

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 21, 2017

VMFA interactive teaching gallery to feature *Dig It!*

Archaeology-themed exhibition to complement Terracotta Army: Legacy of the First Emperor of China

From uncovering objects in a virtual dig to studying ancient works of art to understand their age, function and make-up, visitors to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts' new *Dig It!* exhibition will find a rich environment where intergenerational learners can explore how archaeology contributes to identifying and interpreting objects from ancient China. The exhibition, now open in the Memorial Foundation for Children Teaching Gallery, is free and open to the public. *Dig It!* will remain on display until July 2018.



Photo by David Stover © Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

The exhibition is designed to complement the upcoming *Terracotta Army: Legacy of the First Emperor of China*, which will be on display at VMFA from November 18, 2017 to March 11, 2018. This interactive gallery also ties in with Virginia's third-grade social studies curriculum, which includes a focus on ancient China and Egypt.

Dig It! is organized in sections that highlight the three main aspects of archaeology. Using field notebooks provided at the exhibition's entrance, visitors can record their observations and findings while exploring these areas in any order:

Discovery: Although some sites are discovered accidentally, knowing where to begin an excavation is essential. In this section, visitors can identify major archaeological sites in China.

Excavation: Large-scale touchscreens invite junior archaeologists to use handswipes—to mimic the shovels, trowels and brushes used by their professional counterparts—to “dig” into earth to uncover buried objects. Clues about the pieces are revealed after they are successfully “excavated.”

Lab Study: In this section, visitors can learn more about objects in the excavation by comparing them to similar ones in VMFA's collection. Access to digital files and 360-degree views of works of art reveal more about the pieces, the people who created them, and how objects were used. Stations for younger visitors include hands-on activities and access to commonly used raw materials, such as terracotta (clay), jade, copper, and limestone.

Objects highlighted in *Dig It!* are on display in the museum's East Asian Gallery and span more than 3,000 years of ancient Chinese civilization.

“This interactive space allows visitors to touch and engage with art and archaeology in a way that they can't do in our traditional galleries,” said Celeste Fetta, VMFA's Director of Education. “There's something for everyone of any age in *Dig It!*, and visitors can take the knowledge they gain here and have a more enriched experience as they view the art on display across the museum.”

While the education team leveraged new technology to simulate field experiences, the exhibition offers visitors the printed, eight-page *Field Notebook*, where they can record their observations and findings. The

notebook underscores that many excavation sites are in remote locations, where power sources for laptops, tablets, and smartphones aren't readily available. Users will be encouraged to take notes about the objects they find in the virtual digs, sketch objects from different angles, or document images with texture rubbings.

Additional activities in the *Dig It!* exhibition include puzzles created from replicated fragments, stations to make texture rubbings of objects, and a sketching activity. Reading materials are available for all ages to use in the gallery.

"As we have installed different exhibitions in the teaching gallery over the years, we have seen how visitors of all ages enjoy this space. We design these exhibitions to make art accessible to everyone across multiple generations," said Lulan Yu, Co-organizer of *Dig It!* and Education Programs Manager.

"Archaeology is such a great topic to explore. Many of the objects in VMFA's ancient collections were discovered through archaeological excavations, so it is really interesting to explore that process in more depth," said Courtney Morano, Co-organizer of *Dig It!* and Interpretation Manager.

Dig It! is made possible by generous support from the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation, The Community Foundation *Serving Richmond & Central Virginia*, and The Jeanann Gray Dunlap Foundation. Additional support is provided by Maggie Georgiadis, Margaret and Thomas Mackell, and Jack and Mary Spain. *Terracotta Army: Legacy of the First Emperor of China* is organized by VMFA, in partnership with Shaanxi Provincial Cultural Relics Bureau, Shaanxi History Museum (Shaanxi Cultural Heritage Promotion Center), and Emperor Qin Shihuang's Mausoleum Site Museum of the People's Republic of China.

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 nearly 40,000 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 also home to important collections of Chinese art, English silver and French 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.

Media contact:

Anthony Backherms | anthony.backherms@vmfa.museum | 804.204.2705

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