

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Century of art patronage at VMFA to be celebrated in exhibition

Museum to showcase select works at Winter Antiques Show in New York



Fabergé firm (Russian). *Imperial Peter the Great Easter Egg*, 1903. Gold, platinum, diamonds, rubies, enamel, bronze, sapphire, watercolor on ivory, rock crystal, 4.25 x 3.125 in. (10.80 x 7.94 cm). Virginia Museum of Fine Arts; Bequest of Lillian Thomas Pratt. (Photo: VMFA)

The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts will showcase a century of art patronage—including some of the most important and recognized pieces in its collections—in a special exhibition at the Winter Antiques Show, the leading art and antiques fair in the United States. *Collecting for the Commonwealth/Preserving for the Nation: Celebrating a Century of Art Patronage, 1919-2018*—Virginia Museum of Fine Arts will be on view January 19-28, 2018. Held at the historic Park Avenue Armory in New York, the Winter Antiques Show invites one institution to showcase its collection during the show, which benefits the East Side House Settlement.

Among cherished VMFA works to be on display are Fabergé’s *Imperial Peter the Great Easter Egg*, Paul Storr’s stunning *Figure of Hebe*, Vincent van Gogh’s masterful *Daisies, Arles*, Beauford Delaney’s *Marian Anderson*, and George Bellows’s *Tennis at Newport*. Together, the exhibition’s 48 varied works reveal as much about the museum’s maturation as the patrons who have shaped its encyclopedic collections.

“These works represent the great diversity and quality of VMFA’s collections as well as the tastes and histories of our donors,” said Alex Nyerges, VMFA Director. “We are delighted to bring this

amazing cross-section of works—representing a spectrum of mediums, time periods, and cultures—to New York as a way of introducing new audiences to the treasures that can be viewed at VMFA.”

VMFA traces its philanthropic roots to 1919, when Judge John Barton Payne, shortly before beginning his term as U.S. Secretary of the Interior, donated 51 works of art to the Commonwealth and subsequently offered a \$100,000 matching gift to found an art museum. In spite of the Great Depression, Governor John Garland Pollard secured the support to meet that challenge, and the two men established the first state-run art museum in the United States.

“Most extraordinary was Payne’s vision of an art museum as a catalyst for bringing people together and healing social wounds. It was good citizenship manifest as art patronage,” said Dr. Susan J. Rawles, Associate Curator of American Painting and Decorative Art, who curated the exhibition and wrote the accompanying catalogue. “Payne’s vision inspired others and, a century on, it’s time to celebrate the legacy of those generous donors and collectors who have created this world-class museum from his fledgling depression-era dream.”

VMFA built on art donations

Collecting for the Commonwealth/Preserving for the Nation traces the evolution of VMFA’s collections, which have been shaped by donors’ varied personal interests and leadership roles at the museum. Among the many VMFA donors celebrated in the exhibition are:

Mellon Family, whose lifelong generosity includes more than 1,800 works of art, curatorial support, and funding for the physical expansion of the museum. Paul Mellon underwrote the purchase of 150 Indian and Himalayan works to establish the South Asian collection, and his sister, Ailsa Mellon Bruce, donated more than 450 examples of European decorative art. Mellon donated his collection of British sporting art, and, with his wife, Rachel Lambert Mellon, gave their collection of British, American, and French Impressionist and Post-Impressionist paintings. Mrs. Mellon also bequeathed her personal collection of objet d'arts by artist-jeweler Jean Schlumberger.

James W. and Frances Gibson McGlothlin, whose contributions to the museum include a lead gift to support VMFA's 2010 expansion, individual donations of art, as well as the gift of an extraordinary 73 object collection of American art, which is now on permanent view in a suite of galleries bearing the McGlothlin name.

Lillian Thomas Pratt, who acquired more than 500 objects related to the imperial Romanov period. Her collection of Fabergé and Russian decorative arts was transferred to VMFA in 1947. T. Catesby Jones, a maritime lawyer, who bequeathed his collection, which became the core of the museum's French Modernist holdings.

Adolph D. and Wilkins C. Williams, who began donating Old Master paintings in 1949 and in 1952 created the first restricted acquisitions fund. Their fund has supported more than 2,000 art purchases.

Arthur and Margaret Glasgow, who began contributing funds in 1949. Their most transformational gift was realized after their deaths with one of the largest bequests in the history of philanthropy. While benefitting every collection area, their funds are particularly notable for underwriting the core of VMFA's important African collection.

Sydney and Frances Lewis, who donated their leading collections of Art Nouveau and Art Deco and their equally stellar collection of Modern and Contemporary Art.

Robert and Nancy Nooter, whose donations include a representative selection of Native American art and a collection of African Art particularly strong in Ethiopian liturgical objects.

Gottwald Family, whose leadership spans three generations. They were instrumental in revitalizing the focus on American art, with particular contributions in the field of decorative arts.

J. Harwood and Louise B. Cochrane, who, in 1988, established the first restricted American art fund, which has underwritten more than 50 seminal works. The couple also endowed the chair of American art.

E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter, longtime benefactors of VMFA whose national foundation has supported numerous gifts and endowed the museum's two curatorial chairs of Asian art.

Jerome and Rita Gans, whose remarkable gift of 160 examples of 17th-19th century English silver forms the core of VMFA's European silver collection.

Pamela K. and William A. Royall, Jr., whose interest in cutting-edge works by young artists of global relevance is transforming VMFA's holdings in modern and contemporary art.

Ludwig and Rosy Fischer, who between 1905 and 1925 assembled a collection of more than 400 works by German Expressionist artists. Following their deaths, the collection was divided between their sons. Approximately half the works were confiscated by the Nazis. In 2009, the family partnered to bring the remaining works of this refugee collection to VMFA.

Frank Raysor, whose promised collection of 10,000 works on paper is housed at VMFA.

Patronage at VMFA today

Following the framework first established by Payne and Pollard, the Commonwealth of Virginia continues to provide for a portion of the museum's infrastructure and administration. In addition to state funding, private patrons provide crucial financial support for both day-to-day operations and the purchase of new acquisitions for VMFA's collections.

Exhibition Catalogue

The exhibition catalogue, *Collecting for the Commonwealth/Preserving for the Nation: Celebrating a Century of Art Patronage, 1919-2018—Virginia Museum of Fine Arts*, will be available at the Winter Antiques Show.

Selected works for the exhibition will be removed from VMFA's galleries beginning in December and are scheduled to be returned to display in February.

About the Winter Antiques Show

The Winter Antiques Show is the leading art, antiques, and design fair in America, featuring 70 of the world's top experts in the fine and decorative arts. Held at the historic Park Avenue Armory in New York City, the show highlights a dynamic mix of works dating from ancient times through the present day and maintains the highest standards of quality in the art market. Each object at the fair is vetted for authenticity, date, and condition by a committee of 150 experts from the United States and Europe. Established in 1955, the Winter Antiques Show is an annual benefit for East Side House Settlement, a community-based organization serving the Bronx and Northern Manhattan. East Side House's programs focus on education and technology as gateways out of poverty and as keys to economic opportunity.

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 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 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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