

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**VMFA Acquires Enameled Choker by Celebrated Belgian Jeweler Philippe Wolfers**  
Necklace Is an Exquisite Example of Art Nouveau Artistry



Philippe Wolfers (Belgium), *Wisteria "Glycines" Choker*, 1900–1902

Richmond, Virginia — The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA) announced their recent acquisition of the *Wisteria "Glycines" Choker* designed by Philippe Wolfers (1858–1929). The choker is one of only 131 unique pieces designed by the renowned Belgian jeweler.

“The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts has the finest collection of European Art Nouveau decorative arts in the United States,” said Alex Nyerges, VMFA’s Director and CEO. “This is one of the most exquisite examples of Art Nouveau jewelry in the museum’s collection — a rare find amongst Wolfers’ existing creations.”

Carved, iridescent tourmaline, which display green and pink hues in singular stones, as well as pastel colored, translucent carved opals are used to create delicate, floral swags. The green and purple enamel leaf clusters complement the pale colors of the wisteria.

“The *Wisteria 'Glycines' Choker* is a rare marvel of the jeweler’s work and technique,” said Barry Shifman, VMFA’s Sydney and Frances Lewis Family Curator of Decorative Arts, 1890 to the Present. “It is one of Wolfers’ most impressive pieces. The use of enamel and carved gemstones, specifically watermelon tourmaline, is thrilling. It is truly a show-stopping work by one of the best Art Nouveau jewelers.”

Designed between 1900 and 1901 and made before January 1902, the back of the choker is marked with the jeweler’s initials and “Ex: Unique” to convey “Exemplaire Unique” (French) or “Unique Example.” Wolfers’ works created between 1897 and 1907 bear this mark to distinguish them from the more commercial objects made by his family’s

business, Wolfers Frères Company. Very few of Wolfers' *Exemplaire Unique* pieces still exist due to their loss or dismantling and subsequently they are very rare. The *Wisteria "Glycines" Choker* was purchased by Wolfers' wife, Sophie Willstädter, who also purchased a number of his most impressive pieces to ensure his best works remained in the family.

Philippe Wolfers' father, Belgian goldsmith Louis Wolfers, founded the Wolfers Frères Company in Brussels in 1842. Philippe joined the company in 1875. Though he began as a jeweler designing in the Rococo-revival style, Philippe converted to Art Nouveau by 1890 when he set up his own workshop where skilled craftsmen forged his intricate designs. In 1908 Wolfers ended his jewelry production and turned his focus to sculpture.

The *Wisteria "Glycines" Choker* is on view in VMFA's French Art Nouveau Gallery within the Lewis Decorative Arts Galleries. The choker joins two other objects by Wolfers in VMFA's collection, a stoneware and enamel cachepot and a bronze sculpture *Le Chant du Cygne* (English: *The Song of the Swan*).

### **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 50,000 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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