

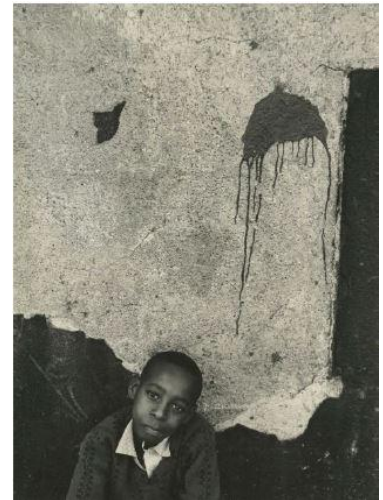


**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**VMFA Acquires 35 Photographs by Louis Draper and his Complete Archive**

The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts recently acquired 35 photographs by the Richmond-born, African-American artist Louis Draper (1935-2002), as well as his complete archive, which includes his papers, working prints, negatives, and camera equipment. This acquisition places VMFA at the forefront of museums and research institutions collecting African American art. Draper's street photography of the 1960s and 1970s, as well as his role as a founding member of the African-American photography collective Kamoinge, have recently garnered critical attention and interest from peer institutions and art historians. The archive from Draper's estate is vital for understanding his body of work as it includes his records, notes, and transcripts recounting Kamoinge's early years.



Louis Draper (American, 1935-2002) Boy with Paint Splatter, undated, gelatin silver print. Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment ©Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

The archival collection consists of photographic material and documentation of Draper's career as a fine arts photographer, teacher and photojournalist and comprises approximately 20 linear feet of material and includes 1,791 prints, 36,216 negatives, 557 proof sheets, about 2,477 color slides, 16 transparencies and computer art. Manuscript material includes notebooks, workbooks, Kamoinge workshop portfolios, academic work, memorabilia, personal records and correspondence. Cameras and photographic equipment were also included, along with approximately 1,500 prints, negatives and proof sheets by other photographers.

Building on Kamoinge's recent publication, *Timeless: Photographs by Kamoinge*, and Mercer County Community College's book, *Louis Draper: Selected Photographs*, VMFA will be the first major art museum to organize an exhibition on Draper and the early years of Kamoinge, which will open in January 2019, and will be accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue informed by the new archival research made possible through this landmark acquisition. In addition to making scholarly contributions to the history of photography during the Civil Rights era, the museum's purchase of 35 works by Draper, along with his entire archive, is directly related to the museum's strategic plan goal of significantly increasing VMFA's holdings of African American art.

"We have long been interested in the important work and legacy of Louis Draper and acquired 13 of his photographs in 2013," VMFA Director Alex Nyerges said. "By acquiring an additional 35 photographs by the artist, as well as his archive, VMFA can now proudly say that we are the leading museum for the research, study, and appreciation of this major figure in the history of photography, as well as the Kamoinge workshop. This acquisition also underscores our strategic plan's commitment to expanding our collection of African American art."

Louis Draper's sister, Nell Draper Winston, explained what the acquisition meant for her: "I am proud of the fact that Louis Draper's collection will remain here in the Richmond area at VMFA. He was so very passionate about his craft and because of his great passion my goal was to expose his work to the local Richmond community. He was recognized nationally and internationally, but not here in his hometown. He was a mentor to so many young people and I want them to see what options are available to them. I also want to introduce them to the extraordinary group of artists which Lewis co-founded, Kamoinge, who recently celebrated their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. My hope is that people will see the world through the lens of his camera and will go out and make their own contributions."

In 2015, VMFA produced a short video interview of Ms. Winston speaking about her brother's body of work: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h0baGVGCcx8>

### **About Louis Draper**

Louis Draper was born and raised in Richmond, Va., and moved to New York City in 1957. He took classes at New York University's Institute of Film and Television as well as at the New School for Social Research where he studied with the influential photographer Eugene Smith. He also established relationships with several major African-American literary and artistic leaders, such as Langston Hughes and Roy DeCarava. In 1963, Draper was instrumental in forming the Kamoinge Workshop, a collective of African American photographers. Draper chose the name, which means "a group of people acting and working together" in Gikuyu, the language of the Kikuyu people of Kenya. While the artists did not work alongside each other, they met weekly to show each other their work and frequently exhibited together. In 1982, the photographer Carrie Mae Weems credited the efforts of Draper and Kamoinge as "the first steps taken by black photographers to come together and form a comprehensive group that would address in photographic terms the description of being black in America." While the group organized several shows in their own gallery space in the mid-1960s, they also had exhibitions at New York's International Center for Photography and the Studio Museum in Harlem.

### **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 African, 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 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 lively after-hours events. VMFA's Statewide Partnership program includes traveling exhibitions, artist and teacher workshops, and lectures across the Commonwealth. VMFA, a certified Virginia Green attraction, is open 365 days a year and general admission is always free. For additional information, telephone 804-340-1400 or visit [www.vmfa.museum](http://www.vmfa.museum).

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