

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 25, 2020

Governor Northam and VMFA Announce Recipients of Virginia Visual Artist Relief Grants Grant Awards Total Two-Hundred Thousand Dollars

Richmond, Virginia — Virginia Governor Ralph Northam, First Lady Pamela Northam and Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA) Director and CEO Alex Nyerges today announced the names of forty Commonwealth artists who will receive relief grants as part of a special program to help visual artists impacted by COVID-19. Each recipient will receive \$5,000 from the Virginia Artist Relief Fellowship Program, for a total of \$200,000 distributed by the fund.

“Art has a way of bringing people together—something we need now more than ever,” said Governor Ralph Northam. “These grant recipients hail from more than twenty different cities and towns across the Commonwealth, and Pam and I are proud to help support their important work.”

The Virginia Artist Relief Fellowship Program grant recipients include: Emine Sermin Ciddi (Alexandria); Veronica Jackson (Bedford); Mojdeh Rezaeipour (Burke); Tina Curtis (Charlottesville); Eliza Lamb (Chester); Nikki Painter, Jordan Shanks and Alfonso Perez Acosta (Chesterfield); Michael Childers and Soomin Ham (Fairfax); Jun Lee (Falls Church); Wendy Werstlein (Floyd); Lorie McCown (Fredericksburg); Sandy Williams IV (Glen Allen); Kemi Layeni (Hampton); Ethan Brown (King William); Noah Velez (Leesburg); Scot Turner (Newport News); Kimberly McKinnis and Khalil Riddick (Norfolk); S. Ross Browne, Hamilton Glass, Alicia Little, Jaydan Moore, Barry O'Keefe, Eva Rocha, Ricardo Vicente Jose Ruiz, Leigh Suggs, Luis Vasquez and Kendra Wadsworth (Richmond); Susan Jamison (Roanoke); Suzanne Stevens and Nastassja Swift (Virginia Beach); and Steve Prince (Williamsburg). Six other artists, who asked not to be named, from Charlottesville, Centerville, Lynchburg, Monroe, Richmond and Roanoke rounded out the list of recipients.

“Artists’ livelihoods and their ability to continue making art have been directly impacted by cancelled exhibitions and gallery and museum closures as a result of the pandemic,” said Alex Nyerges, VMFA’s Director and CEO. “We sought to use resources we have available to help sustain artists in Virginia through this critical time.”

“I truly believe that any available financial support would be invaluable and meaningful to me—not only to make my ongoing pursuits possible, but also to uphold my positive spirit to get through this difficult time,” Soomin Ham, a Fairfax artist and fellowship recipient, wrote in her application. Williamsburg artist and recipient Steve Prince, similarly expressed how timely the support is, “This fellowship becomes even more critical for me, and conversely this nation, to be able to continue creating work that addresses the damaging social issues and operatively working to create a more just and equal society.”

The museum received more than 350 applications for this program. Recipients were selected by a jury made up of three staff members at VMFA: Valerie Cassel Oliver, Sydney and Frances Lewis Family Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art; Natasha Campbell, head of the museum’s fellowship program; and Jeffrey Allison, head of statewide programs.

The Virginia Artist Relief Fellowship Program is funded utilizing the accrued excess balance of the museum's existing Artist Fellowship Endowment established in 1941 through a generous gift made by the late John Lee Pratt of Fredericksburg, VA. Pratt stipulated that the funds be used to support professional artists as well as art and art history students in the Commonwealth and not for other purposes. Through this endowment, VMFA has awarded nearly \$5.8 million to Virginia artists in the Commonwealth over the past 80 years.

Today's announcement was broadcast live on [VMFA's Facebook page](#). To learn more about the Virginia Artist Relief Fellowship Program, visit www.VMFA.museum/visual-artist-relief-program.

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. 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.

#

Media Contacts

Jan Hatchette | 804.204.2721 | jan.hatchette@VMFA.museum

Amy Peck | 804.204.2680 | amy.peck@VMFA.museum

Ume Farwa | 804.204.2702 | ume.farwa@VMFA.museum

200 N. Arthur Ashe Blvd., Richmond, VA 23220