

+++++FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 29, 2021

VMFA Announces International Firm SmithGroup Will Design the Museum's New Wing New Addition Slated to Open in 2025



Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA) in Richmond, Photo by Travis Fullerton, © 2013 Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

Richmond, VA — Following its recent Board of Trustees meeting, the [Virginia Museum of Fine Arts \(VMFA\)](#) announced that the integrated design firm [SmithGroup](#) has been selected to design the museum's upcoming \$190 million expansion and renovation project. The decision follows a comprehensive international search.

SmithGroup will be charged with designing a new wing at VMFA with state-of-the-art gallery spaces for African art, photography and 21st-century art, as well as a second major exhibition space and a special events space with dining facilities that can seat up to 500 guests on the garden-level ground floor. The new wing will also provide a welcoming entrance to and from the E. Claiborne and Lora Robins Sculpture Garden to encourage visitors to enter and enjoy the museum. In addition to the new wing, large parts of the existing building will be renovated to include improved gallery spaces for the permanent collection, increased facilities for art storage, new education classrooms and upgrades to the Leslie Cheek Theater, Evans Court and the 1936 Entrance. The expansion and renovation project will also support the museum's commitment to enhancing the visitor experience and the institution's [strategic plan](#) which calls for offering a range of curator-led, visitor-centered art experiences that engage, captivate and delight a diverse audience.

"We are thrilled to have SmithGroup on board and excited to collaborate with their visionary team on this exciting building project," said Alex Nyerges, VMFA's Director and CEO. "The firm has demonstrated expertise in planning and designing dynamic, engaging museum environments. SmithGroup's spirit of collaboration; their profound commitment to the same values that guide VMFA — diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility; their first-hand knowledge of Richmond and Virginia; and their drive for innovation make them an exceptional choice for VMFA's ambitious expansion and renovation project."

An award-winning international firm, SmithGroup's extensive portfolio features several impressive national museum projects including the [United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Collections and Conservation Center](#) in Maryland, the [Detroit Institute](#)

of Arts in Michigan, as well as the [National Museum of the American Indian](#) and the [National Museum of African American History and Culture](#) in Washington, D.C. SmithGroup is currently designing the re-envisioned [Thomas Gilcrease Museum of American History and Art](#) in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The firm's work is recognized locally as well. SmithGroup designed the concept for the [National Slavery Museum at the Lumpkin's Slave Jail Site/Devil's Half Acre](#) for the City of Richmond.

“VMFA’s mission for education throughout the Commonwealth and the region; its commitment to displaying and preserving its extraordinary collections, including African and African American Art; its dedication to advancing Black and women artists; and its culture of diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility resonated with each of us on the project team,” said Jamē Anderson, SmithGroup’s Cultural Practice Director and Principal in Charge. “We believe this is a pivotal time for museums and recognize that the process and the physical design of a cultural entity speaks volumes about its values.”

This marks the fifth expansion project VMFA has undertaken since the museum’s opening in 1936. Currently the museum, one of the top ten comprehensive art museums in the U.S., comprises 650,000 square feet. The latest expansion plans call for a new wing that will provide an additional 100,000 square feet of total space, as well as a new stand alone Collections Center building to be located on VMFA’s campus. This new facility of 40,000 square feet will house the museum’s conservation department, as well as registration and art storage. In addition to new construction, the museum will carry out approximately 45,000 square feet of renovations to the existing building to create a seamless visitor experience and meet the museum’s current and future needs for the permanent collection. The renovations include transforming the museum’s former library into the Frank Raysor Center, a dedicated photography, prints and drawings study center, comprising a study room for scholars, curators, and professors and students from local colleges and universities, as well as matting and framing, and compact storage for the museum’s growing collection of nearly 26,000 works on paper.



Smithsonian Institution National Museum of African American History & Culture designed by the team of Freelon Adjaye Bond/SmithGroup, Photo by Brad Feinknopf, Courtesy of SmithGroup

“SmithGroup presented us with an inspired proposal that dovetailed beautifully with our desire to reimagine and transform the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts,” said Michael R. Taylor, VMFA’s Chief Curator and Deputy Director for Art and Education, who is the Project Director for the expansion and renovation project. “SmithGroup’s passion for our institution, including our collection, staff and mission, was obvious during the selection and interview process. Their blend of technical expertise balanced with their exceptional conceptual ability makes them the ideal design partner and we look forward to our collaboration with them on this landmark building project.”

With the selection of SmithGroup, VMFA’s project will begin with a discovery and design phase, which is expected to take approximately 24 months. Construction is expected to begin in the summer of 2023, with the new wing tentatively slated for completion in the summer of 2025. As the museum’s expansion project progresses, updates will be available at www.VMFA.museum.

About SmithGroup

SmithGroup is one of the world’s preeminent integrated design firms. Working across a network of 15 offices in the U.S. and China, a team of 1,200 experts is committed to excellence in strategy, design and delivery. The scale of the firm’s thinking and organization produces partnerships with forward-looking clients that maximize opportunities, minimize risk and solve their most complex problems. SmithGroup creates exceptional design solutions for healthcare, science and technology organizations, higher education and cultural institutions, urban environments, diverse workplaces, mixed-use and waterfront developments and parks and open spaces.

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 and Post-Impressionist art, British sporting art, 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.

#

Media Contacts

Jan Hatchette | 804.204.2721 | jan.hatchette@VMFA.museum
Amy Peck | 804.773.1791 | amy.peck@VMFA.museum

200 N. Arthur Ashe Blvd., Richmond, VA 23220