

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 20, 2020

VMFA Exhibition Portrays the Majestic Beauty of the Natural Bridge
American Artists Captured the Splendor of the Popular Natural Landmark



Jervis McEntee (American, 1828-1891), *Natural Bridge*, 1877. Collection of Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

Richmond, Virginia—The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA) is excited to announce its upcoming exhibition, *Virginia Arcadia: The Natural Bridge in American Art*, an exploration of the artistic portrayal of this spectacular and seemingly miraculous natural landmark. The exhibition, free to visitors, will be on view at VMFA in Richmond, Virginia, from February 6 to August 1, 2021.

“VMFA is pleased to recognize Virginia’s very own natural landmark through this exhibition,” said VMFA Director and CEO Alex Nyerges. “We hope *Virginia Arcadia* inspires appreciation for and interest in rediscovering the wonderful natural world here in our state, and also recognizing that the environment is a precious source of inspiration.”

The majesty of the Shenandoah Valley's Natural Bridge, a 400-year-old geological formation, has inspired artists, writers and explorers over the centuries. It has served as an ethereal example of the American landscape, an icon of natural history and a witness to human civilization. One of the most depicted sites in American 19th-century landscape painting, this formation captured the imaginations of artists like Frederic Church, David Johnson, Edward Hicks and Caleb Boyle, as well as many decorative artists.

“Consider a time when our very landscape sparked wonder and inspired myth,” said the exhibition’s curator, Dr. Christopher C. Oliver, VMFA’s Assistant Curator of American Art. “Artists were moved to not only capture its

picturesque splendor and breathtaking sense of place, but also all that the Natural Bridge represented and idealized — the sublime divinity of the natural world, the excitement of discovery, the harmony between nature and civilization and the abundance of pastoral beauty.” The Natural Bridge is also historically relevant to western expansion, slavery, natural history, tourism and ecological conservation.

Virginia Arcadia examines the Natural Bridge through more than 60 paintings, prints, decorative art objects and photographs made between the late 1700s and the early 1900s. Highlights of the exhibition include works from VMFA’s collection including one of the earliest illustrations of the Natural Bridge, an engraving from 1787 by Baron De Turpin, a French engineer sent to document the site, one of three such engravings featured in *Volume 1: Travels In North-America in the Years 1780, 1781 and 1782*. Joshua Shaw’s oil painting *Natural Bridge No. 1* (ca. 1820) captures the view from atop the arch of the bridge looking down into a nearby creek in Rockbridge County, Virginia. Several works in the exhibition are on loan from institutions across the country including the Chrysler Museum, the Fralin Museum of Art at the University of Virginia, the Mead Art Museum at Amherst College, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, the Virginia Museum of History and Culture, and the Yale University Art Gallery, as well as from private collections.

More information about *Virginia Arcadia: The Natural Bridge in American Art* can be found on the museum’s website, 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. 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 | 804.773.1791 | amy.peck@VMFA.museum

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

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