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VMFA Acquires Extensive Photography Book Collection

Singer's Books Added to the Museum's Rare Books Collection and Featured in Exhibitions



Barry and Gretchen Singer gifted more than 2,000 American and European photography books to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Photo by David Stover, © 2016 Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

Richmond, Virginia — The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA) announced the gift of a significant library of more than 2,000 American and European photography books, donated by Barry and Gretchen Singer.

“This collection is a transformative donation and has greatly increased our holdings in the subject areas of American and European photography,” said Alex Nyerges, VMFA’s Director and CEO. “These books are already proving invaluable to exhibitions developed by the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, and this gift further supports the museum’s future photography galleries that are being planned as part of our current expansion project.”

Barry Singer has been one of the country’s leading photography gallerists with a prominent gallery in Petaluma, California, specializing in 19th- and 20th-century photography. “A 2019 conversation with Alex at Paris Photo about the future of my large library of photography books led to my decision to give the collection to VMFA,” said Singer. “I knew that the museum would be able to ensure their care and value their importance, and that the books would be fundamental to VMFA’s other collections and exhibitions.”

Several significant monographs and reference books have been added to the general collection at VMFA’s [Margaret R. and Robert M. Freeman Library](#), and many exceptional photography books and periodicals, including first editions and signed copies, are now part of VMFA’s rare book collection. The Singers’ gift includes the first edition of Robert

Frank's *The Americans*, published as *Les Américains* by Robert Delpire in 1958, *Josef Sudek Fotografie* by Czech film and photography critic Lubomír Linhart, published in 1956, and a first edition of *Naked City* by legendary photojournalist Weegee, published in 1945.

“This donation is especially relevant because the books relate directly to photographs in VMFA’s collection,” said Lee Ceperich, Director of Library and Special Collections at VMFA. “The library exists to support research about the art collection, tell stories and make connections between the art and the widest audience possible.”

Sarah Kennel, the museum's Aaron Siskind Curator of Photography and Director of the Raysor Center, notes that many of these rare photography books will augment VMFA's exhibitions. “One of the most important ways that photography has circulated in the past century is through the photo book, so these very rare editions are an exciting expansion to our holdings and allow us to better show how photography has shaped modern culture.” Included in the donated collection are two books featuring works by Ansel Adams, *Michael and Anne in the Yosemite Valley* (1941) and *The Four Seasons in Yosemite National Park: A Photographic Story of Yosemite's Spectacular Scenery* (1940) — both of which appeared in VMFA's traveling exhibition *Ansel Adams: Compositions in Nature*. Additionally, other books from the collection were used to inform the development of the museum's exhibition *Man Ray: The Paris Years* and still others will be featured in the upcoming exhibition *American, Born Hungary* planned to open at VMFA in 2024.

VMFA's Margaret R. and Robert M. Freeman Library and Special Collections is the most comprehensive art museum research library in the southeastern United States. With more than 150,000 volumes and 200 periodical titles, it provides important resources for the study of art. The library's archives and rare book holdings include primary source material related to the history and activities of VMFA, the museum's art collection, the history of art and artists in Virginia. To learn more, make an appointment to visit the library or to submit a reference query, visit www.VMFA.museum or email library@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 the James W. and Frances G. McGlothlin Wing I after a transformative expansion, previously the largest in its history.

The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts has begun a \$365 million campaign for its 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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