



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 23, 2012

New Acquisition Coincides with U.S. Postal Stamp Series

Complements VMFA's celebration of African American culture

A version of one of VMFA's recent American acquisitions is among 12 featured on a new Forever stamp in the Postal Service's *Modern Masters* series, which will be released in March.

The Prodigal Son (ca. 1927) by Aaron Douglas was among the group of 12th to 20th-century objects by African and African American artists acquired on December 16 by VMFA's Board of Trustees. The work acquired by VMFA is an oil on canvas; the stamp features the same subject produced in gouache on paper from the collection of the Beinecke Library at Yale University. Aaron Douglas is regarded as the leading visual artist of the Harlem Renaissance as well as the first black artist to create a distinctive modernist style that connected contemporary African Americans with their African heritage. *The Prodigal Son* gouache version was commissioned to accompany James Weldon Johnson's *God's Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse*, a collection of free-verse poems inspired by folk sermons of southern black preachers. VMFA's painting directly relates to this award-winning 1927 publication for which Douglas produced related works, including versions of the same subject in different media.



VMFA's collection features work by all but two of the other artists in the *Modern Masters* stamp series, issued to mark the centennial of the 1913 Armory Show, a landmark exhibition that introduced modern American and European art to a broad audience. VMFA owns another painting that was exhibited at the Armory Show – Arthur B. Davies's *Line of Mountains* (ca. 1913).

The remaining 11 masterworks reproduced on the stamps are: Stuart Davis's *House and Street* (1931); Charles Demuth's *I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold* (1928); Arthur Dove's *Fog Horns* (1929); Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2* (1912); Marsden Hartley's *Painting, Number 5* (1914-15); John Marin's *Sunset, Maine Coast* (1919); Gerald Murphy's *Razor* (1924); Georgia O'Keeffe's *Black Mesa Landscape, New Mexico/Out Back of Marie's II* (1930); Man Ray's *Noire et Blanche* (1926); Charles Sheeler's *American Landscape* (1930); and Joseph Stella's *Brooklyn Bridge* (1919-20).

VMFA's Shop will carry the *Modern Masters* stamp collection once it is released. The Shop also features a variety of African and African American-themed gifts, cards, and books.

VMFA's upcoming African and African American cultural programs include:

Radiance from Ancient Heights: Ethiopia's Sacred Art in Context, January 24

A vibrant outpouring of art and architecture has supported the continuity of the Ethiopian church, one of world's earliest churches and the first in sub-Saharan Africa. VMFA African Art Curator Richard Woodward examines the distinctive types and styles of ecclesiastical artworks in VMFA's new Ethiopian collection, with further illumination provided by a short film by filmmaker Tim Reid. \$8 (VMFA members \$5)

Celebrate African and African American Art: Jazz, February 2

Using VMFA's collection, enjoy exploring the rich heritage of jazz and discovering its importance in American life, particularly during the civil-rights era, at this Family Day event. Ragtime rhythms, big-band swing dancing, African drumming, and art activities are included. Sponsored by MeadWestvaco Foundation, this program is free.

In Plain Sight, February 15

Examine the world of Virginia's enslaved peoples through a range of visual and verbal documents in this collaborative program with the Virginia Historical Society. The database, *Unknown No Longer*, compiled by the society, will be featured along with objects in VMFA's American Art collection. This program is free.

Literature Studio: *Things Fall Apart*, February 22

Discover why Nigerian-born author Chinua Achebe chose to write in English his novel, *Things Fall Apart*, first published in 1958. Join VMFA African Art Gallery Educator Karen Getty in exploring connections between VMFA's African collection and Achebe's famous novel. \$8 (VMFA members \$5)

About VMFA's African and African Art Collections

Regarded as one of the finest in the United States, VMFA's African Art collection is on permanent view in the museum's Dominion Resources Gallery. Approximately 400 works span 2,000 years of history and represent the artistic heritage of more than 100 cultures from the African continent. VMFA's major holdings in African and African American art have been enriched by newly acquired objects from Ethiopia as well as works by leading artists Elizabeth Catlett, Beauford Delaney, Aaron Douglas, and Gordon Parks.

About the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

VMFA's permanent collection encompasses more than 33,000 works of art spanning 5,000 years of world history. Its collections of Art Nouveau and Art Deco, English silver, Fabergé, and the art of South Asia are among the finest in the nation. With acclaimed holdings in American, British Sporting, Impressionist and Post-Impressionist, and Modern and Contemporary art – and additional strengths in African, Ancient, East Asian, and European – VMFA ranks as one of the top comprehensive art museums in the United States. Programs include educational activities and studio classes for all ages, plus fun after-hours events. VMFA's Statewide Partnership program includes traveling exhibitions, artist and teacher workshops, and lectures across the Commonwealth. VMFA is open 365 days a year and general admission is always free. For additional information, telephone 804-340-1400 or visit www.vmfa.museum.

#

Press Contact:

Suzanne Hall, suzanne.hall@vmfa.museum, 804.204.2704

Pryor Green, pryor.green@vmfa.museum, 804.204.2701

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 200 N. Boulevard, Richmond VA 23220-4007