

Trophée des Arts 2008

Philippe de Montebello

Philippe de Montebello is one of the most acclaimed American and international cultural figures of our generation. French-born and Harvard-educated, he has led the Metropolitan Museum of Art for over 30 years. His tenure, the longest in the institution's 138-year history, is associated with an unprecedented expansion and renovation of the museum: nearly doubled in size, the Metropolitan has acquired significant collections and masterpieces, mounted acclaimed international loan exhibitions, and reinstalled much of its permanent collections in new and refurbished galleries. Mr. de Montebello received the National Medal of Arts from the President of the United States in 2003, and is Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur.



Mr. de Montebello joined the Metropolitan Museum of Art as a curatorial assistant in 1963, rising to Associate Curator in the Department of European Paintings. In 1974, he was appointed Vice Director for Curatorial and Educational Affairs, a post he held until he became Director in July 1977.

Mr. de Montebello has been acknowledged throughout the museum world as one of the field's most influential and articulate champions of integrity, authority, education, and public access. As one magazine declared: "Met presentations now set the world standard for scholarly excellence and glamorous display." Mr. de Montebello lectures on museum issues throughout the world, is the author of several influential op-ed pieces in *The New York Times* and other publications, and is a ubiquitous commentator on art and museological matters in the broadcast media.

The Metropolitan is the world's most encyclopedic art museum. Its permanent collections—housed in 17 curatorial departments—embrace more than two million works of art spanning 5,000 years of world culture. The Museum also presents more than 30 special exhibitions each year.

During Mr. de Montebello's tenure, the Metropolitan has focused much of its resources on reinstalling, conserving, and publishing its permanent collection, such as the Greek and Roman Galleries, and pursuing an active acquisitions program through purchase and gifts—ranging from the ancient Egyptian sculpture of an Old Kingdom Recumbent

Lion to Jasper Johns's *White Flag* to the widely reported purchase of Duccio's 14th-century masterpiece, *Madonna and Child*.

Stressing that the presentation of the collections remains the institution's primordial responsibility, Mr. de Montebello has committed the Metropolitan to a future policy of amelioration, rather than growth, focusing on such marked improvements as the redesigned Tiepolo gallery, refinements to the areas surrounding The Temple of Dendur in The Sackler Wing, reinstallation of much of the Museum's Egyptian collection, and the launch of the reconstruction, expansion, and reinstallation of the American Wing.

To the millions of people who visit the Museum each year, Mr. de Montebello's is also its signature voice, guiding visitors through the audio guides that he has narrated throughout his tenure as Director.

Mr. de Montebello has been awarded countless honors, including Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur in 1991. In March 2003, The President of the United States awarded him the National Medal of Arts, noting that by "promoting wide-reaching programs that bring art to the American people, he has helped to preserve, protect, and present the cultural and artistic heritage of our world."

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Established in 1992, the Trophée des Arts is awarded each year to a distinguished artist or cultural icon who has exemplified FIAF's mission of French-American friendship and cross-cultural exchange.