

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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VMFA Acquires Painting Commissioned by King George III

One of the most valuable acquisitions in VMFA history

An important work by American painter Benjamin West was recently installed in the McGlothlin American Galleries. The portrait was acquired during the June 18 meeting of the VMFA Board of Trustees and is among the most valuable acquisitions in VMFA history.

Benjamin West, also known as the “father of American painting,” was at one point the most prominent painter in the British Empire. He served as President of the Royal Academy, History Painter to the King, and Surveyor of the King’s Pictures until his death in 1820. While in London, he also mentored American artists Charles Wilson Peale, Gilbert Stuart, and John Trumbull – each of whom is represented in VMFA’s American Galleries. This is one of six group portraits commissioned by King George III during the American



Benjamin West (British American, 1738-1820) *Portrait of Prince William and his Elder Sister, Princess Sophia*, 1779, oil on canvas, fr: 74 1/8 x 98 1/8"; unfr: 61 3/8 x 85 1/4".

Revolution. Intended as a gift for the king’s brother, HRH Prince William Henry, Duke of Gloucester and Edinburgh, it is the only one of the six outside the Royal Collection. Descended in the family of George III, whose daughter HRH Princess Mary wed the sitter, Prince William, the painting celebrates the king’s protection of his niece and nephew at a moment during their father’s ill-health. In acknowledgement of the king’s generosity, the children and father – symbolized by the robe and crown – signal their obedience to the king, symbolized by the lion. This patriarchal narrative of duty and protection served a dual purpose as wartime propaganda. As the king served to protect his subjects, so his subjects – the colonists – owed their obedience to the king.

The acquisition of *Portrait of Prince William and his Elder Sister, Princess Sophia* was made possible by the J. Harwood and Louise B. Cochrane Fund for American Art. Since 1988, this permanent endowment has provided support for the acquisition of historic American paintings, sculpture, works on paper, and decorative arts, ca. 1700-1945, including those native to Virginia. It has been funded with outright gifts, 220 parcels of real estate in Manchester, and their former home and farm in Hanover County. Proceeds from the sales of the real estate have been added to the Cochrane endowment principal. The endowment is now nearly 30 years old and has underwritten 79 important American acquisitions.

Additional Acquisitions

African

- Dogon culture (Mali): *Sirige Mask*, mid-late 20th c., wood, paint, fiber, iron, leather, 145 ½" and *Sirige Mask*, 2014, wood, paint, fiber, iron, leather, 156 ½". Anonymous donor.

American

- Gene Davis (American, 1920-1985), *Three Witches*, 1965, acrylic on canvas, 3 panels, each 36 x 192" Gift of Mary Ann Nichols, Washington D.C.

European

- Neri di Bicci (Italian, 1419-1493), *Madonna and Child enthroned between Saints Dominic, Zenobius, Francis and Miniato*, ca. 1450-1452, tempera on panel, 43.3 x 68.7" The Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Fund.

Photography

Collection of 26 silver gelatin prints by Hungarian and American photographers. Gifts of Dr. and Mrs. Charles McDowell:

- Andre Kertesz, *A Hungarian Memory*, 1980, portfolio of 15 silver gelatin prints
- Imogen Cunningham (American, 1883-1976), two silver gelatin prints: *Magnolia Blossom*, *Tower of Jewels*, and *Edward Weston and Margrethe Mather*
- Emmet Gowin (American, b. 1941), *Natural Drainage System, June 1972*, silver gelatin print
- Paul Caponigro (American, b. 1932), three silver gelatin prints: *Running White Deer*, *Apple*, and *Cabbage*
- Jerry N. Uelsmann (American, b. 1934), five silver gelatin prints: *Strawberry Day*, 1967; *April is the Cruellest Month*, 1967; *Small Woods Where I Met Myself*, 1967; *Questioning Moment*, 1971; and *Equivalent*, 1964

About VMFA Acquisitions:

These works of art were approved by the VMFA Board of Trustees on June 18, 2015. All art is purchased with private funds from dedicated endowments. VMFA is a state agency and a public/private partnership. After trustee approval, the art becomes the property of the Commonwealth of Virginia to protect, preserve, and interpret.

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 Partnership 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.

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