
Denver Office of Cultural Affairs
Press Release

8/9/2004

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The Clyfford Still Art Collection is Bequeathed to the City of Denver - *Denver will create museum to care for collection of over 2,000 works by the late, great American artist Clyfford Still*

(DENVER) Mayor John Hickenlooper and the Mayor's Office of Art, Culture and Film announced Monday that Denver has been chosen to receive the much desired 2,000+ piece private collection of works by the late American artist Clyfford Still.

Most of Still's works have been locked away in storage for the past two decades, bound by the terms of his will in which he bequeathed his works to an American city that would create and maintain a museum devoted exclusively to his art. Since Still's death in 1980, numerous cities have sought the collection by negotiating with his widow, Mrs. Patricia A. Still, who is now in her eighties.

"Mrs. Patricia A. Still confirmed today that the City and County of Denver is to be the recipient of a gift of a collection of works of art by her late husband, Clyfford Still. Also, Mrs. Still noted with pleasure and gratitude that the City and County of Denver, through the auspices of Mayor Hickenlooper and with the anticipated cooperation of the City Council, had accepted the gift of the collection in the spirit and letter of the provisions of the will of her husband which created the gift," said Frederick H. Stalfort, attorney for Mrs. Patricia A. Still.

"We are grateful for Mrs. Still's generosity and are thrilled to receive this incredible gift of Clyfford Still's art," said Mayor John Hickenlooper. "The Still Collection is of tremendous international importance, and its presence here will make Denver a destination for all those interested in twentieth century art. We look forward to caring for and exhibiting this very significant, masterful collection, which will be treasured by Denver residents and visitors for generations to come."

This announcement is the culmination of months of discussions between the City of Denver and Patricia Still. In January 2004, Mayor Hickenlooper traveled with Denverite Curt Freed, nephew of Patricia Still, and Denise

Montgomery, director of the Mayor's Office of Art, Culture and Film, to New Windsor, Maryland, to visit with Mrs. Still about Denver as a possible home for the collection. During the meeting, Mayor Hickenlooper was able to impress upon Mrs. Still the dynamic, positive arts environment in Denver and his own deep passion for the arts.

With the gift of the collection secured and pending formal acceptance of the gift by City Council, Denver will begin the work of fundraising to support the museum and conservation of the collection. Private support from individuals, foundations, and corporations will be sought. City officials estimate they will need to raise approximately \$7 million for construction as well as funds to cover the estimated \$500,000 in annual operating costs.

"Clyfford Still was one of the prime forces in the abstract expressionist movement, and yet, because of his reclusive nature, only a limited number of his paintings made it to the market or into public collections, which has limited the public's knowledge of a truly great artist," said Lewis Sharp, director of the Denver Art Museum. "Still's works are among the most important bodies of material produced by twentieth century American artists."

Currently, large groupings of Still's works available for public viewing exist at very few locations – the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, New York, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. In addition, there are isolated works in public and private collections around the world.

Still's works rarely come up for public sale. At a recent Sotheby's auction held on May 12, 2004, Still's 1960-F from a private European collection sold for \$3,144,000.

"Though many historians ranked him with Willem de Kooning, Jackson Pollock, and Barnett Newman among the founders of what is known as the Abstract Expressionist school, he saw himself as a man set apart," wrote historian and critic John Russell in Still's New York Times obituary. "...he set to work to exemplify a specifically American sublimity."

The late art critic Katharine Kuh wrote after Still's death, "It's nothing less than tragic that this body of work remains unavailable to a public long denied adequate contact with it." Fortunately, with Patricia Still's gift to Denver and the City's commitment to this collection, that will no longer be the case.

Denver's acquisition of the Still collection marks another milestone in the Mile High City's growing cultural prominence. This year marked the first season in the University of Denver's Newman Center for the Performing Arts. Next fall, the City will open its completely renovated Quigg Newton Auditorium containing the new Ellie Caulkins Opera House, part of the second largest performing arts center in the nation. In 2006, the Denver Art Museum will open its new Daniel Libeskind-designed wing, and a new Museum of Contemporary Art, designed by David Adjaye, is on the horizon.

This is a historic moment in the evolution of Denver as a cultural center for our residents and visitors from throughout the region, country and world," Hickenlooper said

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The Will of Clyfford Still provides for the bequest of the Clyfford Still Collection "...to an American city that will agree to build or assign and maintain permanent quarters exclusively for ..." the Collection. The Will also places strict limitations on the sale and exchange of the works contained in the Collection upon receipt by the designated city.

The Agreement between the City of Denver and Patricia Still provides that the Grantor agrees to donate the Collection to the City and County of Denver only if the City is able to meet the following requirements that are detailed in the Agreement:

- The City must procure museum quarters for the Collection which meet the requirements of the Will and the Agreement.
- The City must designate a City Agency to act as caretaker for the Collection.
- The City must provide for governance of the museum and Collection through the appointment of a standing trustee committee and Collection curator.
- The City must maintain, exhibit and handle the Collection in accordance requirements of the Will and Agreement.
- The City must raise or otherwise designate funding sufficient to procure the museum and provide for a maintenance and operation endowment.

Under the terms of the Agreement, the City will have ten (10) years from the date of execution of the Agreement to identify funding adequate to meet its obligations. If the City fails to do so, the Agreement may be declared null and void and the City will have no continuing financial obligation with respect to the Collection.

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For a biography of Clyfford Still, visit the [Guggenheim Museum Web Site.](#)

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To hear an interview with Denise Montgomery, Director of the Denver Office of Art, Culture and Film, on the Clyfford Still collection, please visit the [Colorado Public Radio](#) web site and click on Colorado Matters. The interview aired on Tuesday, August 24, 2004.