

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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VMFA Signs Cultural Exchange Agreement with National Museum of China

RICHMOND, Virginia – On Friday, Sept. 28, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts Director Alex Nyerges signed a five-year cooperative agreement with Wang Chunfa, director of the National Museum of China in Beijing, to develop a cultural exchange between the two institutions. The ceremony took place at 10 a.m. in VMFA’s Claiborne Robertson Room. Commonwealth of Virginia Secretary of Education Atif Qarni was present for the signing, along with delegations from the National Museum of China and VMFA.



Photo: David Stover © Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. From left, Commonwealth of Virginia Secretary of Education, Atif Qarni; Director of the National Museum of China, Wang Chunfa; Director of Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Alex Nyerges; Dr. Michael Taylor, Chief Curator and Deputy Director for Art & Education.

The agreement will promote the exchange of exhibitions including *The Rachel Lambert Mellon Collection of Jean Schlumberger* — an exhibition organized by VMFA that will be travel to the National Museum of China — facilitate loans of artwork from each museum’s collections, and allow the museums to jointly organize major exhibitions together. The agreement will also help to strengthen staff exchanges between VMFA and NMC and allow for the sharing of best practices in all areas of museum operations, from curatorial research and conservation to museum management.

“This historic agreement further strengthens the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts’ history of collaboration with Chinese cultural institutions,” said VMFA Director Alex Nyerges. “This year we shared some of China’s incredible treasures through our wildly successful *Terracotta Army* exhibition, which resulted in record-breaking attendance for the museum. We are excited about the possibilities that lie ahead as we work with the

National Museum of China on future exhibitions and exchanges.”

The National Museum of China is the largest museum in the world. It was established in 2003 with the merging of the National Museum of Chinese History and the National Museum of Chinese Revolution. It encompasses more than 2 million square feet and contains a permanent collection of more than one million objects. In 2017, it was the worlds’ second-most visited art museum.

The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts enjoys a strong relationship with many Chinese cultural institutions. The recent *Terracotta Army: Legacy of the First Emperor of China* exhibition presented more than 130 works of art, drawn from the collections of 14 art museums and archaeological institutes across the Shaanxi province in China. *Terracotta Army* attracted more than 211,000 visitors to VMFA.

The museum acquired *Descent of the Amitabha Trinity* in 1964 from Yamanaka & Co. in Kyoto, Japan. Due to the scroll’s fragility and poor condition, VMFA has not been able to display it for decades. With the extensive conservation treatment and remounting completed by experts from Nishio Conservation Studio in Washington, D.C., led by Yoshi Nishio, founder, president and conservator, *Descent of the Amitabha Trinity* will be reinstalled in the museum’s Japanese Gallery in early 2019.

Descent of the Amitabha Trinity is the first painting among nearly sixty Japanese Buddhist artworks that came into VMFA’s collection in the 1960s. It is also VMFA’s earliest Buddhist painting and is the most significant Pure Land painting in the museum’s collection. The painting is a visual depiction of Pure Land Buddhism and the strong impact the belief held over people’s daily lives during the Nanbokucho period (1336-1392 AD).

The painting depicts Amitabha descending from heaven to greet the souls of devotees as they came to the Pure Land. The painting is executed in gold dust and decorated in the cut gold (*kirikane*) technique, where thin gold foil is cut into hairline strips before being applied to the silk to define details of the costumes. As Pure Land Buddhism spread throughout Japan, the image of the descent of the Amida Triad became popular, with devotees praying for rebirth in the Pure Land before such paintings.

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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.