

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Approved: \_\_\_\_\_

THE VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS  
Minutes of the Art and Audience Committee Meeting  
Held, pursuant to due notice, Theater Level Conference Suite Room #1  
Wednesday, 18 September 2013, 12:00 pm

Presiding: Thomas F. Farrell II, Co-Chair  
Secretary: Ms. Suzanne Broyles

There were present:

Thomas F. Farrell II, Co-Chair  
Karen C. Abramson  
Mary Anne Carlson  
Michael M. Connors  
Ms. Susan S. Goode  
Ms. Nancy H. Gottwald  
Dr. Elizabeth F. Harris  
Marlene A. Malek  
Charlotte M. Minor  
Dr. Claude G. Perkins  
Charles H. Seilheimer, Jr.  
Dr. Lindley T. Smith  
William A. Royall, Jr., Ex-Officio

By Invitation:

Alex Nyerges, Director  
Stephen D. Bonadies  
Ms. Suzanne Broyles  
Dr. Lee Anne Chesterfield  
W. Birch Douglass III  
Robin Nicholson  
Cameron O'Brion  
Ms. Jayne Shaw  
Dr. Sylvia Yount

Absent:

James W. McGlothlin, Co-Chair  
Margaret Irby Clement  
Richard B. Gilliam  
Ms. Margaret N. Gottwald  
Terrell Luck Harrigan  
Dr. Monroe E. Harris, Jr.  
Mrs. Deborah H. Quillen  
Satya Rangarajan

**I. Call to Order**

Co-Chair, Thomas F. Farrell II, called the meeting to order at 12:05 pm and welcomed the group.

## II. Minutes

**Motion:** proposed and seconded that the minutes of the last meeting of the Art and Audience Committee held on the 14th of June 2013 be approved as distributed on the 22nd of August 2013. Motion carried.

## III. Exhibition Planning – Robin Nicholson

Robin Nicholson showed that the museum operating budget for FY14 totaled \$34,400,000. He then provided a pie chart showing operating expenses with personnel being the largest portion at 57.2% and the exhibition program being the second to the smallest at 5.9%. He provided the exhibition budget total for FY14 (\$2,237,797) and a pie chart of the primary cost centers of the FY14 exhibition expenses showing that the Fees/Contract Labor/Insurance category was the largest segment at 21% and the R & D Potential Future being the smallest at 2%. He stated that only 4% is R & D for existing scheduled exhibitions. Mr. Nicholson took questions from Committee members.

Robin Nicholson provided the banner exhibition calendar for the years 2014 through 2017 and discussed each one. He remarked that we have two banner exhibitions planned for each fiscal year. Most exciting is *Forbidden City* that opens in October of 2014, is here for three months and focuses on education. This exhibition has a lot of media support and corporate interest. He reported that half of those works have never before left China. This exhibition brings the world to Virginia and will offer a teaching gallery and an app for outreach. He stated that the challenge with this exhibition is that the objects can only be out of China for a certain number of months.

Charlotte Minor asked about the cost projections for these exhibitions. Mr. Nicholson replied that the cost projections fluctuate greatly from less than \$400,000 for the *Posing Beauty* exhibition to \$1.8 million for *Forbidden City*. He noted that we are trying to get a handle on revenue implications for each planned exhibition. Mr. Nicholson then gave an exhibition R & D update explaining what the curators have been working on.

## IV. Art Acquisitions – Sylvia Yount

Sylvia Yount, Chief Curator and Louise B. and J. Harwood Cochrane Curator of American Art, reviewed VMFA's art acquisition process, as discussed at last December's Art Acquisitions Seminar. Ms. Yount noted that the museum has a formal Collections Policy (last updated in 2007) that states our acquisitions should be of strong aesthetic and historical value. Works of art accessioned into VMFA's permanent collection are intended to be retained for long-term use and are reviewed according to the following general criteria:

- The work of art will possess potential for research and scholarship.
- The work of art will be in an acceptable state of preservation relative to other works of its kind.
- The work of art will be appropriate to VMFA collections, being consistent with the general collection goals of VMFA and the specific goals of the curatorial areas.
- The work of art will have a provenance that adheres to the American Association of Museums and Association of Art Museum Directors guidelines.
- The work of art will be of an aesthetic quality commensurate with VMFA standards for exhibition.

In addition to these general criteria, the following factors will be considered by the Art Acquisitions Sub-committee, the Curators, and the Director:

1. Is appropriate exhibition or storage space available?
2. Has the provenance of the object been satisfactorily researched?
3. Are there questions regarding legal title?
4. Is the object encumbered by conditions imposed by a donor? By intellectual property rights

(i.e. copyright, trademark, etc.)?

5. Could acceptance of the work of art give the impression of undue commercial endorsement?
6. Might the work of art proposed or a similar work of art be obtained by gift or bequest rather than by immediate purchase?
7. Is the price fair and reasonable?

Ms. Yount observed that, in addition to VMFA's institutional policy, each curator has individual collecting strategies that are regularly updated. Ms. Yount indicated that we now have a specific timeline for the acquisition process that coincides better with the Trustee meeting dates. The process begins with a curator bringing information on an object to the Chief Curator (Ms. Yount), suggesting a possible funding source and how the object will be used in the galleries. The Chief Curator then shares it with the Deputy Director for Art and Education, Robin Nicholson, and Director, Alex Nyerges. If green-lighted, the work is then shipped to the museum for further study at the dealer's expense. (VMFA covers the shipping costs of gifts.) Once at the museum, our conservators review the condition of the object, and curators continue to research and evaluate the work. Yount, Nicholson, and Hurt then meet to finalize the funding source. Acquisition write-ups are reviewed and submitted to the Art Acquisitions Sub-Committee (AASC). If the AASC approves the acquisition, it then goes to the full Board for their approval. At that point, a press release is produced announcing the acquisitions, and the object is installed in the gallery with a label text.

Ms. Yount explained that the Director's Discretionary funds are used when a curator needs to purchase something in between Trustee meetings. The Director has discretionary authority to make purchases up to \$100,000 in value without prior trustee approval, and between \$100,001 and \$250,000 in value with the consent of the Co-Chairs of the Art Acquisitions Sub-Committee, up to a total of \$500,000 per calendar year. All such discretionary purchases are reported to the Art Acquisitions Sub-Committee at their next meeting. This gives the museum more leeway to successfully bid at auctions and pursue other time-sensitive acquisitions.

Ms. Yount listed the four major ways an object enters the collection and asked if there were any questions.

- Through a gallery or a dealer (10% museum discount)
- At auction (less common, more in future)
- Private collectors (can be a partial gift/purchase)
- Gifts (generally, many in December for tax purposes)

Charlotte Minor asked if we ever consider pooling our resources to make one major acquisition a year, rather than bringing in a number of less expensive, individual works. Ms. Yount replied that while many of our acquisition funds are restricted to certain collecting areas (Cochrane for American Art, for example) with the advent of the Glasgow funds we are now able to explore more ambitious acquisitions across the entire collection. Alex Nyerges agreed, saying we are pushing the curators to think big.

## V. **Other Business/Adjournment**

Mr. Farrell thanked Ms. Yount for her informative presentation and her insight. There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 1:00 pm by Co-Chair, Thomas F. Farrell II.

Suzanne Broyles  
Secretary of the Museum