

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ISABELLA
SEWART GARDNER
MUSEUM

Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, Initiates New Policy
Offering FREE Admission to Everyone on His or Her Birthday

This Special Birthday Gift Aimed at Providing Respite Particularly During these Tough Economic Times, to Launch January 1st – on the Museum's Own Birthday!

Free on your Birthday! • Starting January 1st, 2009 • Ongoing



Happy Birthday from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston!

BOSTON • DECEMBER 19, 2008 • The Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston is one of the world's most beloved arts institutions – a Venetian-inspired palace museum housing a world-class collection personally installed by Isabella Stewart Gardner to create an intimate experience with great art. *Always* free for kids under the age of 18, for museum members, and – in honor of the museum's founder Isabella Gardner, for anyone named "Isabella"... **And now, starting on January 1st – in celebration of the museum's own 106th birthday – the Gardner is opening its doors for FREE to all on his or her birthday as a happy birthday gift from Isabella Gardner to you!**

The Gardner Museum's own history began on January 1st, New Years Night, 1903, when Isabella Gardner, museum creator and Boston society grande dame, opened her museum to the public with an artful evening celebration. The celebratory evening of music, art, and culture featured a memorable concert of music by Bach, Mozart, Chausson and Schumann performed by members of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the dramatic unveiling of the flower-filled interior courtyard garden hung with Japanese lanterns and abloom with seasonal flowers, and a menu of... champagne and donuts! The memorable event was heralded in the media and described by one guest as *"the aesthetic perfection of all things...Quite in the line of a Gospel miracle!"*

In celebration of this enchanting opening evening – and the museum's ongoing commitment to providing art and beauty to all – the museum will kick off its 106th year, this January, with an invitation to all to visit and enjoy Isabella Gardner's world-class collection, unparalleled atmosphere, and enriching programs for *free* on his or her birthday.

The Gardner Museum remains a place of inspiration, respite, and beauty for all – a unique and wonderful place to celebrate a birthday in quiet contemplation or amidst friends. Magical any time or day of the year, the Gardner is particularly enchanting at night, when the courtyard garden and galleries are aglow. On the third Thursday evening of each month, birthday revelers will have even more to celebrate with a full-blown party – part of Boston's best evening event, *Gardner After Hours* – replete with live music, cocktails, art, artist performances, savory bites, and more. So, bring your ID, grab some friends, and come explore and celebrate in Boston's most enchanting setting.

AN OPEN POLICY

This new *Free on your birthday!* policy comes at a time when many are struggling in a tough economic climate – and in celebration of the cheer and happiness of the holiday season and the start of a new year.

True to Isabella Gardner's mandate – that her museum remain 'for the education and enjoyment of the public forever,' the Gardner is committed to increasing public access to the collection and to vibrant exhibitions and programs, now more than ever.

"Cultural institutions have a responsibility to the public to increase access and affordability, so that *everyone* can enjoy, engage in and experience beauty," says **Anne Hawley**, *Norma Jean Calderwood Director* of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. "Particularly in the current environment, we wanted to do something to enable, and entice, visitors to take advantage of this world-class collection of art and inspiration right here in the middle of Boston.

"Many people may have to cut back on travel and other luxuries this year," adds Hawley, "but – especially on one's birthday – everyone should be able to celebrate in style! Our hope is that our gift of free admission and an invitation to celebrate among friends and revelry at our *After Hours* events will offer some unexpected cheer on this special day."

The Gardner's new *Free on your birthday!* policy is the latest initiative aimed at increasing access to the museum and collection. The museum is *FREE for all* on New Years Day, January 1st, as part of *First Night* celebrations and on Columbus Day, each October, for the Fenway Cultural District's *Opening Our Doors Day*. Each summer, a trio of *free Neighborhood Nights* events open up the museum for all, in celebration of art and community with special evening hours, art-making activities, gallery explorations, and a kids-friendly menu at The Gardner Café. Also, new this year – *thanks to a significant grant from Bank of America as the Official School and Community Partnerships Sponsor of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum for 2009* – the Gardner Museum will again open its doors for *FREE* to all, amidst an array of family programs and activities, on the Wednesday of public school vacation week in February and April.

Check gardnermuseum.org for additional information on these and other free days and special offers at the Gardner.

ISABELLA STEWART GARDNER MUSEUM

280 The Fenway Boston MA 02115 • Tue.–Sun., 11 am–5 pm • admission: Adults \$12; Seniors \$10; Students \$5; Free for members, children under 18 and all named "Isabella" • "After Hours" admission: Adults \$12; Seniors \$10; Students \$5; Free for members, • \$2 off admission with a same-day Museum of Fine Arts, Boston • Info Line: 617.566.1401 • Box Office: 617 278 5156 • www.gardnermuseum.org

Modeled after a 15th-century Venetian palazzo surrounding a courtyard garden, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum houses one of the most remarkable art collections in the world including works by Rembrandt, Michelangelo, Raphael, Degas, and Sargent. Special exhibitions, concerts, innovative arts education programs, seasonal courtyard garden displays, festive evening events, thematic culinary offerings in The Gardner Café, and scholarly lectures and symposia further enrich the collection.

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EDITORS NOTE • Archival images of Isabella Gardner and newspaper accounts of her opening night celebration are available by request. Isabella Gardner's birthday is April 14th. The museum welcomes photo/film crews at all *After Hours* events and will work with the media, then and at any time, to identify birthday revelers who take advantage of this new policy. Please contact the press office for images, access to the museum's director Anne Hawley, and to explore other opportunities associated with this new policy. Much thanks!

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IMAGE CAPTION • *Madame Gautreau Drinking a Toast* by John Singer Sargent, 1882-83, on view in the Blue Room, and an archival photo of Isabella Stewart Gardner, 1883, in the MacKnight Room await birthday revelers and friends at the Gardner Museum any day of the year. Starting on January 1, 2009, the museum is offering FREE admission to all as a special gift on their birthday. The offer includes evening *After Hours* events.