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VMFA's Original Exhibition *Storied Strings: The Guitar in American Art* Opens October 8
The Exhibition is the First Ever to Explore the Symbolism of the Guitar in American Art



Jessie with Guitar, 1957, Thomas Hart Benton (American, 1889–1975), oil on canvas. Jessie Benton Collection. Image © 2022 T.H. and R.P. Benton Trusts/Licensed by Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Richmond, Virginia — The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA) is excited to announce its upcoming exhibition, *Storied Strings: The Guitar in American Art*, slated to be on view at the museum in Richmond from October 8, 2022 to March 19, 2023. [*Storied Strings*](#) is the first exhibition to explore the guitar's symbolism in American art from the early 19th century to the present day.

“We expect that *Storied Strings*, an exhibition that will bring to the fore one of America’s most quintessential emblems — the guitar — will have broad appeal and resonate with our visitors,” said Alex Nyerges, VMFA’s Director and CEO. “Through this multifaceted exhibition, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts will highlight the exceptional work of this country’s diverse artists, designers, makers and musicians.”

Curated by Dr. Leo G. Mazow, VMFA’s Louise B. and J. Harwood Cochrane Curator of American Art, *Storied Strings* will trace how the guitar, as a visual motif, has long enabled artists and their subjects to address topics and tell stories that would otherwise remain untold or under-told.

“As with music, the guitar in visual art is both a storyteller’s companion and a tool through which topics are addressed. The guitar is uniquely capable of symbolizing both poetic and prosaic themes,” said Dr. Mazow. “Because of its

portability and relative affordability, the guitar appears in myriad settings and situations. It frequently intersects with matters of race, ethnicity, class, gender and disability, including blindness.”

Composed of 125 works of art created over the span of nearly 200 years, *Storied Strings* will include paintings, drawings, watercolors, photographs and sculptures by prominent American artists such as John Baldessari, Romare Bearden, Thomas Hart Benton, Elizabeth Catlett, William Merritt Chase, Thomas Eakins, William Eggleston, Robert Henri, Lonnie Holley, Frances Benjamin Johnston, William H. Johnson, Jacob Lawrence, Annie Leibovitz, Charles Willson Peale, Ruth Reeves and Julian Alden Weir.

In addition, 35 guitars will punctuate the exhibition, including instruments made by Fender, Gibson, Gretsch and Martin. Featured guitars were played by pioneering musicians who helped shape the American sound including Lulu Belle, Eric Clapton, John Lee Hooker, Freddie King, Les Paul and Brian Setzer.

Audio-visual kiosks featuring music and filmed performances will further enhance the visitor experience. A window overlooking an impressive, fully functioning recording studio, installed in the exhibition in partnership with [In Your Ear Studios](#), will enable visitors to view guitarists of national and regional renown as they record songs that demonstrate the power of the instrument to tell stories. Among the musicians confirmed to record in the studio are Tommy Emmanuel, Nels Cline (Wilco), Stephen McCarthy (The Jayhawks) and Yasmin Williams. The resulting videos of their performances will be released regularly on [VMFA's website](#) and [YouTube channel](#) as *Richmond Sessions '22–'23*.

A comprehensive 276-page exhibition catalogue will be available for sale in the VMFA Shop, online at [www.VMFAshop.com](#) and distributed by Penn State University Press. Authored by Dr. Mazow, the catalogue will feature color images of every work of art in *Storied Strings* and include insightful contributions by Jayson Kerr Dobney, the Frederick P. Rose Curator in Charge of Musical Instruments at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and Dr. Phil Deloria, the Leverett Saltonstall Professor of History at Harvard University.

For more information about [Storied Strings: The Guitar in American Art](#) and exhibition related programs, visit [www.VMFA.museum](#).

Ticket Information

Tickets for VMFA's exhibition [Storied Strings: The Guitar in American Art](#) will go on sale August 11, 2022. Regularly priced tickets for this special exhibition are \$16 for adults, \$12 for seniors 65+, and \$10 for youth 7–17 and college students with ID. As a participant of Blue Star Museums, VMFA provides free admission to *Storied Strings* for all active duty, National Guard and Reserve military personnel and their immediate families. Tickets are scheduled to help limit gallery capacity during the pandemic. For current information about the museum's COVID-19 protocols, visit [www.VMFA.museum](#).

About the Sponsors

[Storied Strings: The Guitar in American Art](#) is supported by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Wyeth Foundation for American Art, the Robert Lehman Foundation and the Peachtree House Foundation. Other sponsors include the Lettie Pate Whitehead Evans Exhibition Endowment; Julia Louise Reynolds Fund; Nancy and Wayne Chasen; Community Foundation for a greater Richmond; Mr. and Mrs. Thomas F. Garner, Jr.; Dr. and Mrs. William V. Garner; Troutman Pepper; YouDecide; Birch Douglass; Hamilton Beach Brands, Inc.; an anonymous donor; Dr. and Mrs. Michael Godin; Sherrie Page Guyer and Ray A. Guyer III; Karen and Pat Kelly; Curry and Lindsey Motley; Pamela and Fred Palmore; Dr. and Mrs. R. P. Sowers III; Tredway S. Spratley and Janine M. Collins; Don and Pia Steinbrugge; and Courtenay S. Welton II.

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, and 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 has begun its more than \$190 million expansion and renovation project led by the international architecture firm SmithGroup. Tentatively scheduled for completion in 2027, the project consists of adding a new wing of nearly 170,000 square feet and renovating 45,000 square feet of existing spaces, while maintaining four acres of green space in the Sculpture Garden. Visitors will experience a seamless journey through the collections in the new wing, which will house contemporary art, African art, American art, a new suite of galleries for rotating special exhibitions and a special-events space. The expansion and renovation will enable the museum to display more art, welcome more visitors and provide more enjoyment.

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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