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VMFA Welcomes Diverse Group of New Works Into Its Permanent Collection
New Acquisitions Include an Andrew Wyeth Portrait and a 15th-Century Chinese Gilded Statue



Approaching Storm, Racetrack, 1929, Guy Pène du Bois (American, 1884–1958), oil on canvas. Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, J. Harwood and Louise B. Cochrane Fund for American Art, 2022.15

Richmond, Virginia — The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA) is delighted to announce that a compelling and diverse group of new acquisitions has recently been added to its permanent collection. More than 1,200 works of art were purchased by or gifted to the museum in Richmond during the fiscal year, which ended June 30, 2022.

“We are overjoyed to continue expanding our comprehensive collection of nearly 50,000 works of art, which will enrich the lives of our visitors for generations to come,” said Alex Nyerges, VMFA’s Director and CEO. “Some of the new works will be showcased in the museum’s new wing, which is slated to open in 2027 and includes expanded galleries for African, American, Native American and 21st-Century art.”

Highlights of the acquisitions include significant additions to the museum’s American art holdings. In particular, VMFA is excited to welcome works by notable 20th-century American artists Andrew Wyeth and Guy Pène du Bois. *Ericksons*, painted by Wyeth in 1973, epitomizes the artist’s exploration of the human condition through one of his most recognizable subjects, his neighbor George Erickson. Given Wyeth’s status as “one of the most lauded and avidly collected artists of the 20th century,” according to Dr. Christopher C. Oliver, Bev Perdue Jennings Associate Curator of American Art, “VMFA ultimately intends to feature the work as a cornerstone of the museum’s new wing.”

Visitors do not have to wait to see the painting, however — it is currently on view in the James W. and Frances G. McGlothlin Wing.

Guy Pène du Bois' 1929 painting *Approaching Storm, Racetrack* serves as an equally significant addition to the museum's American art holdings. The work is "arguably one of the three best and most important canvases" made by the artist, acclaimed for his contributions to American Modernism, according to Louise B. and J. Harwood Cochrane Curator of American Art Dr. Leo G. Mazow. "*Approaching Storm, Racetrack* is as visually stunning as it is culturally evocative," said Mazow.

VMFA's efforts to broaden the scope of its holdings by living artists are evident within a group of multifaceted works new to its contemporary art collection. One such accession is *Gravity and Grace*, a large-scale installation crafted from aluminum bottle tops and copper wire that was made by the Nigerian-based, Ghanaian artist El Anatsui in 2010. Through the artist's simultaneous use of abstraction and unconventional materials, as well as traditional Ghanaian Adrinka imagery, the work marries modernist impulses with classical West African sensibilities. The artist pushes viewers to ponder the intersections of persisting global issues by interrogating "the legacy and residual effects of colonialism in African countries like Ghana and Nigeria by using materials rooted in consumption, waste and the environment," according to Valerie Cassel Oliver, Sydney and Frances Lewis Family Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art. "Through used and discarded objects, Anatsui addresses the postcolonial ramifications upon former colonized nations. However, it is the artist's manipulation of these very materials into magnificent works of art that speaks to African communities' resiliency and beauty, emphasizing transcendence past limitations," added Cassel Oliver, who looks forward to installing the 37-foot wide work in the museum's new wing.

Another noteworthy acquisition to VMFA's contemporary holdings is *Armour Skirt IV*, a 2017 sculpture by renowned Pakistani artist Naiza Khan. The work, which alludes to structural female undergarments in its form, meditates on the politicization of the public female body in Pakistan amidst the ongoing cultural conflict between Islamization and feminist activism that began in the 1980s. "The sculpture is the first work by a Pakistani woman artist to enter VMFA's South Asian collection," noted Dr. John Henry Rice, E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Curator of South Asian and Islamic Art.

VMFA is also delighted to add esteemed photographer Carrie Mae Weems' 1990 breakout body of work, *The Kitchen Table Series*, to the photography collection. The series questions the role of racial and gender power dynamics within family relationships through 20 photographs and 14 text panels. "Acquiring such an iconic body of work expands our extant holdings of photographs by this important artist and complements our rich collections of work by artists like Louis Draper and members of the Kamoinge Workshop," said Dr. Sarah Kennel, Aaron Siskind Curator of Photography and Director of the Raysor Center for Works on Paper

Rounding out the museum's new acquisitions are exciting additions to VMFA's holdings of European art and East Asian art, including a historically significant painting by French Romantic master Théodore Géricault and a 15th-century Chinese gilded statue. *Portrait of An African Man*, painted by Géricault in 1819, epitomizes the artist's embrace of "established conventions of history painting in the service of marginalized or oppressed groups and causes, including abolitionism," said Dr. Sylvain Cordier, Paul Mellon Curator and Head of the Department of European Art. The painting depicts a survivor from the infamous 1816 *Medusa* shipwreck, wherein the doomed ship's captain left lower-ranking members of the crew, particularly those of color, to die, opting to save only himself and his senior officers. The portrait, which is believed to be a preparatory study for Géricault's 1819 masterpiece *The Raft of the Medusa*, depicts one of the painting's main protagonists, an African man whose tragic heroism transforms the scandalous incident into a "monumental scene," imbued with abolitionist political intent.

The museum's East Asian Art collection welcomes the addition of Chen Yanqing's *Seated Figure of Yuanshi Tianzun (Celestial Worthy of Primordial Beginning)* a stunning early 15th-century Chinese gilded bronze statue of the preeminent Daoist deity. Through "the work's exemplary exploration of Daoist aesthetics and concepts, the statue will serve as one of VMFA's most important pieces of Chinese art," said Li Jian, E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Curator of East Asian Art. One of only 12 surviving bronzes by Chen Yanqing, this work joins three others that are held outside

China, all in North American museum collections. The sculpture, which was acquired at auction at Sotheby's, New York, in March 2022, will be exhibited later this summer.

In the process of expanding and transforming VMFA's collections over the last 12 months, the museum's 15 curators have sought to "address the historical under-representation of African, African American, Islamic, Latinx, LGBTQIA+, Native American and women artists," said Dr. Michael Taylor, Chief Curator and Deputy Director for Art and Education. "These efforts are evident in the works the museum added to the collection over the past year, and for the seventh year in a row VMFA has spent more than 30 percent of its endowed acquisition funds on African and African American art in line with our strategic plan." Through these efforts, VMFA hopes to fulfill its "profound commitment to representing and serving all of the state's diverse communities," Dr. Taylor added.

For more information about the permanent collection of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 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. 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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