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VMFA Presents *The Dirty South: Contemporary Art, Material Culture, and the Sonic Impulse*
Exhibition Examines Art and Culture Shaped by Aesthetic Traditions of the African American South



Nadine Robinson (American, born England, 1968), *Coronation Theme: Organon*, 2008, speakers, sound system and mixed media. High Museum of Art, Atlanta, given by John F. Wieland Jr. in memory of Marion Hill, 2008.175, Image: © Nadine Robinson

Richmond, Virginia — The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA) is excited to present the groundbreaking exhibition [*The Dirty South: Contemporary Art, Material Culture, and the Sonic Impulse*](#). On view from May 22 to September 6, 2021, the exhibition explores the aesthetic legacies and traditions of Black culture in the African American South as seen through the lens of contemporary Black musical expression.

“Though this exhibition has been in development for a few years, *The Dirty South* has a renewed significance at this time of historic social change. We endeavor to create important, innovative and original exhibitions that are relevant to all of our communities,” said Alex Nyerges, VMFA’s Director and CEO. “With this ambitious and timely exhibition, VMFA affirms its commitment to collect and display works by Black artists.”

The Dirty South makes visible the roots of Southern hip-hop culture and reveals how the aesthetic traditions of the African American South have shaped visual art and musical expression over the last 100 years. Beginning in the 1920s with spirituals, jazz and blues, the exhibition interweaves parallels in the visual art production of the Southern United States. The exhibition features an intergenerational group of artists working in a variety of genres from sculpture, painting and drawing to photography and film as well as sound pieces and large-scale installation works.

Featuring more than 140 works of art, drawing from the visual imagery found in music videos, song lyrics and cultural ephemera, *The Dirty South* looks deeply into the frameworks of landscape, belief systems and the Black body. Through the contributions of artists – both academically trained as well as those creative intellectuals relegated to the margins as “folk artists” – the foundational aesthetics that gave rise to the shaping of our contemporary expression are uncovered.

Organized by Valerie Cassel Oliver, VMFA’s Sydney and Frances Lewis Family Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, *The Dirty South* features art, ephemera and sound work by artists with ties to the South. Included in the exhibition are John Biggers, Beverly Buchanan, Nick Cave, Allison Janae Hamilton, Mose Tolliver, Rodney McMillian, Sister Gertude Morgan, Paul Rucker, Nadine Robinson, Arthur Jafa, Thornton Dial, Jr., Mildred Thompson, Radcliffe Bailey, Bisa Butler, Benny Andrews, RaMell Ross, Kara Walker and El Franco Lee II, among many others.

“The confluence between the visual and sonic arts in the Black creative expression has long been recognized. What has remained elusive, particularly in the presentation of these forms, is the long trajectory of this exchange,” said Cassel Oliver. “André 3000’s iconic phrase, ‘The South’s got something to say,’ really sparks for me a meditation to dig deep and to understand how Southern hip-hop artists were shaping their identity within the bedrock of the landscape that they knew and the creative expression born from the history of that landscape.”

Accompanying the exhibition is an illustrated catalogue, edited by Cassel Oliver, which will serve as a contemplation on the African American South and feature contributions by Cassel Oliver, Fred Moten, Anthony Pinn, Regina Bradley, Rhea Combs, Guthrie Ramsey, Andrea Barwell Brownlee, Roger Reeves, Kirsten Pai Buick, Charlie Braxton and Paul Miller aka DJ Spooky, That Subliminal Kid. The publication will also feature an exhibition checklist, plates of the works in the exhibition, artists’ biographies and a bibliography.

More information about the exhibition *The Dirty South: Contemporary Art, Material Culture, and the Sonic Impulse* can be found at www.VMFA.museum.

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, 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.

About the Sponsors

The Dirty South: Contemporary Art, Material Culture, and the Sonic Impulse is presented by Altria Group with additional generous support from The Henry Luce Foundation; Lettie Pate Whitehead Evans Exhibition Endowment; Julia Louise Reynolds Fund; Fabergé Ball Endowment; The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts; Bank of America; Joan P. Brock; Wayne and Nancy Chasen Family Fund at the Community Foundation for a greater Richmond; James W. Klaus; Mr. Hubert G. Phipps; Don and Mary Shockey; Radio One; The Sotheby’s Prize; and Richmond (VA) Chapter, The Links, Incorporated. This project is supported in part by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts.

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, call 804.340.1400 or visit www.VMFA.museum.

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