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FREE ADMISSION AT BALTIMORE MUSEUM OF ART AND WALTERS ART MUSEUM BEGINS OCTOBER 1

***Groundbreaking cooperation and financial support from Baltimore City and
Baltimore County provides greater public access to world-class art***

BALTIMORE, MD (May 31, 2006) — The Baltimore Museum of Art and the Walters Art Museum, under the leadership of BMA Director Doreen Bolger and Walters Director Gary Vikan, will eliminate admission fees this fall and open free to the public for the first time in more than two decades. This unprecedented initiative is made possible thanks to a unique government partnership with Baltimore City and Baltimore County that will provide greater public access to two world-class museums. Free admission will begin Sunday, October 1, in conjunction with the launch of *Free Fall Baltimore*, an innovative citywide program under the direction of The Baltimore Office of Promotion & The Arts designed to make the arts available to everyone.

Opening the doors free of charge renews the original vision of the two museums, each founded for the benefit of the public during the last century. A lead gift of \$800,000 from Baltimore City and Baltimore County will make free admission possible at both museums beginning this year, with additional support from Anne Arundel County. The museums are continuing to seek funding to sustain free admission.

“This partnership between the museums and the county and city governments will have a transformative impact on the community for both residents and visitors,” said Mayor Martin O’Malley. “This significant investment will provide many more people with the opportunity to experience the beauty, creativity, and significance of art in our lives.”

“This is an investment in the future of the entire metropolitan area,” said Baltimore County Executive Jim Smith. “I am delighted that both museums are approaching this initiative together for the benefit of the people in our community.”

“I believe the arts are a critical component to our quality of life,” said Anne Arundel County Executive Janet S. Owens. “The ability to expose all citizens to great art will enormously enhance our region.”

Future additional support for this regional initiative is being sought from the remaining counties in the Baltimore metro region, including Howard, Harford, and Carroll counties.

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Today general admission for adult visitors to the BMA and the Walters is \$10, however both museums were free for the larger part of their histories. In recent years, the BMA and the Walters have made free hours and free days for the public a significant component of their programs. During these times, each museum consistently attracts a larger and more diverse audience than times when general admission is charged. As a result, each museum independently had explored the possibility of offering free admission again, studying positive results from other major U.S. museums that have eliminated admission fees. This year, the leadership of each museum decided to join forces in seeking greater financial support for free admission.

“The first sentence of the Walters’ mission statement is to bring art and people together for enjoyment, discovery, and learning,” said Walters Board President William L. Paternotte. “Free admission eliminates all financial barriers to the achievement of this mission and demonstrates a commitment to our community—enabling everyone to enjoy these exceptional art museums.”

“The big, bold ideas in The Baltimore Museum of Art’s 2003 Strategic Plan were free admission and making 10 Art Museum Drive a place where everyone feels welcome, energized, and inspired,” said BMA Board Chair Suzanne F. Cohen. “Art should have a place in everyone’s life, and free admission makes it possible. How lucky for Baltimore to have these two great museums—and visionary government officials who recognize the value and importance of the cultural riches of our entire community.”

The Baltimore Museum of Art was founded in 1914 by a group of civic leaders who came together to advance the city by establishing an art museum “to bring the fine arts into the lives of the citizens and their children.” Over the next several decades, their vision brought about an extraordinary accomplishment. Today the BMA is home to a world-renowned collection of 19th-century, modern, and contemporary art and diverse programming that engages people of all ages with the power and excitement of art.

In 1931, the Walters Art Museum’s founding benefactor, Henry Walters, bequeathed the core collection to the City of Baltimore “for the benefit of the public.” The Walters Art Museum now features a distinguished collection of almost 30,000 objects of world art from antiquity to the 20th century. Since its opening, the Walters has been a national leader in scholarship, conservation, and education, and has continued to focus on the preservation, presentation, and interpretation of this permanent collection.

Beginning October 1, the Walters will offer free admission for all exhibitions for one year, including *Courbet and The Modern Landscape*, *Untamed: The Art of Antoine-Louis Barye*, and *Gee’s Bend: The Architecture of the Quilts*.

The BMA will have one specially ticketed exhibition—*Pissarro: Creating the Impressionist Landscape*, February 11–May 13, 2007. All other exhibitions, including the major fall exhibition, *A View toward Paris: Collecting French Art from Corot to Cassatt*, will be offered free during the year.

Members at each museum will continue to receive a host of benefits ranging from free VIP tickets to special exhibitions to gift shop discounts to exclusive members-only preview parties. They will also receive substantial program discounts and invitations to other special events.

Free admission kick-off events, part of *Free Fall Baltimore*, will be held at the BMA on October 1 and at the Walters on October 7. Details will be announced later this summer.

FREE FALL BALTIMORE

Free Fall Baltimore is a new arts initiative and cultural tourism program created to make art more accessible to area residents and visitors. Taking place in the Arts and Humanities Month of October and in November of 2006, **Free Fall Baltimore** features free cultural programs by area attractions and art institutions made possible by a \$750,000 grant from the City of Baltimore. The highlight of the program is the elimination of admission fees by The Baltimore Museum of Art and the Walters Art Museum.

THE BALTIMORE MUSEUM OF ART

The Baltimore Museum of Art is home to an internationally renowned collection of 19th-century, modern, and contemporary art. Founded in 1914, the BMA's outstanding collection encompasses 90,000 works of art, including the largest and most significant holding of works by Henri Matisse in the world, as well as masterpieces by Pablo Picasso, Paul Cézanne, and Vincent van Gogh. An expanding collection of contemporary art features iconic post-1960 works by Andy Warhol and Sol LeWitt, as well as exciting acquisitions by artists such as Kara Walker and Olafur Eliasson. The BMA is also recognized for an internationally acclaimed collection of prints, drawings, and photographs from the 15th century to the present; grand European painting and sculpture from Old Masters to the 19th century; distinguished American painting, sculpture, and decorative arts and Maryland period rooms; one of the most important African collections in the country, and notable examples of Asian, ancient American, and Oceanic art. The BMA's sculpture gardens feature a 100-year survey of modern sculpture on nearly three landscaped acres.

THE WALTERS ART MUSEUM

The Walters Art Museum is located in Baltimore's historic Mount Vernon Cultural District at North Charles and Centre streets and is one of only a few museums worldwide to present a comprehensive history of art from the third millennium B.C. to the early 20th century. Among its thousands of treasures, the Walters holds the finest collection of ivories, jewelry, enamels and bronzes in America and a spectacular reserve of illuminated manuscripts and rare books. The Walters' Egyptian, Greek and Roman, Byzantine, Ethiopian, and western medieval art collections are among the best in the nation, as are the museum's holdings of Renaissance and Asian art. Every major trend in French painting during the 19th century is represented by one or more works in the Walters' collection. Peabody Court is the official hotel of the Walters Art Museum. This historic property is just around the corner from the museum and features George's, a full-service restaurant. For hotel reservations, call 1-800-292-5500 and ask for the special Walters discounted rate.

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