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June 21, 2017

VMFA exhibition to explore conversations among Native American artists
Hear My Voice to run August 19-November, 26, 2017, before statewide tour in 2018

Based on the notion of dialogue, *Hear My Voice: Native American Art of the Past and Present* will explore conversations between Native American artists and their art across centuries, a continent, and 35 indigenous cultures. Opening August 19, 2017, at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, the exhibition features 56 works that illustrate the ways in which Native American art speaks of a shared knowledge and shared history while also being incredibly diverse in subject matter, style, medium, and age.

Admission to *Hear My Voice* is free. The exhibition will be on view in VMFA's Evans Court Gallery until November 26, 2017.

From a wooden Raven rattle created by a Tsimshian artist and a war shirt crafted by a member of the Crow Nation in the late 19th century to contemporary works by Cherokee painter Kay WalkingStick and Passamaquoddy basketmaker Jeremy Frey, objects in this exhibition point to the deep and intimate understanding Native Americans have of their land. Audio recordings of some present-day artists discussing works from the past provide greater insight into how Native Americans use art to maintain a connection with their history. Objects in the exhibition date from 400 A.D. to the present day.



War Shirt, 1850-1880, Crow, elk or antelope hide, porcupine quills, ermine, horsehair, glass beads, pigment. Virginia Museum of Fine Arts; Adolph. D and Wilkins C. Williams Fund. 2016.127. Photo by Katherine Wetzel © Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

“While art is certainly a universal language that bridges our diverse cultures, different mediums of art also can be the vehicles that connect people within a culture to each other,” said Alex Nyerges, VMFA Director. “With *Hear My Voice*, VMFA brings this communication—indeed, this storytelling—to life, as the exhibition uses unique objects to show how Native American artists have captured and conveyed their shared experiences throughout time.”

Hear My Voice: Native American Art of the Past and Present is curated by Dr. Johanna Minich, VMFA's Assistant Curator of Native American Art. The exhibition is organized into three themes or types of dialogue.

- **Artist and Nature** looks at how artists communicate both about and with the natural world. Their choice of materials and sources of inspiration exemplify the unique connection indigenous Americans have to the North American continent.
- **Artist and Community** reflects on the sense of belonging that has always been a common consideration among Native American groups. Artworks such as clothing, musical instruments,

cradles, and ritual objects connote status, individuality, and/or adherence to communal norms. Contemporary works express the artists' need to negotiate between their identities as Native Americans and as artists living in the modern world. "Traditionally, many Native people felt an obligation to their community first and themselves second," Minich said.

- **Artist and Outsider** illustrates ways in which Native American artists have been inspired to use new materials or adopt new artistic styles. Prior to European colonization, this could have happened through trade with other indigenous groups or as a result of migration or incursions of new populations. Contemporary artists included in this conversation work in mediums that have not generally been associated with Native American art, such as glass and printmaking.

"Through the years, we have focused on Native American works as historical artifacts, but there is a growing need to place these objects within the conversation of art," Minich said. "Visitors to this exhibition will see that indigenous artists are responding to the same kinds of inspiration as other artists. The art produced by Native Americans changes and continues to influence the narrative of American art history."

Works in the exhibition are drawn from the museum's collection, as well as loans from other institutions and individuals—including works that have been acquired or loaned to VMFA from the Robert and Nancy Nooter Collection. Other exhibition lenders include Susan and David Goode and the Skiles Family Collection, Altria Group, the Fralin Museum of Art at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, and the Muscarelle Museum of Art at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg. Works loaned by three Virginia artists represent the Upper Mattaponi and Pamunkey tribes of Virginia.

In 2018, the exhibition will travel to the Museum of the Shenandoah Valley in Winchester in the spring and the Taubman Museum of Art in Roanoke in the fall. The statewide tour is generously sponsored by Mareke and Heinz Schiller.

"As a state institution, our mission is to ensure that everyone in Virginia has access to our collections and exhibitions," said Dr. Michael R. Taylor, Chief Curator and Deputy Director for Art and Education. "We are therefore honored and delighted that *Hear My Voice* will travel to additional museum venues in Winchester and Roanoke, particularly given how Native American stories are deeply rooted in our state's rich history and to what students in the Commonwealth are learning in their classrooms."

To continue the modern dialogue among different cultures, visitors will be asked to offer their thoughts and reflections after viewing the exhibition. "For many indigenous people, communication doesn't have to happen in real time and face-to-face," Minich said. "Dialogue is believed to be more circular than linear, so you can have a dialogue with the past and the future."

A companion exhibition, *In Our Own Words: Native Impressions 2015-16*, features a print portfolio that highlights the life experiences of Native Americans living in North Dakota today. Daniel Heyman, whose previous work dealt with issues connected with human rights and social justice, collaborated with Lucy Ganje, who has family ties to tribal nations in North Dakota, to produce the portfolio under the guidance of master printer Kim Fink. The two artists listened to members of North Dakota's four remaining tribal nations talk about their personal and family histories. The series of 26 prints on handmade paper is made up of 12 pairs of portraits and broadsides that include excerpts from these interviews, plus a title page and colophon. The portfolio, also curated by Minich, was acquired by VMFA earlier this year to enhance the museum's Native American collection, as well as its holdings of contemporary prints. *In Our Own Words: Native Impressions 2015-16* will be on display in VMFA's Lewis Focus Gallery from August 19, 2017-February 18, 2018.

About the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond, Virginia, is one of the largest comprehensive art museums in the United States. VMFA, which opened in 1936, is a state agency and privately endowed educational institution. Its purpose is to collect, preserve, exhibit, and interpret art, and to encourage the study of the arts. Through the Office of Statewide Partnerships program, the museum offers curated exhibitions, arts-related audiovisual programs, symposia, lectures, conferences, and workshops by visual and performing artists. In addition to presenting a wide array of special exhibitions, the museum provides visitors with the opportunity to experience a global collection of art that spans more than 5,000 years. VMFA's permanent holdings encompass more than 35,000 artworks, including the largest public collection of Fabergé outside of Russia, the finest collection of Art Nouveau outside of Paris, and one of the nation's finest collections of American art. VMFA is home to important collections of English silver and Impressionist, Post-Impressionist, British sporting, and modern and contemporary art, as well as renowned South Asian, Himalayan, and African art. In May 2010, VMFA opened its doors to the public after a transformative expansion, the largest in its 80-year history. The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts is the only art museum in the United States open 365 days a year with free general admission. For additional information, telephone 804-340-1400 or visit www.vmfa.museum.