

WHITNEY

Whitney Museum
of American Art
Press Office

99 Gansevoort Street
New York, NY 10014

pressoffice@whitney.org
(212) 570-3633

PRESS RELEASE



Photograph by Filip Wolak

First Lady Michelle Obama Joins with Dignitaries and Artists to Dedicate the Whitney Museum of American Art

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio, Architect Renzo Piano, Director Adam D. Weinberg, and Whitney Trustees Open the New Home for American Art and Artists

NEW YORK, NY, April 30, 2015— At a festive ceremony held today in downtown Manhattan, First Lady of the United States of America Michelle Obama joined with New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio to officially open the new Whitney Museum of American Art, now housed in a 220,000-square-foot building set beside the Hudson River at the foot of the High Line elevated park in the Meatpacking District.

First Lady Michelle Obama said, “I fell in love with the building. It is an amazing space...One visit, one performance, one touch, and who knows how you could spark a child’s imagination....Maybe you can discover the next Carmen Herrera, or Archibald Motley, or Edward Hopper, or maybe even the next Barack Obama. That is the power of institutions like the Whitney. They open their doors as wide as possible both to the artists they embrace and to the young people they seek to uplift. That’s what happens. And today I am so proud to be here as we open these doors...I truly cannot wait to see the impact this extraordinary museum will have in the years ahead.”

Also speaking at the dedication ceremony were Adam D. Weinberg, the Alice Pratt Brown Director of the Whitney; architect Renzo Piano; and leaders of the Whitney’s Board of Trustees: Co-Chairmen Robert J. Hurst and Brooke Garber Neidich, President Neil G. Bluhm, and Honorary Chairman Flora Miller Biddle, granddaughter of artist and Museum founder Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney.

The new building returns the Museum to the downtown area where it was founded in 1930. With indoor and outdoor spaces that offer panoramic views east across the city, west across the Hudson River, and south toward the Statue of Liberty, the building doubles the Museum’s previous gallery space, enabling the Whitney for the first time to present exhibitions and programs in the context of the world’s foremost collection of modern and contemporary American art.

Mayor de Blasio said, “We already knew we were the mecca of the art world but just in case we needed to make it clearer, this museum does it. As New Yorkers, we are extraordinarily proud. We’re proud that people from around the world come to experience our cultural life.”

The Museum's director, Adam D. Weinberg, stated, "The Whitney has always believed in the importance of the present—the capacity for artists to act in and effect the life of our times, to alter perceptions in such ways that might enable one to change the course of history...We are here for those artists as they are here for us. Our new home was designed for and is now re-consecrated in this belief. This is our gift to our city, our nation, and the world as it was Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney's in her time."

The dedication ceremony began with the performance of *Incantation*, an improvisatory musical work composed and performed by renowned Chicago-born saxophonist Matana Roberts. The ribbon-cutting was carried out by The Wooster Group, the experimental New York theater company, joined by teens from the Whitney's Youth Insights Program.

Architect Renzo Piano said, "I love making buildings. I especially love making buildings for public use. Public buildings are the essence of cities because they are places where people share values. They stay together and enjoy the city. Especially among public buildings I love to make buildings for art and beauty. The reason is very simple—because art and beauty make people better people...I'm pretty sure that beauty will save the world. It will save one person at a time. It will do it."

Robert J. Hurst, co-chairman of the Whitney's Board of Trustees, said, "Rarely does one have the opportunity to build a museum from the ground up in the cultural capital of the world. Thanks to an extraordinary partnership with the City of New York and an early leadership gift from the State of New York, we launched a capital campaign for \$760 million for the building and a strengthened endowment, and we are so pleased that that goal has been achieved due to unprecedented public and private generosity."

Flora Miller Biddle, Honorary Chairman and granddaughter of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, quoting Goethe, said, "A museum should be never finished, but boundless and ever in motion.'...Now, the physical construction of this extraordinary new building is complete and the Museum is ready to receive visitors, but it is the artists who will keep it ever in motion—that is what artists do and why their work is so precious and necessary: they carry us forward into the unknown, into mystery, into wisdom, into truth."

Others in attendance included: artists Lawrence Weiner, Glenn Ligon, Alex Katz, Carol Bove, and Fred Wilson; Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer; NY State Senator Brad Hoylman; NY State Assembly Member Deborah Glick; NYC Council Majority Leader & Chair of the Committee on Cultural Affairs Jimmy Van Bramer; NYC Council Member Corey Johnson; and NYC Department of Cultural Affairs Commissioner Tom Finkelpearl.

Inaugurating the Whitney's new galleries is the exhibition *America Is Hard to See*, an ambitious re-examination of the history of American art from 1900 to today, drawn entirely from the Museum's holdings. With more than 600 works by some 400 artists, the exhibition is the most extensive display to date of the Whitney's collection. Numerous pieces that have rarely, if ever, been shown appear alongside familiar icons, in an effort to challenge assumptions about the American art canon and reveal the themes, ideas, beliefs, visions, and passions that have preoccupied and galvanized American artists over the past one hundred and fifteen years.

The Museum opens to the public tomorrow, Friday, May 1, 2015.

Press Images and B-Roll

For broadcast-quality video of the Whitney's dedication ceremony and related b-roll, as well as a transcript of the remarks and still images from the event, please visit whitney.org/Press.

About the Whitney

The Whitney Museum of American Art, founded in 1930 by the artist and philanthropist Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney (1875–1942), houses the foremost collection of American art from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Mrs. Whitney, an early and ardent supporter of modern American art, nurtured groundbreaking artists at a time when audiences were still largely preoccupied with the Old Masters. From her vision arose the Whitney Museum of American Art, which has been championing the most innovative art of the United States for more than eighty years. The core of the Whitney's mission is to collect, preserve, interpret, and exhibit American art of our time and serve a wide variety of audiences in celebration of the complexity and diversity of art and culture in the United States. Through this mission and a steadfast commitment to artists themselves, the Whitney has long been a powerful force in support of modern and contemporary art and continues to help define what is innovative and influential in American art today. ###