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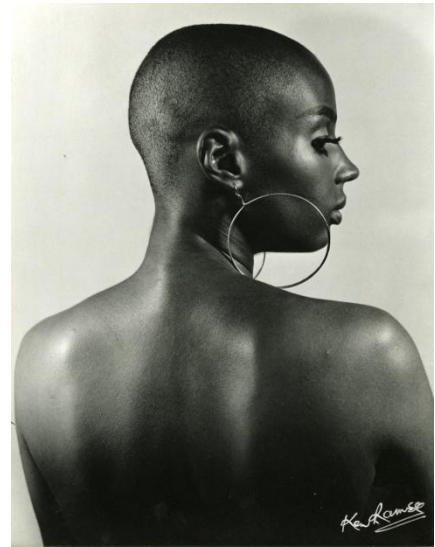
April 2, 2014

***Posing Beauty Investigates Representations***

Companion exhibition explores personal and cultural identity

Exploring contemporary understandings of beauty, *Posing Beauty in African American Culture* frames the notion of aesthetics, race, class, and gender within art, popular culture, and political contexts. The exhibition – and its companion, *Identity Shifts* – will be on view April 26 - July 27, 2014.

*Posing Beauty* examines the contested ways in which African and African American beauty has been represented in historical and contemporary contexts through a diverse range of media including photography, film, video, fashion, advertising, and other forms of popular culture such as music and the Internet. Drawn from both public and private collections, *Posing Beauty* features approximately 90 works by artists such as Carrie Mae Weems, Charles "Teenie" Harris, Eve Arnold, Sheila Pree Bright, Leonard Freed, Renee Cox, Anthony Barboza, Bruce Davidson, Mickalene Thomas, and Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe.



Ken Ramsav. *Susan Tavlör. as Model.* c.1970s.

According to author and historian Barbara Summers: “Beauty is power. And the struggle to have the entire range of Black beauty recognized and respected is a serious one.”

**Identity Shifts: Works from VMFA**

Since the museum’s founding in 1936, VMFA has actively collected work by African American artists. In conjunction with *Posing Beauty*, this collection-based display will feature works by African American artists that use representations of the human figure or some aspect of the body (including hair) to explore how we construct and perceive personal and cultural identity. The selection of paintings and sculptures from the 1970s to the present features an array of perspectives and styles that underscore the complex factors informing conceptions of race and gender. Many of the 21<sup>st</sup> century artists – such as Iona Rozeal Brown, Trenton Doyle Hancock, and Robert Pruitt – mix national, international, historical, and pop culture references with personal stylistic preferences to produce images that provoke more questions about identity than they answer. The selection of photographs offers a survey of 20<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> century work – from James VanDerZee to Carrie Mae Weems and Hank Willis Thomas – while also highlighting the work of lesser



Robert Pruitt, *Steeped*, 2011, conté and charcoal on hand-dyed paper, 47½ x 38". Funds provided by Jil and Hiter Harris.

known artists, such as Richmond native Louis Draper, who played a primary role in founding the first African American photography collective, Kamoinge, in New York in 1963. Many of these works will be on view at VMFA for the first time.

### **Programs**

On April 21, *Posing Beauty* curator Deborah Willis will examine the relationship between beauty and politics and explore how it has shaped a new understanding of black culture, from the antebellum period to the present. A Teen Talent showcase take place May 16, and a free family day, “Celebrate African and African American Art – Free Style” will be June 21. Artists Sonya Clarke and Robert Pruitt will talk about their work in *Identity Shifts* on July 17.

### **About *Posing Beauty***

**TITLE:** *Posing Beauty in African American Culture*

**DATES:** April 26 – July 27, 2014

**TICKETS:** \$10; \$8 for seniors 65+, adult groups 10+, students with ID and youth ages 7-17

**PUBLICATION:** Deborah Willis, *Posing Beauty: African American Images from the 1890s to the Present*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009.

**CURATOR:** Dr. Deborah Willis, University Professor and Department Chair at Tisch School of the Arts, New York University

**VMFA COORDINATING CURATOR:** Dr. Sarah Eckhardt, Assistant Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art

**ORGANIZER:** The exhibition is organized by the Department of Photography & Imaging at New York University, Tisch School of the Arts and traveled by Curatorial Assistance Traveling Exhibitions

**NUMBER OF WORKS:** 90

**ITINERARY:** This exhibition has traveled internationally since 2010

**SPONSORS:** Sponsored by Dominion. The Banner Exhibition Program at VMFA is supported by the Julia Louise Reynolds Fund.

### **About *Identity Shifts***

**TITLE:** *Identity Shifts: Works from VMFA*

**DATES:** April 27 – July 26, 2014

**TICKETS:** Included in the *Posing Beauty* ticket

**CURATOR:** Dr. Sarah Eckhardt, VMFA’s Assistant Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art

**NUMBER OF WORKS:** 35 paintings, sculptures and photographs

### **About the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts**

VMFA’s permanent collection encompasses more than 33,000 works of art spanning 5,000 years of world history. Its collections of Art Nouveau and Art Deco, English silver, Fabergé, and the art of South Asia are among the finest in the nation. With acclaimed holdings in American, British Sporting, Impressionist and Post-Impressionist, and Modern and Contemporary art – and additional strengths in African, Ancient, East Asian, and European – VMFA ranks as one of the top comprehensive art museums in the United States. Programs include educational activities and studio classes for all ages, plus lively after-hours events. VMFA’s statewide program includes traveling exhibitions, artist and teacher workshops, and lectures across the Commonwealth. VMFA, a certified Virginia Green attraction, is open 365 days a year and general admission is always free. For additional information, telephone 804-340-1400 or visit [www.vmfa.museum](http://www.vmfa.museum).

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