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Robinson House Reopens at VMFA after extensive Renovation and Expansion

Historic mansion houses Richmond Region Tourism Center, history exhibition, and museum offices

Richmond, VA—After more than a year of renovations, the newly refurbished and expanded Robinson House will reopen at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts on Mar. 1. In addition to a Richmond Region Tourism Center, the historic mansion includes offices for VMFA’s Human Resources Division and an exhibition that interprets the history of the house and the grounds, which will be open daily. Taking great care to preserve the original Italianate style of the home, Richmond-based Glavé & Holmes Architecture led the renovation project and Howard Shockey & Sons, Inc. undertook the construction. The project has added 3,200 additional square feet to the original 7,600 square-foot structure. New additions include an accessible walkway to Robinson House from the VMFA parking deck, stairs, and an elevator. The renovation was funded through appropriations from the Commonwealth of Virginia and a grant from the Thomas F. Jeffress Memorial Trust.



Robinson House at Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 2019. Photo by David Stover, © Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

“Richmond’s burgeoning art scene is driving considerable tourism to the region,” said VMFA Director Alex Nyerges. “At the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, we look forward to welcoming visitors to the heart of the museum district through the Richmond Region Tourism Center at Robinson House, open 365 days a year.”

“We are grateful to VMFA for their support and partnership for the Richmond Region Tourism Center at Robinson House—one of only four tourism centers in the area,” said Toni Bastian, Richmond Region Tourism Group Tour & Visitor Center Manager. “Tourists will now be able to start their visits to Richmond at one of the region’s top attractions.”

The free exhibition *Across Time: Robinson House, Its Land and People* interprets the multilayered history of the museum grounds from the 17th century to the present. Richly illustrated with maps, prints, and period photographs, the narrative includes Virginia’s native peoples and English colonists; an antebellum family and the enslaved people who labored for and sometimes escaped from them; the R. E. Lee Camp Confederate Soldiers’ Home—a veterans’ facility born out of a spirit of reconciliation between North and South; an innovative scientific research institute; and a creative center for art programs and studio classes. The exhibition is

curated by Dr. Elizabeth L. O’Leary, former associate curator of American art for VMFA, and supported by The Council of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Robert Edmond Hill, and the Roller-Bottimore Foundation.

A companion book, *Across Time: The History of the Grounds of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts*, will be available in the VMFA Shop later this winter. O’Leary, its author, will present a lecture, “At the Grove: Robinson House, Its Land and People,” on April 12 from 6:30 to 7:30 pm. The event is \$8 for visitors and \$5 for VMFA members and will take place in the Leslie Cheek Theater.

In addition to Robinson House (ca. 1828, expanded 1856 and 1886), VMFA’s 15-acre campus includes the Confederate Memorial Chapel (1887), the Studio School (ca. 1896), and the Pauley Center (1932, former Home for Confederate Women). All are designated as Virginia Historic Landmarks and on the National Register of Historic Places or as resources in National Historic Districts. Since assuming responsibility for these properties over two decades ago, the museum has invested heavily in maintenance and renovation campaigns for each of them.

About Robinson House

Once part of a 190-acre estate belonging to prominent Richmond banker Anthony Robinson Jr., the mansion and 36 acres were sold in 1884 to the R. E. Lee Camp, No. 1, Confederate Veterans, to become a residential complex for indigent and disabled southern veterans. The building, which gained a third floor and belvedere two years later, served as the facility's administration building and war museum. In 1892, Lee Camp sought ongoing and increasing subsidies from the Commonwealth of Virginia to operate the Soldiers' Home. In turn, it promised to relinquish the deed to the grounds once the need to house veterans ended. When the last resident died in 1941 and the property reverted to the state, about 3,000 veterans had resided there since its opening in 1885.

During the subsequent seven decades, Robinson House served various functions, including offices and laboratories for the Virginia Institute for Scientific Research (1949-63); VMFA's art annex housing offices, art studios, and galleries (1964-93); and offices for the Virginia Association of Museums (1995-96). Until its recent comprehensive refurbishment, the structure served as museum storage (1996-2014).

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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