

# The Museum of Modern Art

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Tribute to the Artists  
By William A. M. Burden, President,  
The Museum of Modern Art  
The Museum of Modern Art Opening Ceremonies  
May 25, 1964

Mrs. Johnson, Fellow Trustees, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am delighted to welcome you here tonight for the re-dedication of this great institution.

First on behalf of the Trustees I want to thank all those who have given their time, their energy and their financial aid to the Museum. Generosity and farsightedness have always been the hallmarks of contributors to The Museum of Modern Art. Those here tonight have helped the Museum take another great step ahead in the task of aiding the public to enjoy, use, and appreciate the arts of our time. They join the distinguished company of men and women who founded the Museum and supported its first efforts. I hope that as you walk through this beautiful Garden, as you view the exhibitions in the new galleries, you will be proud of what has been accomplished in your name and thanks to your support.

It is fitting, I think, for this institution to make this evening's pleasant activities a tribute to the artists. Because while the Museum of Modern Art exists for the public, it exists because of the artists. And as we are dedicated here to the art of our time, it is the artists of our time whom we honor above all.

We pay tribute to those men and women who have widened our horizons more radically and I believe more constructively than did their predecessors during the previous half millenium. Certainly they have produced an art which is particularly fitting to our country and in which we take special pleasure. We honor those artists who have found new freedoms and new disciplines and by their work have enriched our lives.

Artists have been called the sensitive antennae of our civilization - pioneers whose work is a symbol of the human spirit in its search for truth, for freedom, for perfection.

Surely in our time this heroic struggle is fought on many battlefields, and the crowd's roar is not always acclaim. As Beowulf said when he tackled the dragon, "This is not an expedition for a coward."

Since Impressionism, innovations have occurred not only in style, technical procedures, and subject matter, but more fundamentally, in esthetic goals.

We honor the painters who cherish their independence, their independence from the market place, from the critics and from the Museums, the painters who have created new ways for us to see, new things for us to see, who have not followed any dictates but that of their own conscience, their own private inner compulsion toward truth and perfection.

We pay tribute to the sculptors who have created new forms, sometimes using traditional materials of stone, wood, and metal, sometimes quarrying the industrial civilization that surrounds them for new materials. We honor the architects who overthrew eclecticism and created new forms meaningful for our time and full of beauty. We honor the designers who made good use of the new machines that shape our world, and who invented shapes where necessary for new objects used in our 20th century life; we honor the photographers who developed a special visual vocabulary which has conditioned our sight, our language, our imagery, and the printmakers who created a new renaissance in a centuries' old art, a renaissance particularly appropriate to our democratic day; and we honor the film makers who have taken that peculiarly 20th century art so far in a mere 60 years, who have penetrated

human affairs for so many purposes and have made their art serve far beyond the more easy task of providing superficial entertainment.

Like the scientist, the artist cannot exist without courage, perseverance and vision: courage because what he discovers may not always please; perseverance because the truth is not easy to come by, vision because one does not create by imitating.

As the late President Kennedy said not so long ago in honoring Robert Frost:

"A nation reveals itself not only by the men it produces but also by the men it honors, the men it remembers. In America our heroes have often run to men of large national accomplishments."

But tonight we honor the men and women whose contribution is not to our size but to our spirit, not to our political beliefs but to our insight, not to our self-esteem but to our self comprehension. The men who create power make an indispensable contribution to the nation's greatness, but the men who question power make a contribution just as indispensable, for they determine whether we use power or power uses us ... when power leads men towards arrogance, art reminds man of his limitations. When power narrows the areas of man's life, art reminds him of the richness and diversity of his existence. When power corrupts art cleanses. For art establishes the basic human truths which must serve as the touchstone of our judgment.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I ask you to join in saluting the artists with us tonight.