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October 5, 2017

Mellon French Impressionist, British Sporting Collections to Go on Tour

VMFA to share works publicly while galleries are refurbished

The esteemed French Impressionist Art and British Sporting Art collections at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts will be embarking on national and international tours during the next two years, creating opportunities for more people to view these important paintings and sculptures that were donated to the museum by Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon.

While the Mellon collections are on tour, VMFA will renovate and refurbish its Mellon Galleries, located on the second and third floors of the museum's 1985 West Wing. The renovations will include the installation of new wall materials and flooring, as well as updated air-handling systems, all aimed at ensuring the best possible long-term environment for displaying these collections. The Mellon Galleries will close to the public on January 2, 2018, and reopen in 2020.



Tropical Landscape: an American Indian Struggling with a Gorilla, 1910, Henri Rousseau (French, 1844–1910), oil on canvas. Virginia Museum of Fine Arts; Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon. Photo: Travis Fullerton © Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

“The Mellon French Impressionist and British Sporting Art collections are among VMFA’s greatest treasures, and the galleries that house them are popular destinations for our visitors,” said Alex Nyerges, VMFA’s Director. “Each of these collections tells an important story, and we’re delighted to share these incredible works of art with art lovers in different parts of the United States and abroad, many of whom have never visited VMFA before. This opportunity allows us to complete necessary renovations that will protect these significant works in the future, while also keeping the collections on display to the public, which was always so important to Mr. and Mrs. Mellon.”

Dr. Mitchell Merling, Paul Mellon Curator and Head of the European Art Department at VMFA, selected the works for the French Impressionist and British Sporting Art traveling exhibitions, which will both include more than 70 works of art. VMFA will publish a fully illustrated catalogue for each exhibition; those catalogues also will be available in the VMFA Shop when the tours begin.

About the renovations

The renovation and refurbishment of the Mellon Galleries will cost \$3.5 million and is funded by the Commonwealth of Virginia. The galleries total 16,464 square feet across two floors in the 1985 West Wing addition. This space will be sealed off from the rest of the museum to protect other works of art that will remain on display, and the Marble Hall will continue to be accessible during the renovations.

New plywood and drywall necessary to meet today’s museum industry standards will be installed on the walls, and flooring will be installed on top of the cement slabs. The 1985 air-handling systems have reached the end of their natural life, and two new HVAC systems will be installed to ensure a stable environment for art on display.



The Melton Hunt Going to Draw the Ram's Head Cover, 1839, Sir Francis Grant, P.R.A. (Scottish, 1803–1878), oil on canvas. Virginia Museum of Fine Arts; Paul Mellon Collection. Photo: Katherine Wetzzel © Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

VMFA will not redesign the general footprint of the galleries, but it will include some updates, such as new lighting tracks and casework. The museum is also creating a new dedicated space for the permanent display of works from *The Rachel Lambert Mellon Collection of Jean Schlumberger*, which debuted in a special exhibition at the museum in spring 2017 and is also set to travel on a national tour over the next two years.

Select pieces from the Mellon American collection will be installed for viewing in the museum's James W. and Frances G. McGlothlin American Art Galleries during the renovation period.

About Van Gogh, Monet, Degas: The Mellon Collection of French Art

Offering 74 works by 19th- and 20th-century masters, *Van Gogh, Monet, Degas: The Mellon Collection of French Art from the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts* showcases French Impressionist paintings, along with masterpieces from every important school of French art—from Romanticism through to the School of Paris. Taken together, these works exemplify the Mellons' personal vision and highly original collecting strategies, which provide a context for understanding this unique collection of French art. The exhibition includes works by Pierre Bonnard, Paul Cézanne, Edgar Degas, Paul Gauguin, Édouard Manet, Claude Monet, Henri Rousseau, and Vincent van Gogh.

While the permanent display at VMFA is presented chronologically, the traveling exhibition is designed for visitors to experience the works through eight themes, including Views of Paris, Flowers, Water, and Interiors. The exhibition will open with *Cyphers of Modernity*, which introduces two of its most characteristic paintings: Berthe Morisot's *Young Woman Watering a Shrub*, and Théodore Géricault's *Mounted Jockey*; these paintings are emblematic of the collection in their commitment to modernism, as well as their subject matter, which appealed to Mrs. Mellon's love of gardening and Mr. Mellon's passion for horses and horse racing.

Paul Mellon began to collect 19th-century French art in the 1940s with his second wife, Rachel Lambert Mellon. The exhibition reproduces the invigorating experience of the Mellons' collection, in which each work resonates with and gains greater strength from its lovingly created context.

"This is a collection of art that mattered to the Mellons," said Mitchell Merling. "The way that they thought about art and sought out paintings and sculptures to add to this collection is very important. That was a radical approach to building a collection at that time."

About A Sporting Vision: The Paul Mellon Collection of British Sporting Art

A Sporting Vision: The Paul Mellon Collection of British Sporting Art includes representative masterpieces of the genre, including works by George Stubbs, Sir Francis Grant, John Frederick Herring, Benjamin Marshall, and George Morland. Mr. Mellon donated this collection to VMFA, and the British Sporting Art galleries were dedicated in 1985. The collection includes 84 works, including six by Stubbs, who is recognized as the greatest of all British Sporting painters.

While the collection is presented in a chronological sequence at VMFA, the traveling exhibition will display the works in thematic sections that will give a cohesive narrative to the collection, while also underscoring the importance of sporting art and tradition to British society and history as a whole. The themes are In Pursuit; In Motion; Animal, Man, Country; and The World Upside Down.

“*A Sporting Vision* proposes a fresh look at British Sporting Art,” said Dr. Michael R. Taylor, VMFA’s Chief Curator and Deputy Director for Art and Education. “The exhibition places these paintings within wider social and artistic contexts, including the scientific and industrial revolutions taking place in Great Britain and elsewhere in the 18th and 19th centuries, as well as the transformation of the British countryside, and the evolutionary history of the horse and other animals. Our hope is that visitors to the traveling exhibition will see these images of sporting life in a new way.”

Tour venues and dates

Van Gogh, Monet, Degas: The Mellon Collection of French Art from the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

- The Frick Art & Historical Center, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, March 17–July 8, 2018
- Frist Center for the Visual Arts, Nashville, Tennessee, January 26–May 5, 2019
- Oklahoma City Museum of Art, Oklahoma, June 22–September 22, 2019

A Sporting Vision: The Paul Mellon Collection of British Sporting Art

- National Sporting Library and Museum, Middleburg, Virginia, April 7–July 22, 2018
- Frist Center for the Visual Arts, Nashville, Tennessee, January 26–May 5, 2019
- The Frick Art & Historical Center, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, June 15–September 8, 2019

A selection of 41 works from each of the Mellon French and British collections will travel to the Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature in Paris, France, and will be on view August 18–December 2, 2018.

About Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon

Mr. Paul Mellon of Upperville, Va., was the son of Andrew W. Mellon, American financier, U.S. Secretary of the Treasury, and a noted collector of Old Master paintings who founded the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. Paul Mellon chose not to follow his father’s footsteps into business, devoting his life instead to collecting art and major deeds of philanthropy, while living an idealized version of English country life (which he memorably described in his autobiography, *Reflections in a Silver Spoon*). Educated at Choate Rosemary Hall school, Yale University and Cambridge University, Paul Mellon wittily described himself as a victim of “galloping anglophilia.” Paul Mellon’s deep appreciation for English culture is reflected in his encyclopedic collection of British art—first shown at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in 1963—which he later donated to the Yale Center for British Art, an institution founded by this gift, and VMFA. Also deeply involved with the National Gallery of Art, to which he gave more than 1,000 works of art, he commissioned the NGA’s East Building and funded its construction in the 1970s. Paul Mellon served VMFA as a trustee for 44 years. His nascent interest in British and sporting art blossomed after he served on the advisory committee for VMFA’s 1960 exhibition *Sport and the Horse*. His second wife, Rachel Lambert Mellon, was also a longtime VMFA supporter and a patron of the arts and sciences. She contributed substantially to VMFA through her donation of the *objets d’art* that she personally commissioned from the French-born jeweler and designer at Tiffany and Co., Jean Schlumberger. Paul Mellon credited Rachel Lambert Mellon with inspiring his interest in French Impressionism, and together they gave important works from their French art collection (including nine rare wax sculptures and five paintings by Edgar Degas), as well as American and British works to VMFA.

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 6,000 years. VMFA’s permanent holdings encompass more than 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.

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