

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts
Transcription of the Art and Collections Committee Meeting
Wednesday, January 13, 2021, 8:30am
Video Conference

Meeting called to order at 8:30am.

Full attendance listed in the meeting minutes.

Meg Gottwald: I would like to call the meeting of the Art and Collections Committee to order and welcome us all back. I know we are all really glad to be here. Caprice has informed me that in accordance with the requirements for virtual meetings, we offered a public comment period, but there were no takers. As a reminder, a transcript of this meeting will be posted along with the meeting minutes on VMFA's website after the meeting, which is also a requirement for electronic meetings. Is there a motion to approve the minutes of our last meeting, which was actually in December of 2019 before all hell broke loose? Is there a motion?

Pamela Reynolds: So move.

Meg Gottwald: Would you please state your name?

Pamela Reynolds: Pamela Reynolds.

Meg Gottwald: Thank you. Is there a second?

Cindy Conner: Second.

Meg Gottwald: All those in favor?

Committee Members: Aye.

Meg Gottwald: Any opposed? All right, we are good to go. Michael is going to talk to us. Take it away, Michael.

Michael Taylor: Good morning everyone, and Happy New Year. It is great to see you all again, even if it is only virtual. Today we are going to talk about two issues. One is a very hot button issue. It is deaccessioning, and even yesterday in the Acquisitions Sub-Committee meeting a question came up about credit lines and deaccessioning. It is really good, I think, to go back over why we deaccession, how we do it, and why it is important. It has been in the news a lot, so I really felt it was good for this Committee to understand all that. Then we have Sylvain Cordier, the Paul Mellon Curator of European Art. He is going to present his collection plan. This is something that all of the curators do with this Committee. They are not just out in the world buying shiny objects that they see. They actually have a very strategic vision for building their collection. This time around as we move into the next Strategic Plan 2021-2025, we have charged the curators not only with a collection plan, but also how does that collection plan interface with the new expansion and the increase in gallery space? Sylvain will walk you through that.

Museum deaccessioning. I think my basic message today is do not be afraid of it. It is part of what

we do. It is an important aspect. We are not just building a collection at VMFA. We are also refining it. As new works come into the collection, it really makes you look at the works in storage, and ask yourself, "Are we going to show it? Are these things just gathering dust?" If so, then we might have a home for them somewhere else. Someone will love these objects, even if we do not. Since 2015, we have deaccessioned, more than 500 works of art, and the funds, remember, go to new art acquisitions. Deaccessioning can fall into many categories. One of them that is very much a hot button is the issue of restitution and repatriation. Since 2004, VMFA has restituted and repatriated six works of art. That is three European paintings that were stolen by the Nazis and three Native American objects that were returned to the Tlingit tribe of Alaska. We currently have no claims on the collection. Remember, our collection is fully on view both in the galleries and online. We have a very robust, state of the art collection search, and we encourage anyone who believes that they have a work that may have been stolen to actually check that out and let us know. We investigate all claims. In 2017, we went back over our collection management policy, working with Stephen Bonadies, his great team, and Alex, and really refined and brought up-to-date the criteria for determining deaccessioning. These are what we present when we justify why we would like to deaccession and dispose of a work of art. It has to fit one of these criteria, whether it be poor quality or a duplicate. It might be stolen, as I have said, or needs to be repatriated. It might be false and inauthentic, and we do not want those in the collection. The physical condition of the work might be so poor that the restoration is not going to happen, and we would rather just dispose of it. The work is no longer consistent with the mission. The one that we probably use the most is our efforts to refine and improve the collections. As I said earlier, "Is this work ever going to see the light of day?" It is doing no good in storage for 100 years. Finally, is the museum unable to adequately care for the work because of its requirements?

I just wanted to show you some recent examples of these to make these points clear. The easiest one of all is just pure duplication. In 2018, Howard Greenberg, who is an amazing art dealer and has run a famous gallery in New York for photography. A great friend of Alex, he had been giving works of art to us over the years and gave us eight photographs by Aaron Siskind. At that time, we did not know what would happen next, which is that we would get the key set of Aaron Siskind's photographs. More than 8,000 works of art were donated by the Siskind Foundation. What happened was we then realized that these photographs were just pure duplications. The key set had the originals. These works, the *Eight Photographs from the Harlem Document Series*, were actually printed in 1981, so later prints. We had examples of those in the Siskind Foundation gift. It was a pure duplication. We informed Howard, and he said, "Yep, absolutely. Deaccession and sell it." But he said to Alex, "Just promise me you buy photographs with the proceeds." That is what we did. Another one that comes up rarely, but it is also very important, is a pure museum transfer. This is a great example. It is a work by Moses Ezekiel. It is a statue of Thomas Crawford that belongs as part of a group of 12 at the Norfolk Botanical Garden. At some point in its history, three of these works had been broken off from the set. The artist intended them all as one work, but they were broken off from the set. Two went to the Chrysler Museum. One came to us. We got the request from the Norfolk Botanical Garden, and we fully agreed that it made sense for this work to be returned, so we could complete the artist's vision. The Chrysler did the same. Now all 12 works are together. I see David Goode. The next time, David, you are in the Botanical Gardens in the great city of Norfolk, you can take a look at all of them. Then we went over restitution. This is something that we take very seriously. This was the most recent of the restitutions. We were very pleased that we were able to do this in the lifetime of the heir of the Goudstikker family. Jacques Goudstikker owned a very famous gallery in Amsterdam that was looted when the Nazis invaded the Netherlands. He died that day, so it was a huge tragedy. His collection was then dispersed. This

work was actually taken by Hermann Goering who was Hitler's Chief Deputy. We were delighted to return it. There was a clear title by the family, not the VMFA. We bought it not knowing this, and when I say we bought it this was back in the 1950s. The attention now to Nazi era stolen art is just so much greater. There is so much more information out there. In fact, as you will hear in a minute at this very Board of Trustees meeting, we have had a painting restituted to the museum via the Fischer family. I will show you that in a minute. I mentioned works of poor quality. This is my favorite one. This is a 16th century doorway that we had not shown. As you can see, it was all in pieces in storage. You can get a scale of how large this is by looking at that ladder on its side. That is one of those enormous ladders. There were just no plans for showing this. It was filling up storage, and we sold it at Freeman's in Philadelphia. I do not have to tell you this was almost certainly bought by a builder, who then put it in a home, so it finds a place. We then used those proceeds to buy works of art that we will show. Another great example of this. Li Jian came to me with this painting by Zao Wou-ki who is a Chinese artist. It was donated in 1959 and never shown. It falls between two stalls. As you can see, it is very modern, so in her galleries with that tradition of calligraphy and landscape, it did not fit there. It also was too conservative for Valerie. This would not hold its own within the Abstract Expressionist Gallery where you have Rothko and Pollock and Clifford Still. We were delighted to sell this in Hong Kong. It did really well at auction. What Li Jian did was acquire with those proceeds a full set of samurai armor. When I came to the museum in the summer of 2015, I met with all the curators and talked with them about their collections. I asked them, "What are the great works of art that you want to bring to this museum?" Li Jian said right off the bat, "We do not have a set of samurai armor." You know how children and adults, like me, love to see this. This was just a spectacular example. That is a great way of showing a painting that was in storage for 70 years doing no one any good to have this work, which will always be on view.

We do not always get it right. This was a work that we deaccessioned. It is a painting by Bellows. If you remember, this was the Asher B. Durand that came in as a gift from an anonymous donor. At the same time, there was this Frederic Edwin Church, and this was an expensive painting that went beyond the acquisition funds that we had, so we had to look at deaccessioning. The year before we deaccessioned this work [*Shipyards Society*], we had received five Bellows paintings as a gift from Jim and Fran McGlothlin. All of which were stronger examples than this work, so it made sense. When we went to auction, we had a figure in mind that we wanted to raise. I think the low estimate on this painting was \$4 million, and we were informed by Sotheby's the day before the auction that they were not confident that they would get that amount. We had the discipline to pull the work and to say, "We are not going to sell it for peanuts." We actually re-accessioned it, which can happen. It has its original credit line. We decided to have that discipline and look elsewhere. We are not going to just sell the collection for nothing. This is an important painting. It did not reach the results. That is my promise to you, is that we are very attentive, probably more than all of the other museums, to what happens at the market and how our work is sold. That left us in a hole. I targeted the curators to look at works in storage, and it was Barry who found these two works, an emerald and a ruby. Again, they had not been shown since 1971 and really were not works of art. The settings are not important. It is the stones. These sold very well and netted a huge amount at auction. That allowed us to not only pay off what we owed on the Church, but also to do other things. Keeping within that collection area, Barry was able to acquire this amazing work that we had drooled over at the Maastricht Art Fair the year before. It was just a wonderful acquisition. You think about the jewelry that was in storage that had very low value for us with no chance of ever being shown in our Art Nouveau and Art Deco collection, which is the finest outside of Paris, to go and buy a masterpiece like this. It is on view in the gallery. It is absolutely spectacular. It was just featured on *Art Daily*. Sylvain, who you are about to hear from, for him in his first year to buy a painting by Sérusier, a

great artist of the Nabi group and someone who worked side by side with Gauguin and to fill one of those gaps in the Mellon Collection, this was just a fantastic moment for us. Finally, paying attention to Native American art, we were able to buy a ledger drawing. We did not own a ledger drawing, and this was another thing going back to when I started and talking with Johanna. To acquire this one at auction was really a joy. That is the message here, to get those works out of storage that are doing no good and to bring works like this in that will transform and delight our visitors.

I wanted to go back to the restitution issue. We were able to sell this work to support what is happening with the Fischer Collection. This was a work that was in storage, again doing no good. At yesterday's [Art] Acquisition [Sub-Committee] meeting, we were presenting this amazing painting by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner. This is a work that was stolen from Max Fischer, who was the other son of Ludwig and Rosie Fischer, the great collectors of German Expressionism. You may know this story. Ernst Fischer, their other son, comes to Richmond and brings his collection with him. In fact, Pam Reynolds on the meeting call was telling us about how they kind of smuggled it out in their suitcases. Max unfortunately did not do that. He stayed behind. This work would have been in his apartment and was stolen. We have been diligently working with the Fischer family heirs, especially Eva Fischer Marx and her lawyers. We have been posting works like this on lost art databases, so that if ever they come up on the market at galleries or auctions, we are notified. Sure enough, this work showed up at an auction in Switzerland. When we found out about it, we were able to stop the sale, negotiate, and bring this work to VMFA. The work is restituted to the family. They are the heirs and the rightful owners of stolen art, but Eva Marx has made this agreement with VMFA. We did this with a restitution with MoMA, where if we pay the legal fees associated, then she will donate the work. What she wants to see is all of Max Fischer's side of the collection reunited at VMFA, so we can tell the most complete story. I can say this is going to be a major exhibition at VMFA in 2024. We have many of these cases out there. I think at last count, about seven. You are going to see a lot more of these coming up in the very near future.

There has been a lot of controversy around deaccessioning, and it stems from a decision in April of the Association of Art Museum Directors (AAMD) of which Alex is a member. If you think about April right at the beginning of this COVID crisis, they made a decision to refrain from censoring, sanctioning, or expelling museums that use restricted endowment funds, trusts, or deaccessioning funds for general operating expenses. It was a period of two years. The terms were very vague. They needed to have been tighter, in my opinion. What it did was it loosened those structures around deaccessioning we have always held as a field that the proceeds of deaccessioning be used for acquiring other works of art. What we then saw was a rush to auction. You had paintings by Picasso and Jackson Pollock and Lucas Cranach the Elder all coming to action. Remember, these were often first time deaccessioning. VMFA, as I have shown, has been doing it steadily and very reflectively over a period of years, so we were not in this category of rushing to sale. Things came to a head with the Baltimore Museum's announcement in October, that it would be deaccessioning and selling three paintings that were actually on view: a Clyfford Still, an Andy Warhol, and this Brice Marden. This challenged many of the given rules that we have. For example, we refrain from selling works by living artists. This can really damage the career of a living artist to sell them. It is kind of a verdict on the importance of their work. That has always been forbidden, and that was something that immediately raised eyebrows. Even more so, the fact that Clyfford Still lived in Maryland for the last 20 years of his life and he is buried in Baltimore. This was the only Still painting owned by a museum in Maryland, so that got the attention of the Maryland Attorney General. It seemed very different from the thoughtful way that museums have been doing deaccessioning. Finally, Andy Warhol's monumental *Last Supper*, which is mural scale. This is a painting that has been one of the

star attractions of that museum. I would say it would be akin to us proposing, which we would never do, the sale of the Fabergé Eggs. This all came to a head on the night of the sale of these works when they were pulled at the last minute. The Baltimore Museum was under huge opposition in the press, from their Board, and people were resigning. They made the decision, they said at the time, to put it on pause. We hope that is a permanent pause. AAMD also went back to its April resolution, and they made this statement that “art collection should not be monetized.” They clarified that general operating expenses do not fall under care of collections. This is intended for the treatment of works of art and not to pay salaries, utilities, and things like that.

I want to end with good news. This is what happens when you do it right. This is a painting by Boudin that had not been shown. It came into the collection in 1979 and was our Boudin, but then when Paul Mellon donated his collection in 1985, we got 18 Boudins that were better examples. When Sylvain came on board, he deaccessioned this work, and it did very well at auction. It beat its estimate of \$100,000 - \$150,000 and netted \$187,200. Those funds will be used to buy new works of European art. That is how you do it well. You do not go to the galleries and pull things on view that are being enjoyed by your visitors. It is really storage that we are looking at. All of the curators are doing this. We are deaccessioning in every area, but I hope, as you heard today, we are doing it in a very thoughtful and sustained way. I am happy to take questions now. That is the end of my presentation. I would love to take any questions if you have them, and Alex is also on the call as an AAMD member and a great authority on this subject.

Meg Gottwald: I have got one question. The altarpiece that was stolen by the Nazis, when we deaccession that or we return it to the rightful owners, we do not get any reimbursement. We are just doing the right thing. Is that correct?

Michael Taylor: That is exactly correct. Although I remember at the time, there was a feeling like, “Well, is that gallery still in operation? What is our legal standing with that?” I mean, even though the sale to us was in 1958, it does make sense. I think maybe I will have to talk to Cindy some more about that. To be honest, I think probably the passage of time is too great with that example. Remember in the 1950s the questions about provenance that we ask today just were not there. We happen to have Karen Daley who is a registrar, and who is our resident authority on this issue. She is one of the great leading thinkers in this field about the restitution of Nazi era art. She speaks at conferences. She has great colleagues in Germany, so she is someone who is very much at the forefront of looking into these issues. What a lot of it comes down to is for these families who have had their works stolen, in the past, museums were very tone deaf. They tended to say, “Well, prove it.” Well, I do not think that is very fair. We really have to do the research on our end. In this case, they were right. That work was definitely stolen.

Meg Gottwald: Thanks

Michael Taylor: Thank you. Great question. Any other questions around deaccessioning? If not, we will move on to Sylvain. Dr. Sylvain Cordier, as I said, is our Paul Mellon Curator and Head of the Department of European Art. He has been here a short time, but has already had an enormous impact. You see it in the acquisitions. You see it in the displays and just the energy and gravitas he has brought to the museum are sight to behold. Sylvain, please take it away with your European Art Collection Plan.

Sylvain Cordier: Thank you very much, Michael. Thank you, in particular, very much for this

opportunity to present this collection plan for VMFA's European art. This presentation accompanies the written document which you have received, and my aim today is to talk about only the major objectives associated with visual examples of potential future acquisitions. My goal is to reconsider the perspective of collecting and displaying European art in ongoing reflection with our museum's strategic plan in favor of an inclusive, equitable, and diverse culture of interpretation. To that end, I will work on defining a dual approach to collecting and displaying. First, through a thematic display that will serve as an introduction to important aspects of European culture in an inclusive way that will address the concerns of our contemporary museum visitors. This thematic display will be followed by a chronological display of periods, schools, and styles running from the Middle Ages to the early 20th century aiming at a complete display and reinterpretation of our European Collection for 2025 coinciding with the inauguration of a renewed museum with the upcoming expansion. I believe that there is a fantastic opportunity to reflect on the part that European art forms and culture can and must play in order to inspire a contemporary American audience, while retaining a strong commitment to art historical scholarship and the aesthetic appreciation of exceptional works of art.

Conceived as a spectacular introduction to the European Department, I plan on completely repurposing the Grand Hall, which today we know as Tapestry Hall, by turning it into a grand portrait gallery. I mentioned the idea of introducing our visitors to key concepts and themes of European art and culture. It seems to me that portraiture is a particularly eloquent concept for the creation of more profound connections between viewers, sitters, and artists from different periods and regions, and in particular, with the possibility for the viewer to identify with an experience in different historical contexts. I have to say I am dreaming big for this wonderful portrait gallery project. I am especially inspired by the neo-classical architecture of this space, which as you know is within the earliest of our museum's building and which evokes an 18th century palatial gallery of Britain or France, giving us an excellent opportunity to educate our public about traditional modalities of display. The goal here will be to compose a display that will transport our visitors back into the late 18th century while composing a captivating discourse on the stakes and purposes of portraiture from the late Renaissance in the 16th century to the early 1820s. When I speak about captivating discourse, we have with portraiture extraordinary perspectives to acquire and show art that will reflect our commitment to diversity, to underrepresented artists, and to underrepresented communities of people.

One particular facet will be, for instance, promoting the visibility of women artists as well as showing the evolving conventions for representing femininity throughout the ages. I am showing you, for instance, this stunning portrait of a gentle donna by one of the earliest identified, successful woman painters of Italian late Renaissance, Lavinia Fontana. A portrait that I had the great pleasure to present yesterday to the Acquisitions Sub-Committee, and that we are all very excited about. In parallel, it will be appropriate to look for examples of the changing conventions for representing masculinity. An enticing theme in art and portraiture, in particular, that will be pertinent within our display for not only our members of our LGBTQ community, for instance, but also addressing the nuanced understanding of gender construction that concerns so much of our society in our days. As an example, I am showing you this splendid portrait of a gentleman from the reign of Louis XIV by the iconic French portraitists Hyacinthe Rigaud, who has a matter of fact, according to the latest biographical research, may have been himself homosexual. This regal portrait, for instance, would be a perfect companion to complete the presentation of our spectacular Kehinde Wiley *Willem van Heythuysen* which my colleague Valerie Cassel Oliver placed a few years ago in Tapestry Hall, in the future Grand Portrait Gallery. I think that keeping the Wiley, of course, in this future portrait gallery

allows us to explore various avenues of correspondences especially between European and American, between past and present, between European and African American, as well as illustrating exciting discussions about masculinity and the iconography of prestige from a long historical perspective. From the community of posters, the sitters expression, the composition, the use of color, we see here that Wiley and Rigaud, 21st and the 17th century together, would display a groundbreaking demonstration of dialogue and complementarity between old European and contemporary American art at the service of our inclusive strategy. Another theme that I am interested in for the portrait gallery would be representing family values through portraiture, as well as the iconographic conventions of childhood. Here I am showing you, for instance, another potential candidate to illustrate this. It is a pair of family portraits of Baron and Baroness Solignac, French aristocrats of the Napoleonic period, by an important portraitist of Napoleon's court, Robert Lefèvre. This pair of pictures are particularly pertinent thanks to the very interesting and actually quite charming displays of affection that the painter represents between parents and children. It is a pair of paintings that would be meaningful for our public as a representation of the military family which may be of interest given the importance of our military and veterans community here in Virginia. The theme of portraiture will also allow us to address the question of aging, the ages of life, and the relative notions of beauty and ugliness in art. I was particularly struck by this portrait, which you see at the center of the page. *Portrait of an Old Woman* by 18th century German painter Denner that is on the Paris market right now. I am also interested in providing room to portraits of artists and performers. Here, for instance, you see a wonderful absolutely lovely portrait of an archlute virtuoso who was a Petruccio working at the Naples Vice Regal court at the end of the 17th century. Petruccio is painted by the wonderful Neapolitan painter Paolo de Matteis at the very end of the 17th century on the London market. Of course, that should include stimulating examples of 17th and 18th century self portraits by painters and sculptors.

When I mentioned earlier the goal to insert this demonstration on portraiture within our new repurposing of Tapestry Hall, taking advantage of this grand neo-classical architectural space, it was to state that my vision for the future Grand Portrait Gallery should be thought and conceived of as a reconstruction that gives the illusion of a palatial or state gallery of a princely residence at the end of the 18th century. My interest in this is to step away from the now too traditional, in my opinion, modern convention of the white cube or the gray cube, I should say and aim at contextualizing paintings in a more dramatic and impactful experience for the visitor, an experience that provides some historical context and immediate emotional impact in front of a display. For that reason, it is essential that our portraits be associated within the gallery with a high quality ensemble of palatial gallery furniture. You want to have the real feeling of going through a European palace and feel invited into a princely court to learn more about its art collection, but with our unique themes as you can see here with some examples. I am showing you magnificent examples, for instance, Buckingham Palace in London, the Palazzo Colonna in Rome, and a 19th century watercolor showing the French Palace of the Trinity in the 19th century. As you can see, a state gallery of the sort does not go without what I call state furniture. I will combine my search for portraits with a search for top quality gilt wood European palace furniture, in particular, consoles or pier tables with late 18th century essentially being the focus. Going from the Rococo, so early 18th century to neo-classicism in the very early 19th century. Here you can see examples, for instance, of a French console and an empire Napoleonic pier table that was actually made for Napoleon's palace. Both pieces of furniture are on the Paris art market right now. I want not only pier tables but also state gallery seating, obviously not for use by the public but displayed as state gallery furniture. Here, for instance, you see an early 18th century Roman stool to the right, in what we call the barrel Rocaille style and a set of impressive four empire or neoclassical folding court stools that were also made for

Napoleon's Empire in the very early 19th century. Both of them are shown on the New York art market. Here you have an example of a projected display that gives you an idea of the effect the association of portraits and furniture will provide: a very complete experience of art and culture as well as provoke interesting connections between fine and decorative arts. You see another projected attempt at display, this time questioning masculinity and involving, for instance, Kehinde Wiley.

I am concluding here on the precise subject of the Grand Portrait Gallery and perspectives of acquisitions related to this ambitious development for the European Department. Another fundamental area of research for acquisition and interpretation will concern European art that would promote the concepts of equity and inclusiveness in past periods and help document historical background for our contemporary conceptions of democracy and civic values. I am thinking, in particular, about allegories or historical scenes from the age of enlightenment in 18th century France and Britain, not only, but that is particularly the kind of work that I have in mind when talking about that. I will also work on enriching our narrative and presentation of the diverse and complex iconography of non-European cultures by European artists through finding important examples of allegories of the four parts of the world. Here, you see an example. Unfortunately, I just learned that it was already sold, but it used to be on the Paris market. Absolutely stunning examples that used to be on the Paris market by 18th century French sculptor Jacques Bonnet of Africa, America, Asia and Europe. This interest will also, of course, concern the representation of indigenous Americans. Here is an example, not on the market. It belongs to the Met, but this is the kind of thing that I would like to look for. You see this example of Delacroix's *The Natchez* from 1835. This, in order to facilitate discussion around the forging and questioning of historical stereotypes between Europeans and Native Americans, Colonialism and the iconography of enslavement, as well as abolitionism in European art, will be a crucial point of focus in my search for acquisitions. Here you can see, for instance, an absolutely extraordinary composition by French artist Marguerite Gérard who was Fragonard's niece and student in the late 18th century and early 19th century. The painting dates from the very beginning of the French Revolution and takes the opportunity of representing a scene taken from a famous novel of the time, *Paul and Virginie*. To propose a scene promoting respectful equality, it has a very charming and very moving composition. Actually, when you place it back in the late 18th century, promoting a respectful equality between European and African families whose children grow up together, it is a picture that is contemporary to the vivid debates at the time on the abolition of slavery in France in the first years of the Revolution. Another example, celebrating the abolitionist cause in particular, is this very striking sévres bisque, a group of 1794 and titled "*I Am Your Equal. I Too Am Free.*" So far, we only know of one existing example which is conserved in a French museum in La Rochelle, but usually bisque groups were produced over the course of years. There is always an opportunity to find another example that we could bring into the collection.

The third and final part of this presentation concerns acquisitions we should make to enrich our collection of European decorative arts from before 1890 in order to allow for a better dialogue between paintings, sculptures, and other forms of artistic expression. As you know, one of VMFA's particular strengths is the fantastic ensembles of our Nouveau and Art Deco gifted by the Lewis family. It is clear that with the notable exception of British silver, thanks to the generosity of the Gans family, and 18th century snuff boxes, thanks to the generosity of Ailsa Mellon Bruce, there is a striking imbalance and misrepresentation of important areas of decorative arts that we should aim at correcting. I am thinking, in particular about furniture and ceramics from the late 17th century to the mid-19th century, aiming at creating more of a connection between what happens before the Art Nouveau and the Art Deco collection. In particular, I propose to focus attention on finding three important examples of vases or sculptural pieces of sévres porcelain, which is something I am

particularly interested in as an art historian, three important vases, illustrating one the Rococo Period, two early Neoclassicism, and three large Napoleonic empire style. This would be running from a period from the mid 18th century to the 1820s. Regarding furniture, I am planning on proposing acquisitions that will contribute quite systematically to a better stylistic contextualization of our collection of late 18th and 19th century. I am all for dialogue in terms of displaying our collection and having different kinds of artworks dialoguing together, co-existing in order to provide a good understanding of the style of a period from one gallery to the next. For instance, here I am showing you a great example of a pier table of Empire style, an absolutely stunning piece on the French market attributed to Adam Weiswiler, which I put in dialogue with our wonderful *The Judgment of Paris* by the French artist Fabre from our collection. This is one of our best French Neoclassical pictures, another example of association, You recognize our wonderful *Portrait of Baroness Staël-Holstein*. Concerning the mid-19th century, you see it is associated with a perfectly contemporary monumental cabinet made for a huge aristocrat of the Second Empire Duke of Luynes by Alexandre Bellange. It is also on the French market. Another possible association with Bellange, this wonderful *Center Table aux Griffons*. This idea of historicism and revivalism through decorative arts, which I put in dialogue here with one of our paintings. Finally, I would like to create a pertinent and beautiful setting, something quite precise for the very complete collection that we have of romantic bronzes at VMFA thanks to Paul Mellon and also thanks to Patty Sinclair. To do so, I am looking for a large Second Empire display cabinet of the sort that I am showing you here conserved on the French market. One example is by Fourdinois and another one is by Grohé. I am showing you that this will allow for a display of these bronzes as the way they would have been presented in a 19th century collection. This is another opportunity for marrying fine and decorative arts in a way that would give the visitor an immediate historical and visual context of both mediums.

Here are the principal directions of the collection plan that I am proposing. I hope that it demonstrates the integral commitment of the European Department to VMFA's ambitious strategic plan for an inclusive, diverse, respectful, and inspirational museum for all members of the public to enjoy. Thank you very much for your attention. Do you have any questions?

Pamela Reynolds: I did not have a question, but it is just thrilling to see. As you go to the great museums, one of my favorites, I get lost when I go, is the Met's Weitzman Galleries, because it is a combination of the ceramics and paintings. It just tells a story. I, for one, want to say it is thrilling for me, because I have always loved the decorative and ceramic. I think that people will feel it and I just say congratulations.

Sylvain Cordier: Thank you so much. I am very happy that you support this vision. I think it is really fundamental, I guess, to kind of think not only about having to take the opportunity of display or to really tell the story and find better ways to tell stories and contextualize. I think we are all for contextualization and this is the big direction that museum display is going. That is one of the purposes of this plan. Thank you.

Monroe Harris: I agree. I think it is absolutely thrilling what you presented. I am excited, absolutely fantastic.

Sylvain Cordier: Thank you, Monroe.

Michael Taylor: Any other questions for Sylvain? I have to say, he came to VMFA in November 2019. Meg was mentioning that the last time this committee met was December 2019. In such a

short amount of time, he has done so much to transform this place. We made a position paper around how we are going to be doing acquisitions in the next five years, as part of a vision for a curator-led, visitor-centered art museum that really would be at the forefront of thinking in our field. Sylvain played a major role in that and I think you saw that in the collection plan. The attention to detail in how you can bring in an artist like Kehinde Wiley and enter into this dialogue as everyone has said, it is absolutely thrilling. Thank you so much.

Sylvain Cordier: Thank you.

Michael Taylor: Any other questions for Sylvain on his plan?

David Goode: Just one comment, perhaps. Maybe a question? The scope of this and the intellectual depth of it is breathtaking. So, congratulations. Sylvain, thank you for presenting a plan like this. Michael, I wonder how with the scope and diversity of the people under your responsibility, how do we prioritize and figure a way to accommodate? What are the orders of accommodation of these really exciting and impressive visions that we have? Sylvain's list alone is breathtaking and you must face that from others.

Michael Taylor: I do, and it is a great question. It really does come down to that word you use, which is prioritizing. As part of the expansion plans, if you remember, the African galleries will move to the new wing and European art will move back into those areas and basically run from Medieval to the Mellon Collection, which is the early 20th century. This will also mean Evans Court, the exhibition space, will go away, and that will be European Galleries. There will now be a second exhibition space in the new wing. What we have seen today is really a vision for how to take visitors through that kind of very important artery, what we call Tapestry Hall. Those tapestries are light sensitive, and we have not paid enough attention to that. Sylvain is really the first person to look at that. Transforming that into a portraiture hall that reflects everyone. It really is our strategic plan writ large. You can see yourself in these portraits, no matter who you are or what your background is. It is kind of like an ecumenical way of thinking about it and very much in tune with where this museum is going in terms of inclusive diversity. In terms of priorities, when you have that it makes it easy. We do have great endowed funds, you know we are top five in the nation. All of the curators are following these strategic collection plans, so what it does is it removes the opportunities to just buy everything. It makes curators like Sylvain really hone in on this vision, so they can fulfill it. That is really how I see it. We do have a profound commitment to African and African American art in our plan. We have committed 30% of our acquisition funds and will continue to do so. We have become the field leaders in that regard, but it does not mean that everything else goes on hold, far from it. Our curators are buying the best works of their career, and my job is to always say, "You know your best work is in front of you, and I am here to support you and the museum is too." Many of the works that you have seen, you will be seeing in the future. We will find ways to bring them to this museum.

Alex Nyerges: David, I am going to add two things. One, Sylvain, great plan. Obviously integrating more of the decorative arts into our galleries is fabulous. You being an expert, that is one of the reasons we brought you to Richmond. We are just so glad you are here. David, the other half of this is something I mentioned yesterday. Michael has transformed how we look at acquisitions and how we look at the collecting plans. We have always had collecting plans, but they are much more precise. They are much more visionary. What Michael has done is very different than, for example, the museum I inherited 15 years ago. No offense to the now somewhat, long gone former Chief

Curators, but they would hoard monies for their particular collections. That is not to disparage their legacies. They built great collections. The telling moment was one day, someone brought to my attention that Li Jian, our Curator of East Asian Art, had proposed over and over again an acquisition and they were told that I had turned it down. I said, "I do not even know what you are talking about." Apparently the acquisition had been proposed two or three times over a couple of years. It was a great collection acquisition but it never was brought to my attention. What Michael has done, if you look for an example today at the Full Board meeting, the span and breadth of the collections that we are proposing for purchase, not just the works that are obviously gifted, covers all the areas of the collection. Contemporary Native American art, American art, historical, contemporary, European art, and decorative arts - it runs the gamut of all of the 15 or 16 curators who are bringing possibilities to support their collecting plan. Michael gets all the credit for making sure that we continue to collect an encyclopedic collection, because our legacy in so many areas just gets built that much better. Great question. Thanks.

Michael Taylor: Thank you, Alex. Just to add on to that, I would say the Strategic Plan is really at the heart of this. The way in which we can align the curatorial vision and dovetail it with a strategic plan, that is when the sparks fly. That is when you get creative thinking. The last plan was so rich. I think the next one is going to be even better. It is a big success story. Listening to Sylvain today, we have done dry runs. I have read it. I have gone over it many times with him. Remember that this was something that he would have loved to present in March, but we had the COVID situation. I really feel it has been better and better. To hear Board members like Pam and Monroe with such enthusiasm, I am sure it means the world to Sylvain. Thank you. Okay, Meg. I think we are probably at time. Right?

Meg Gottwald: We are. I just want to say it feels so good to have something to look forward to, to be excited about, and to look at things in a different way. Thank you both. What a great meeting. If there is no more business, this meeting is adjourned.

Meeting adjourned at 9:30am.

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