

RVA Community Makers

VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS | WED, FEB 24, 2021



Welcome



Dr. Monroe Harris

Monroe E. Harris, Jr., DMD, was elected President of the Board of Trustees for the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts on July 1, 2018. He is the first African American to hold this position in the eighty-two-year history of the institution.

Dr. Harris has served on the Board of Trustees at VMFA for five years, which included terms as executive vice president and vice president. He has also served as President of the Foundation Board of Directors at the museum. He succeeds Michael J. Schewel.

He is past President of the Board of the Virginia Repertory Theatre, board chair of the Black History Museum and Cultural Center of Virginia, and member of the board of the American Civil War Museum. Dr. Harris has previously served as President of the Virginia Board of Dentistry and the Virginia Board of Medical Assistance.

For thirty years, Dr. Harris has been an oral and maxillofacial surgeon in Richmond and a partner in the practice of Virginia Oral & Facial Surgery. In the community, Dr. Harris frequently provides volunteer care and free oral surgery to patients in Richmond at the Crossover Clinic, the Fan Free Clinic, Donated Dental Services of Virginia and Missions of Mercy. Dr. Harris also volunteers his time as a mentor for those seeking careers in dentistry and oral surgery.

Born and raised in Louisville, Kentucky, Dr. Harris graduated first in his class at the University of Louisville School of Dentistry. He has been married to Dr. Jill Bussey Harris for more than thirty-four years. They have a son, Monroe III, and a daughter, Madison. Among his many interests, Dr. Harris is passionate about the arts and has a vast collection of African and African American art.



Dekonti Mends-Cole

Dekonti Mends-Cole serves as Vice President for the Mid-Atlantic at JP Morgan Chase Global Philanthropy overseeing strategic grant making in the greater Washington region. Dekonti is an economic and community development practitioner, who has worked on the ground in the country's most distressed communities. Before joining JP Morgan Chase & Co., she served as Director of Policy at the Center for Community Progress, a national nonprofit based in Flint, Michigan, that equips communities with the tools and resources needed to effectively address abandonment, blight, and vacancy. Additionally, Dekonti served as a deputy director at the Detroit Land Bank Authority, the country's largest land bank, and as a fellow with the White House Strong Cities, Strong Communities initiative embedded in the city of Detroit. She brings international experience and best practice to her grant-making role, having previously worked on local economic development projects in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa including infrastructure investment strategies in Iraq and Zambia for the United Nations and community-development projects tied to the 2012 London Olympics. She holds an MSc from the London School of Economics in Urban Regeneration and Affordable Housing, a Juris Doctor from Georgetown Law Center, and a BA from University of Miami in International Studies and Economics.



Paula Saylor-Robinson

Paula is the Director of Audience Development and Community Engagement at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. A knowledgeable marketing and branding professional with over twenty-five years of experience in a variety of industries and academic institutions, she has successfully developed and expanded audiences for many established brands. At VMFA, she has created several new initiatives to build community, including VMFA After Hours, Summer Breeze Fridays, and RVA Community Makers with artist Hamilton Glass. Paula works with a number of community partners, connecting the museum to organizations such as Girls for a Change, Boys and Girls Club of Metro Richmond, and Peter Paul Development Center, with the goal of making VMFA a welcoming place and more representative of all Virginians. As part of her role at VMFA, she had the opportunity to accompany political activist Angela Davis on a private tour of The Black Photographers Annual exhibition in 2017. Two years later, she watched as Congressman John Lewis listen to his own impassioned speech, which was part of Donald Moffet's IMPEACH sound installation in the Confederate Memorial Chapel.

Paula received her BS from Duke University and her MBA from Clark Atlanta University. Originally from the New York metropolitan area, Paula and her husband, Danny, love living in the Fan. They have two adult children.



Hamilton Glass *Creator*

Hamilton Glass's career as an artist stems from his architecture and design background. Despite working in the architecture field for seven years, his passion for public art pushed him to start a career as an artist. Public art has always been a big inspiration for Hamilton because of its power to influence and inspire the surrounding community. With every opportunity Hamilton is given to create, he tries to convey a message that connects his art to the community. Using his background in architecture, he creates images that reference architectural drafting practices, which are represented in the

sharp lines, scale, and balance of the piece. The bright colors and unpredictable lines and shapes are used to convey energy and movement in each piece.

Hamilton's work isn't just a single canvas, print, or mural. One of the things he enjoys most is creating multi-layered projects that amplify many voices. In 2020, Hamilton founded two large projects, Mending Walls and All In Together, which were created to address the civil unrest and pandemic raging in our country. This was a way for Hamilton to process current events and share that opportunity for expression with others through art. Hamilton is always looking to use his art as an inspiration and healing tool in the community, as well as being a great example of a working Black artist.



Ms. Community Clovia *Host*

Clovia "Miss Community" Lawrence is a multi-award-winning Virginia Association of Broadcasters journalist, a two-time Marconi Award nominee for Top Five Best Radio Announcer in the Country, and change agent. She has worked at more than a dozen radio stations and virtually every format. Miss Community has produced top ratings. Clovia continues to lead the charge on moving our communities forward with team collaboration on voter registration, voter empowerment, restoration of rights, ending the stigma of mental health and substance use disorders through monthly

"Barbershop Talks." She is also active in raising funds for breast cancer research, domestic violence, diabetes, sickle disease programs, sending kids to summer day camps and after school programs, and hosting teen forums. She helps to organize mayoral, gubernatorial, and senatorial forums as well as visits to regional jails and prisons, with the message of hope for a full re entry back into society.

“Art and music in all their forms and genres are glorious manifestations of human aspirations. Creators and their works are best evaluated based on their positive reflections of and contributions to society. I have endeavored to create music that utilizes the aesthetics of Black music traditions and at the same time forges sonic visions of today and our potential future. My goal has been to remain committed to serving and, hopefully, inspiring the community.”

Musical Artist

J. Plunky Branch

Saxophonist J. Plunky Branch is an experienced performer, songwriter, and music and film producer. He is president of his own independent record label, N.A.M.E. Brand Records, through which he has released thirty albums. With his group, Plunky & Oneness, he has appeared in concert with some of the biggest names in Black music, including Patti LaBelle, Ray Charles, Earth, Wind & Fire, Yellow Jackets, Frankie Beverly and Maze, LL Cool J, Chuck Brown, and more. His song “Every Way But Loose” was a top-ten hit on the soul music chart in London in the 1980s, and his hit single “Drop” was released in 2007. Today he continues to produce and tour with his band, playing rousing funk, jazz, African, rap, and R&B.

Jazz Community Maker





Visual Artist

Mahari Chabwera

Mahari is an artist and curator living and working between Newport News and Richmond, Virginia. Shortly after receiving her BFA in painting and printmaking from Virginia Commonwealth University in 2017, she began cultivating communion rooted in radical Black well-being and self-determination. She was the 2019–2020 recipient of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts Professional Fellowship, and the 2020 recipient of the Visual Arts Center Emerging Artist Award. Her practice is her salve; liberatory magic medicine making. To guide her work of spiritual maturation, she turns to the doctrine of Black women writers like Tananarive Due, Alice Walker, Toni Cade Bambara, and Ntozake Shange. She is committed to self-fertilization and regeneration. She bears the weight of being well well. Mahari is currently a 2020–2021 First Patron artist in residence with the Contemporary Arts Network.

Inspired by
J. Plunky Branch

“Seven months’ time spanned for me to expand, and I’m out here inspiring to be a better human.”



Musical Artist

Z-Bey tha Poet

Z-Bey tha Poet is a writer and spoken-word hip-hop artist based in Richmond, Virginia. Along with music, basketball, and uplifting people to be the best version of themselves, she pursues her passion as an educator, mentor, and community advocate.

Hip-Hop Community Maker



Visual Artist

Nadd Harvin

"Oftentimes marginalized groups, people who look and live like me, are not given the space, resources, or simply the encouragement to pursue creative endeavors or soul freeing projects. It is my firm belief that everyone must, for themselves, explore and cultivate their inner gifts and learn how to channel and express them."

Nadd is a self-taught painter/illustrator and art instructor who mostly works with youth from marginalized backgrounds and communities. Art has always been a tool to explore their creativity, perceptions of reality, and a way of expressing themselves, as a young Black person, in a medium and manner that other people value and understand.

In their work, whether it be through personal projects and creating space for themselves, or tutorials, teaching, and creating space for others, they always try to emphasize the act of creating and the importance of the process. Nadd believes that centering these things in art can help us all to get closer to our reason for existing and make us more well-rounded people.

Pursuing creative possibilities is the mode with which they explore their own life and subjects in paint and illustration, searching for the essential truths in all they see. It is also the mode with which they hope to provide space and encouragement to others, through instruction and other such activities.

Inspired by
Z-Bey tha Poet



Musical Artist

Desirée Roots

Desirée Roots has been one of this region's favorite performers for decades. She is revered for her powerful yet controlled, lush voice with its 3½ octave range. Her ability to sing nearly every genre including jazz, gospel, classical, and opera has made her one of the area's most sought-after vocalists.

Desirée has performed throughout the East Coast with orchestras and regional jazz bands, and as leader of her own ensembles. She sings regularly at concerts, festivals, and cabaret settings to standing room-only audiences. She has been the opening act for internationally renowned artists including Boney James, Brian McKnight, Gerald Albright, and B.B. King.

As an actor, Desirée has received numerous accolades and awards for her talents. Her leading-role credits include *Aldonza in Man of La Mancha*; *Effie in Dreamgirls*, *Sofia in The Color Purple* and *Caroline in Caroline or Change*, for which she won the RTCC Award for Best Actress in a Musical.

In 2004, Desirée Roots was awarded the Theresa Pollak Prize for Excellence in the Arts for Best Vocalist in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Her debut CD, *Don't Ever Stop Dreaming*, released in 2015 showcases the range of her talent with an eclectic mix of jazz favorites and contemporary popular hits.

***"Don't ever stop dreaming. Reach the highest heights.
Don't ever stop believing because faith is your guiding light!"***

Blues/Jazz Community Maker



Visual Artist

Justice Dwight

Justice Dwight is a self-taught visual artist originally from Plainfield, New Jersey, who now resides in Richmond, Virginia. Justice focuses on portraiture in his works because he always felt like there was a lack of Black people in portraiture. It became a part of Justice's artistic mission to showcase not only Black beauty but to show showcase queer identity in his works. With representation being fuel to inspire his art, Justice has successfully participated in numerous art shows along the East Coast. His artistic voice/vision is constantly seen while creating. Justice uses fun mixed media materials like glitter and fabrics to keep his work original and fresh. Justice Dwight hopes that his core themes and original perspective continue to keep Black people and queer-identifying people feeling seen in his works.

If you'd like to keep up with Justice and his works, follow him on Twitter and Instagram at @JusticeDwight.

Inspired by
Desirée Roots

“I believe music is a beautiful gift from our Creator with incredible power to reach people’s hearts. When I sing and play, I do so hoping to use the musical medium to touch people and inspire them to feel beauty, love, freedom, and hope.”

Musical Artist

Dr. Jon Bibbs

Dr. Jon Bibbs is a native of Richmond, and has been a part of the music community in our city for over thirty years. Jon began his musical journey at two years old, studying piano with a VCU graduate student. By the time he was twelve, Jon was a sought after performer throughout the city and had played featured presentations with everyone from the iconic gospel group The Winans to the Richmond Philharmonic Orchestra.

Jon discovered his love for vocal music while studying history at Hampton University. What started as an experiment with a friend who was a music engineering student became a storied career as an independent recording artist that is noted around the world. Dr. Bibbs’s unique blend of soul, jazz, gospel, and rock and roll has afforded him the opportunity to share studios and stages with some of the most well-known artists of our time, including

Busta Rhymes, Richard Smallwood, Eric Roberson, Ledisi, Miguel, Avant, Musiq, Dwele, Wiz Khalifa, Melanie Fiona, Bilal, Floetry, Chuck Brown, and a host of others. Bibbs’s discography includes five albums and countless features and single releases. His 2012 EP project “Ode to Old Flames” broke new ground for independent music, peaking at #11 on the iTunes R&B charts and #14 on Amazon’s R&B boards.

When asked about his motivation to make music, Dr. Bibbs says, “Music is a gift from God like none other. It is a powerful tool for communicating, inspiring awe, displaying beauty, and bringing people together. My motivation is to use God’s gift to bring all of these implications to bear—to sing and play music that touches hearts and inspires people to love.”

R&B Community Maker



Visual Artist

David Marion

“Art is such a powerful tool of communication and my overall goal is to give my testimony through art in hopes that it can further inspire someone else or help them to realize the true gifts that are within them.”

David Marion Green was born in South Carolina in 1982 and resides in Richmond, Virginia. At an early age, he found his artistic gift and developed a passion for creating. As a graduate of Hampton University, with a BA in architecture, he always finds time to continue following his passion and practicing his craft. Using oil as his medium of choice he has specialized in figurative art and portraiture for over a decade. He has exhibited in galleries and museums in New York, Chicago, South Carolina, and Virginia and is on his way to becoming a nationally recognized artist.

Having a strong interest in giving back to the community David Marion helped to organize and create the Liberated Flow Charity Art Gala, which focuses on helping nonprofit organizations by using art as a catalyst for change to spread awareness and by raising funds to assist in their mission. David was also the featured official poster artist for the RVA 2nd Street Festival from 2015 to 2018.

David Marion draws inspiration from his own life experiences and tries to make a statement with every piece that he creates. Through his art he depicts positive themes of Black life, family, and struggle of being Black in America. Art has become a platform to voice his views of the world and to tell his story.

Inspired by
Jon Bibbs



"I can do all things through Christ Jesus
who gives me strength!"

"To God be the Glory for all that
He has done!"



Musical Artist

Cora Armstrong

Cora Harvey Armstrong is from the Newtown District of King and Queen County, Virginia. She has been playing the piano for more than sixty years. She and her sisters, Clara Jackson and Virginia Young, have portrayed themselves at the Swift Creek Mill Theatre in a play written about their lives as they sang Gospel music with their mother, the late Eva Harvey. The play is entitled *Those Harvey Girls*. Cora and her sister and nieces now sing together as The Harvey Family and have been blessed to perform at many folk festivals and shows across the country. Cora has served as a member of the King and Queen County School Board and has served as treasurer of the King and Queen Volunteer Rescue Squad for more than fifteen years. She is a member

of Union Baptist Church, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, under the pastorate of The Reverend Donald K. West. She is a licensed and ordained minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ and has earned as Master of Divinity Degree from the Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology at Virginia Union University in Richmond.

Gospel Community Maker



Visual Artist

Austin Miles

Originally from Durham, North Carolina, Austin “Auz” Miles is a practicing painter, designer, and public artist located in Richmond, Virginia. She uses color, texture, and distortion to embody her own stories and contribute to the conversation about Black female experiences. Miles is an alumna of Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts, receiving her BFA in 2017. Her paintings are a glimpse into a realm where emotions are personified and become out-of-body experiences of connection. Through her work, Austin “Auz” Miles hosts visual conversations that ignite understanding and inspire community healing.

Austin “Auz” Miles has shown work at the Virginia Museum of History and Culture during the *Fresh Paint* (2018) and *Mending Walls* (2020) exhibitions. In addition, Miles collaborated with the Jamestown Settlement in 2019, creating two works featuring the tenacious tri-cultured women of Jamestown and the first Black woman to be documented in the United States in 1619, Angela. These paintings were displayed in their *Tenacity* exhibition. Miles has painted many vibrant, uplifting murals throughout Richmond’s city and has shown her work in Virginia, North Carolina, Washington, DC, Atlanta, Georgia, and Cusco, Peru. #AuzCan #AuzDoes

Inspired by
Cora Armstrong

Thank you to all participants for providing these biographical statements.



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