildings are being decorated, are an excellent example of the continuity of this tradition. The Federal Art Project of the Works Progress Administration is a practical relief project which also emphasizes the best tradition of the democratic spirit. The WPA artist, in rendering his own impression of things, speaks also for the spirit of his fellow countrymen everywhere. I think the WPA artist exemplifies with great force the essential place which the arts have in a democratic society such as ours.

In the future we must seek more widespread popular understanding and appreciation of the arts. Many of our great critics provide the facilities for such appreciation. But we all know that because of their lack of size and riches the smaller communities are in most cases denied this opportunity. That is why I give special emphasis to the need of giving these smaller communities the visual chance to get to know modern art.

As in our democracy we enjoy the right to believe in different religious creeds or in none, so can American artists express themselves with complete freedom from the strictures of dead artistic tradition or political ideology. While American artists have discovered a new obligation to the society in which they live, they have no compulsion to be limited in method or manner of expression.

The opportunity before the Museum of Modern Art is as broad as the whole United States. I trust that the fine example which this institution is affording will be widely copied and that the good work will continue until the influence of the best and the noblest in the fine arts permeates every community in the land.

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PRESIDENT ROCKEFELLER, FRIENDS OF THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART:

May 10, 1939

When men dedicate a new edifice for a common enterprise they are at once celebrating an achievement and announcing a purpose. They cannot refrain nor could they properly be excused from making clear what that purpose is.

From all that has been said by the speakers to whom we have been listening tonight the mission of this Museum is plain. We are dedicating this building to the cause of peace and to the pursuits of peace. The arts ~~which~~ that ennobled and refined life flourish only in the atmosphere of peace. And in this hour of dedication we are glad again to bear witness before all the world to our faith in the sanctity of free institutions. For we know that only where men are free can the arts flourish and civilization ^{the} national culture reach full flower.

These are the thoughts that come to me as we dedicate this new building at a time when what we have been accustomed to call Western Civilization seems such a tragic dividing of historical forces and so acute a conflict of ways of life. The opening of this Museum is a symbol of something quite as essential to civilized life as security, liberty, and peace.

The arts cannot flourish except where men are free to be themselves and to be in charge of the discipline of their own energies and ardors. The conditions for democracy and for art are one and the same. What we call ^{75th Anniversary} liberty in politics ~~is~~ freedom in the arts. There can be no vitality in the works gathered in a museum unless there ^{is} ~~is~~ ^{1946 is the right} possibility of spontaneous life in the society in which the arts are nourished.

A world turned into a stereotype, a society converted into a regiment, a life translated into a routine, make it difficult for either art or artists to survive. Crush individuality in society and you crush

art as well. Nourish the conditions of a free life and you nourish the arts, too.

~~This way~~
In ~~nowhere~~ the creation and enjoyment of beautiful things we are furthering democracy itself. Only a democracy can sustain the moral ideal of the happiness of the individual. Only in a democratic society are the fruits of art more freely available to everyone. That is why this Museum is a citadel of civilization.

As the Museum of Modern Art is a living museum, not a collection of curious and interesting objects, it can, therefore, become an integral part of our democratic institutions — it can be woven into the very warp and woof of our democracy. Because it has been conceived as a national institution the Museum can enrich and invigorate our cultural life by bringing the best of modern art to all of the American people. This, I am gratified to learn, will be done through the traveling exhibitions of the Museum.

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It is ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~most~~ ~~important~~ that the Museum ~~should~~ make these traveling exhibits ~~as~~ an essential part of its work. By this means the gap between the artists and American industry, and the great American public, can be bridged. And most important of all, the standards of American taste~~s~~ will inevitably be raised by thus bringing into far-flung communities results of the ~~best~~ and finest achievements in all the arts.

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~~In the future we may look for even more widespread popular appreciation, for just as radio enormously expanded musical taste in America we can expect that television will stimulate awareness of the visual arts.~~

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As in our democracy we enjoy the right to believe in different religious creeds or in none, so can American artists express themselves with complete freedom from the strictures of dead artistic tradition or political ideology. While American artists have discovered a new obligation to the society in which they live, they have no compulsion to be limited in method or manner of expression. ~~The success of modern art is now inseparably associated with contemporary efforts towards artistic freedom, and the freedom of culture in general for our own country and for the world.~~

The opportunity before the Museum of Modern Art is as broad as the whole United States. I trust that the fine example which this institution is affording will be widely copied and that the good work will continue until the influence of the best and the noblest in the fine arts permeates every community in the land.

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May 10, 1959

new york city,

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The arts cannot thrive except where men are free to be themselves and to be in charge of the discipline of their own energies and ardors. The conditions for democracy and for art are one and the same. That we call liberty in politics results in freedom in the arts. There can be no vitality in the works gathered in a museum unless there exists the right of spontaneous life in the society in which the arts are nourished.

A world turned into a stereotype, a society converted into a regiment, a life translated into a routine, make it difficult for either art or artists to survive. Crush individuality in society and you crush art as well. Nourish the conditions of a free life and you nourish the arts, too.

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