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VMFA to Receive \$45,000 Grant from the National Endowment for the Arts
Award Provides Support for 2021 Exhibition *The Dirty South*

Richmond, Virginia — The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) has awarded \$45,000 in Art Works grant funds to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA) to support its upcoming exhibition *The Dirty South: Contemporary Art, Material Culture and the Sonic Impulse*. This is one of 1,015 grants nationwide that the agency has approved and was part of Art Works, a major funding package totaling \$84 million.

“These awards demonstrate the resilience of the arts in America, showcasing not only the creativity of their arts projects but the organizations’ agility in the face of a national health crisis,” said NEA Chairman Mary Anne Carter. “We celebrate organizations like VMFA for providing opportunities for learning and engagement through the arts in these times.”

“The National Endowment for the Arts’ support for *The Dirty South* exhibition enables the museum to continue highlighting and commissioning work by Black artists,” said Alex Nyerges, VMFA’s Director and CEO. “Though we have been working on this exhibition for a few years it is an especially significant project at this time of historic change.” In 1944, only nine years after opening its doors, the VMFA acquired its first work by an African American artist. Since that time the museum has continued to make strides in diversifying the permanent collection of which the works of Black artists now comprise 39 percent.

Featuring approximately 80 works, *The Dirty South* exhibition will explore the aesthetic impulses of early 20th-century Black culture as seen in contemporary Black musical expression found throughout the American South. Drawing from the visual imagery found in music videos, lyrics and cultural ephemera, the exhibition traces the roots of southern Black hip hop to reveal its aesthetic leanings. The exhibition, slated to open in May 2021, will explore the sonic and visual currents that not only influenced today’s music but art over the last century. “The confluence between the visual and sonic arts in Black expression have long been recognized. However, what has remained elusive, particularly in the presentation of these forms, is the long trajectory of this exchange,” said Valerie Cassel Oliver, the Sydney and Frances Lewis Family Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, and the exhibition’s organizer. “As a native of the South, this is an endeavor that is close to my heart.” The museum is also producing a catalogue to accompany the exhibition.

For more information on this National Endowment for the Arts grant announcement visit [arts.gov/news](https://www.arts.gov/news).

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. 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 nearly 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 its doors to the public after a transformative expansion, the largest in its history.

About the National Endowment for the Arts

Established by Congress in 1965, the National Endowment for the Arts is the independent federal agency whose funding and support gives Americans the opportunity to participate in the arts, exercise their imaginations and develop their creative capacities. Through partnerships with state arts agencies, local leaders, other federal agencies and the philanthropic sector, the Arts Endowment supports arts learning, affirms and celebrates America's rich and diverse cultural heritage and extends its work to promote equal access to the arts in every community across America.

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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