



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

July 5, 2016

**Mellon Grant Puts African Art at Center of Research and Conservation Project**  
\$1.5M grant enables unprecedented study of VMFA collection

The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation has awarded the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts a \$1.5 million grant that will support in-depth technical examination, conservation, and art historical studies focused on the museum's stellar African art collection. This significant award will help launch VMFA's newly conceived center for advanced study in art conservation, designed to bring conservators and curators together with scientists, art scholars, and global experts for focused collaborative research.



“We are thrilled to have received this recognition from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation,” Chief Conservator and Senior Deputy Director for Collections Stephen Bonadies said. “This generous gift enables us to initiate an ambitious research program that will enhance scholarship and understanding of our world-class African Art collection and be the pilot for the new conservation center.”

The African Art project will allow museum staff to concentrate on works where analysis can lead to well-informed conservation treatment, yield new knowledge through the combination of scientific and cultural examination, and help prepare complex works for display. The Mellon grant will make it possible for the museum to acquire scientific equipment designed to analyze the structure of complex assemblages, determine pigments, assess metal alloys, and identify organic materials employed in creating African works of art. Bonadies further elaborates, “We anticipate that the project will prove transformative for scholars in their understanding of the collection as well as for conservators in their knowledge of the technical and cultural aspects of the objects in our care.”

Under guidance of Curator Richard Woodward, VMFA's African collection has grown to include some 1,200 works of art which span approximately 100 cultures throughout the continent. This funding enables museum staff to investigate the cultural and creative impulses that underlie African art and the techniques used in their fabrication. To further extend the impact of these studies and provide training opportunities to the field, the Mellon grant will support an advanced fellowship in art conservation as well as summer internships. The reinstallation of the African collection accompanied by a scholarly catalogue and a wide variety of programs will present the findings of the studies to the public.

“This major grant aligns with goals included in the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts' ambitious 2020 strategic plan, which places an emphasis on both African art and conservation,” Director Alex Nyerges said. “We anticipate significant discoveries that will yield new scholarship and elevate our

museum to be an essential destination for research.” Adopted last year, VMFA’s 2020 strategic plan outlines a five-year agenda to expand diversity among museum visitors by increasing awareness of the museum’s renowned African and African-American Art collections through exhibitions, public programs, scholarly research and major acquisitions.

#### **About the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation**

Founded in 1969, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation endeavors to strengthen, promote, and, where necessary, defend the contributions of the humanities and the arts to human flourishing and to the well-being of diverse and democratic societies by supporting exemplary institutions of higher education and culture as they renew and provide access to an invaluable heritage of ambitious, path-breaking work. Additional information is available at [mellon.org](http://mellon.org).

#### **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 world. 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 lively after-hours events. VMFA’s statewide 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).

# # #

#### **Press Contacts:**

Sam Campbell, [sam.campbell@vmfa.museum](mailto:sam.campbell@vmfa.museum), 804.204.2770

Allan Altholz, [allan.altholz@vmfa.museum](mailto:allan.altholz@vmfa.museum), 804.204.2721

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