

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Oct. 4, 2019

**MEDIA ALERT**

**VMFA to Host *Ascend and Lead: A Women's Empowerment Forum***



Image Credit L: Sandra Sellars/Richmond Free Press; Image Credit R: David Stover © Virginia Museum of Fine Arts March 6, 2017  
Tuskegee University Golden Voices Choir performing at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.

The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts will host *Ascend and Lead: A Women's Empowerment Forum* on October 19, 10 am–3:30 pm. Please join us for this thought-provoking and inspiring day-long forum that will include topics such as *In the Black: The Business of Media*; *The Struggle Is Real*; and *Challenging Stereotypes, Setting a New Standard* that highlight each speaker's respective journey toward leadership. The framework for the forum involves personal reflections, panel discussions and conversations in brief and rapidly shifting narratives that maximize both time and impact.

Participants include Kristen Cavallo, CEO, The Martin Agency; Karla Redditte, Anchor/Reporter, NBC12; Ting Xu, CEO, Evergreen Industries; Lynette Allston, Chief and Chair of the Tribal Council of the Nottoway Tribe of Virginia; Melody Barnes, Co-Director, University of Virginia's Democracy Initiative; and many others who hold leadership positions in the arts, education, policy and business. Notably, Valerie Cassel Oliver, VMFA's Sydney and Frances Lewis Family Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, will be in conversation with Mary Margaret Pettway, Chair of the Board of the Souls Grown Deep Foundation as well as an acclaimed quilter and a third-generation member of the Gee's Bend Quilters Collective. They will discuss the intersections of art, traditional culture and business.

The cost for the event is \$20 (\$15 for VMFA members) and includes a box lunch. Tickets are available at [vmfa.museum](http://vmfa.museum). Also, while you're here, visit the museum's permanent collection galleries and the special exhibition *Cosmologies from the Tree of Life: Art from the African American South*, which are both free and open until 5 pm.

**SCHEDULE** Schedule, published below, is subject to change. For a full list of speakers and updates, please visit [vmfa.museum/calendar/events/2019-womens-empowerment-forum/](http://vmfa.museum/calendar/events/2019-womens-empowerment-forum/)

**9:30 am Theater doors open**

## **MORNING SESSION**

**10 am–noon**

**10–10:05 am**

### **Opening Remarks**

Paula Saylor-Robinson, Director of Audience Development and Community Engagement, VMFA

**10:05–10:15 am**

### **VMFA’s 3-D Vision: Our Visitors, Art, and the People We Employ**

Dr. Michael Taylor, Chief Curator and Deputy Director for Art and Education, VMFA, and Caprice Bragg, Vice President for Board Relations and Strategic Planning, VMFA

**10:15–10:40 am**

### **Quilting: From Pieces to a Whole**

Mary Margaret Pettway, Chair of the Souls Grown Deep Foundation in conversation with Valerie Cassel Oliver, Sydney and Frances Lewis Family Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, VMFA

**10:40–10:50 am**

### **The Struggle Is Real**

Dr. Sesha Joi Moon, Senior Human Capital Strategist, US Patent & Trademark Office

**10:50–11:10 am**

### **For Such a Time as This: Museum Leaders for the 21st Century**

Jan Hatchette, Deputy Director for Communications, VMFA; Marquette Folley, Content Director, Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service; and Adele Johnson, Executive Director, Black History Museum and Cultural Center of Virginia

**11:10–11:20 am**

### **Stories Beyond Black and White**

Nancy Rodrigues, Deputy Director, 2019 Commemoration American Evolution

**11:20–11:40 am**

### **In the Black: The Business of Media**

Karla Reddite, WWBT NBC12 News Anchor/Reporter; Kelli Lemon, Social Entrepreneur/Consultant, and Jean Boone, Publisher of Richmond Free Press

**11:40 am–noon**

### **Session Wrap-up**

Lunch Information, Museum Wayfinding, and Reflections

Paula Saylor-Robinson, Director of Audience Development and Community Engagement, VMFA

## **LUNCH**

**Noon–1 pm**

## **AFTERNOON SESSION**

**1–3:30 pm**

**1:05–1:10 pm**

**Welcome Back**

Clovia Lawrence, Media Personality and Community Advocate, Project Give Back Foundation

**1:10–1:20 pm**

**Profile: Evergreen; Ever Dream**

Ting Xu, Founder and Chairman of the Board, Evergreen Industries

**1:20–1:40 pm**

**It All Starts with Education**

The Honorable Atif Qarni, Secretary of Education, Commonwealth of Virginia; Dr. Betty Crutcher, Educator and Consultant; and Celeste Fetta, Director of Education, VMFA

**1:40–2:05 pm**

**Enacting Change**

Dr. Laurant Lee, Visiting Lecturer, Jepson School of Leadership Studies, University of Richmond; Melody Barnes, Co-Director, The Democracy Initiative, The University of Virginia; Dr. Jennifer Lawless, Commonwealth Professor of Politics, University of Virginia; and Claire Guthrie Gastañaga, Executive Director, ACLU of Virginia

**2:05–2:15 pm**

**Profile: Rising Tide of Women in Politics**

The Honorable Jennifer McClellan, Virginia State Senator

**2:15–2:25 pm**

**Now Upon a Time: Empowering Future Leaders**

Kristen Cavallo, Chief Executive Officer, The Martin Agency

**2:25–2:50 pm**

**Challenging Stereotypes, Setting a New Standard**

Michelle Collins-Robinson, Founder, MMCR Consult; Finis Solomon Cook, Executive Technical Lead, IBM Cloud Platform, Financial Services Markets; Dr. Linda Hines, Chief Executive Office, VA Premier Health Plan; Gail Letts, President, Letts Consult; and Adrienne Whitaker, Director of Business Development, SOAR365

**2:50–3 pm**

**Profile: Indigenous Peoples and What It Means to Be First**

Lynette Allston, Chief and Chair of the Tribal Council of the Nottoway Tribe of Virginia

**3–3:15 pm**

**Closing Remarks**

Paula Saylor-Robinson, Director of Audience Development and Community Engagement, VMFA featuring an inspirational story and reading by Dr. Yewande Austin, Founder/President, Global Institute for Diversity and Change

VMFA has designated October 14–19 as “Women’s Empowerment Week,” to highlight a variety of community events that celebrate the ingenuity, diversity, power and accomplishments of women. First, is American Evolution 2019 *Women’s Achieve Summit*, October 14–15 at the Richmond Convention Center. On Friday, October 18, come to VMFA for the Navratri Celebration, an annual Indian festival that honors the female deities of Hinduism. Also, VMFA and the Library of Virginia will host a book signing and reception for Mary Gabriel, author of *Ninth Street*



*Women—Lee Krasner, Elaine de Kooning, Grace Hartigan, Joan Mitchell, and Helen Frankenthaler: Five Painters and the Movement That Changed Modern Art*, which won the annual Art in Literature: The Mary Lynn Kotz Award. Both events begin at 6 pm. All leading up to *Ascend & Lead: A Women’s Empowerment Forum* on Saturday, October 19.

**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](http://www.VMFA.museum).**

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