

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Important Benefactor Adds to VMFA Holdings**

Gifts enhance museum's British, American, and French collections

Works from the Life Estate of Paul Mellon, longtime donor and trustee at VMFA, are being gifted to the museum upon the death of his widow, Rachel Lambert Mellon, who died March 17, 2014. Mrs. Mellon held a life estate in 26 works of art originally bequeathed to VMFA in 1999 by Mr. Mellon. Among the gifts are six masterworks, including Vincent van Gogh's *Daisies*, which will be officially acquired at the June 17 Board of Trustees meeting.

"Through the Mellon family's historic gifts to the Commonwealth's art museum," VMFA Director Alex Nyerges said, "they transformed the museum into a center for display, study and appreciation of the arts, especially of Britain and France. The works amplify our already strong holdings in British and American art, but significantly increase the French holdings as well."



Vincent van Gogh (Dutch, active in France, 1853-90)  
*Daisies, Arles*, 1888, oil on canvas. Unframed: 13 × 16  
1/2 in. (33 × 41.9 cm)

This week, a memorial to Mrs. Mellon was installed at the entrance to the Mellon French Gallery. The display spotlights Jean Schlumberger's *Flower Pot*, one of the *objets d'art* in her collection that was included in the approximately 1,800 works of art given by the Mellons throughout their involvement with VMFA.

"The Virginia Museum is particularly proud that the Mellon Collections include works of art representing subjects that were highly meaningful to Mrs. Mellon, such as flowers, gardens, and the French countryside, as well as the British and American horses and landscapes that Mr. Mellon admired," Nyerges said.

Among the most significant and transformative of the recent gifts, the following are works that represent styles, artists, or movements not already included in the Mellon French Collection.

- Camille Pissarro (French 1830-1903) *The "Royal Palace" at the Hermitage, Pontoise, May*, 1879, oil on canvas. A landscape masterpiece from the height of Camille Pissarro's fully-fledged high Impressionist period, representing the neighborhood of l'Hermitage in Pontoise, where he worked between 1866 and 1883. Pissarro heretofore has been represented by three other works: two Caribbean landscapes, and an earlier Pontoise streetscape.

- Paul Gauguin (French 1848-1903) *Still Life with Bowl*, ca. 1889, oil on canvas. A classic Post-Impressionist Breton still life by Paul Gauguin, until now represented by a much-earlier still life in the manner of Manet.
- Vincent van Gogh (Dutch, 1853-1890) *Daisies, Arles*, 1888, oil on canvas. A major Arles period still life of good size and excellent wall power by Vincent van Gogh, which will be featured in VMFA's upcoming exhibition *Working Among Flowers*. This popular artist was represented previously by four landscapes: two in oil and two ink drawings.
- Georges Seurat (French, 1859-1891) *Houses and Garden*, ca. 1882, oil on canvas. A Pointillist landscape by Georges Seurat, VMFA's only oil by this rare master.
- Kees van Dongen (Dutch, 1877-1968) *Haystacks*, ca. 1904-05, oil on canvas. A major early Kees van Dongen landscape in his rarely seen fully Fauve style, which will hang with the Henri Matisse and the early Maurice de Vlaminck as major examples of this movement.

### **About Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon**

Mr. Paul Mellon of Upperville, Va., was the son of Andrew W. Mellon, American financier, U.S. Secretary of the Treasury, and noted collector of old master paintings who founded the National Gallery of Art in Washington. Paul Mellon chose not to follow his father's footsteps into business, devoting his life to collecting art, major deeds of philanthropy, and an idealized version of English country life (that he memorably described in his autobiography, *Reflections in a Silver Spoon*). Educated at Choate, Yale and Cambridge, Paul Mellon wittily described himself as a victim of "galloping anglophilia." Paul Mellon's deep appreciation for English culture is reflected in his encyclopedic collection of British art—first shown at VMFA in 1963—which he later gave mainly to the Yale Center for British Art, an institution founded by this gift. Also deeply involved with the National Gallery, to which he gave more than 1,000 works of art, he commissioned the NGA East Building and funded its construction in the late 1970s. At VMFA, Paul Mellon served as a trustee for 44 years. His nascent interest in British and sporting art blossomed after he served on the advisory committee for VMFA's 1960 exhibition *Sport and the Horse*.

Rachel Lambert Mellon, longtime VMFA supporter and patron of the arts and sciences, contributed substantially to VMFA through her donation of the objects d'art that she personally commissioned from the French-born surrealist jeweler and designer at Tiffany and Co., Jean Schlumberger. Paul Mellon credited his wife as inspiring his interest in French art, and together they gave a portion of their French collections (including nine rare wax sculptures by Edgar Degas), as well as American and British works to VMFA.

### **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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**Press Contact:**

Suzanne Hall, [suzanne.hall@vmfa.museum](mailto:suzanne.hall@vmfa.museum), 804.204.2704

Pryor Green, [pryor.green@vmfa.museum](mailto:pryor.green@vmfa.museum), 804.204.2701

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 200 N. Boulevard, Richmond VA 23220-4007