

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts Appoints Dr. Alisa Chiles as the New Sydney and Frances Lewis Family Curator of Decorative Arts, 1890 to the Present

Chiles will advance the curatorial vision for VMFA’s decorative arts collection of more than 2,700 works



VMFA appointed Dr. Alisa Chiles as the museum’s new Sydney and Frances Lewis Family Curator of Decorative Arts, 1890 to the Present.
Photo by Sandra Sellars, © 2024 Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

Richmond, VA — Following an international search, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA) announced today the appointment of Alisa Chiles, Ph.D., as the museum’s new Sydney and Francis Lewis Curator of Decorative Arts, 1890 to the Present, beginning January 10, 2025.

“I am delighted to welcome Alisa to the staff at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts,” said museum Director and CEO Alex Nyerges. “Alisa will play a vital role in upcoming acquisitions, future installations and the stewardship and interpretation of works of art in the museum’s renowned decorative arts collection.”

The Sydney and Frances Lewis Family Curator of Decorative Arts, 1890 to the Present, oversees a collection of more than 2,700 works of [decorative arts made after 1890](#), which includes the finest holdings of Art Nouveau and Art Deco outside of Paris, as well as the museum’s extensive Fabergé collection, which is considered the most important outside of Russia. The position was previously held by Barry Shifman, who retired in January 2024 after 17 years of distinguished service to VMFA.

“I am thrilled to join VMFA and work with its extraordinary collection and dedicated team,” Dr. Chiles said. “I greatly admire VMFA’s commitment to inclusivity and making all visitors feel at home. I’m excited to support this mission and look forward to helping create meaningful and inspiring connections between people and the decorative arts.”

An expert in Art Nouveau and Art Deco, Dr. Chiles seeks in her curatorial practice to broaden perspectives and make decorative arts collections widely accessible. She comes to VMFA from the Philadelphia Museum of Art, where she served as Assistant Curator of European Decorative Arts and Sculpture, overseeing a large collection of objects from the 18th century to present day. While there, she worked on multiple projects to recontextualize European decorative arts through a more global lens by illuminating makers' identities and tracing the origins of materials. She also installed galleries and period rooms that brought together diverse objects to foster dialogue across a range of collections and continents. Prior to her appointment as Assistant Curator, Dr. Chiles was the Andrew W. Mellon Fellow, where she played a vital role in the reinstallation of the Philadelphia Museum of Art's 19th-century galleries.



Dr. Alisa Chiles will begin working at VMFA on Jan. 10, 2025.
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Previously Dr. Chiles worked in the European Sculpture and Decorative Arts department at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

Dr. Chiles received her Ph.D. in art history from the University of Pennsylvania. Her dissertation, *Dueling Designs: The French-German Rivalry and Modernism in the Decorative Arts, 1890–1939*, examined how the national rivalry between France and Germany energized the development of modern decorative arts in the early decades of the 20th century. She earned her M.A. in art history from the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University and her B.A. in art history from Stanford University in California, where she completed her undergraduate honors thesis on the French Art Nouveau architect and designer Hector Guimard.

“Alisa’s strong scholarly background and innovative curatorial approach make her an exceptional choice for this endowed curatorial position at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts,” said Artistic Director and Chief Curator Dr. Michael Taylor. “Our outstanding collection of decorative arts after 1890 is in great hands with Alisa, and I can’t wait to see the acquisitions, exhibitions and permanent collection displays she makes at VMFA.”

For more information about the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, recently named one of the 20 best art museums in the U.S. by *The Washington Post*, visit www.VMFA.museum.

About the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond, Virginia, is one of the largest comprehensive art museums in the United States. VMFA, which opened in 1936, is a state agency and privately endowed educational institution. Its purpose is to collect, preserve, exhibit and interpret art, and to encourage the study of the arts. Through the Office of Statewide Partnerships program, the museum offers curated exhibitions, arts-related audiovisual programs, symposia, lectures, conferences and workshops by visual and performing artists around the Commonwealth. In addition to presenting a wide array of special exhibitions, the museum provides visitors with the opportunity to experience a global collection of art that spans more than 6,000 years. VMFA’s permanent holdings encompass more than 50,000 artworks, including the largest public collection of Fabergé outside of Russia, the finest collection of Art Nouveau outside of Paris and one of the nation’s finest collections of American art. VMFA is also home to important collections of Chinese art, English silver, French Impressionist, Post-Impressionist, British sporting and modern and contemporary art, as well as renowned South Asian, Himalayan and African art. In May 2010, VMFA opened the James W. and Frances G. McGlothlin Wing I after a transformative expansion, previously the largest in its history. A new expansion, the McGlothlin Wing II, is planned to open in 2028. Comprising more than 170,000 square feet, it will be the largest expansion in the museum’s history and will make VMFA the fourth largest comprehensive art museum in the United States.

The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts is the only art museum in the United States open 365 days a year with free general admission. For additional information, telephone (804) 340-1400 or visit www.VMFA.museum.

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