

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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After an International Search, VMFA Selects Dr. Sylvain Cordier as Paul Mellon Curator and Head of the Department of European Art



Dr. Sylvain Cordier, VMFA's Paul Mellon Curator and Head of the Department of European Art, Photo by Elcayer

Richmond, Virginia—Following an extensive, international search, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts is pleased to announce the appointment of Dr. Sylvain Cordier to the position of Paul Mellon Curator and the Head of the Department of European Art. Cordier will begin his position on Nov. 4. He comes to VMFA from the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, where he served as the Curator of Early Decorative Arts and the Napoleonic Collection since 2013. During his time at the MMFA, Cordier curated two critically acclaimed exhibitions that traveled internationally, including presentations at VMFA: *Napoleon: Power and Splendor* (2018) and *Rodin: Evolution of a Genius* (2015). *Napoleon Power and Splendor* was widely praised for its profound contribution to 19th-century scholarship and the thematic presentation of Napoleon's Imperial household.

"Sylvain Cordier is an outstanding curator and scholar of European art," says VMFA Director Alex Nyerges. "His previous collaborations with the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts have already established him as a member of the team; now he will join us officially as a marvelous addition to an award-winning group of curators. I am confident that we have found the best candidate to lead the Department of European Art."

Cordier's high standing in the museum field was recognized in June 2018, when the online journal *Artsy* named him one of 20 museum curators taking a cutting-edge approach to art history. As Cordier explained to the *Artsy* editor: "I belong to a generation of curators of European art that have to rethink the traditional codes of display and interpretation in order to reflect the diversity of the public and inspire greater understanding."

"We are absolutely thrilled to have Sylvain Cordier join VMFA as the new Paul Mellon Curator and Head of the European Art Department," says VMFA Chief Curator and Deputy Director for Art and Education Michael Taylor. "Through his engaging and thought provoking exhibitions, Sylvain has demonstrated a deep commitment to curatorial excellence and the visitor experience. He brings with him an international network of contacts in the museum field, as well as a keen eye for rare and exceptional objects. We can't wait to see the acquisitions that he will make at VMFA!"

The first major project for Cordier will be the reinstallation of the Mellon French Impressionist and British Sporting Art collections in their newly refurbished galleries, which will re-open to the public in October 2020. The esteemed Mellon collections have been travelling nationally and internationally since 2017, creating opportunities for people around the world to view the incredible works donated by Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon. The Mellon collection encompasses works by American, British and French artists, including Pierre Bonnard, Paul Cézanne, Edgar Degas, Thomas Eakins, Paul Gauguin, Winslow Homer, Édouard Manet, Claude Monet, Berthe Morisot, Pablo Picasso, Henri Rousseau, George Stubbs, and Vincent van Gogh, among others.

"Throughout each of the wonderful opportunities I have already had to collaborate with VMFA, I have been constantly impressed by the extraordinary talent and admirable spirit of teamwork demonstrated by the museum's staff under the visionary leadership of Alex Nyerges and Michael Taylor," says Cordier. "I am very eager to join the curatorial team during this truly exciting time when we will revisit the display of European art to better reflect the values and interests of the

contemporary museum public. Because it is a state-funded museum that belongs to all Virginians, VMFA’s visitors bring with them a multitude of perspectives and access information in a variety of ways. Owing to this diversity of visitors’ experience, I feel that museum curators today are responsible for displaying works from the past in ways that communicate their continued relevance. The name of Mellon has a unique resonance in the history of art museums and cultural institutions, which speaks of the role that European culture has played in fashioning the taste for art in America. I am sincerely honored by my appointment and by the opportunity to oversee this first-class collection.”

About Dr. Sylvain Cordier

Born and raised in France, Cordier received his doctorate in art history from Université Paris-Sorbonne in 2009. Prior to moving to Montreal for his position as the Curator of Early Decorative Arts and the Napoleonic Collection at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Cordier worked as curatorial assistant and assistant curator at the Musée Gustave Moreau, the castle of Versailles, and the Mobilier national in Paris. As a doctorant, he lectured at the Sorbonne University, teaching French painting in the 19th Century and the history of decorative arts. He then joined the Metropolitan Museum as a Jane and Morgan Whitney fellow in the Department of Drawings and Prints, and the Getty research Institute as a post-doctoral fellow.

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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