

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 6, 2022

VMFA Welcomes *Elegance and Wonder: Masterpieces of European Art from the Jordan and Thomas A. Saunders III Collection*
Private Collection of 17th- and 18th-Century Art Treasures on Rare Display at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts



LEFT: *Girl Singing*, 1625–1630, Frans Hals (Dutch, ca. 1581–1666), oil on panel. Jordan and Thomas A. Saunders III Collection, L2020.6.14
RIGHT: *Boy Playing the Violin*, 1625–1630, Frans Hals (Dutch, ca. 1581–1666), oil on panel. Jordan and Thomas A. Saunders III Collection, L2020.6.15

Richmond, Virginia — The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA) is excited to announce *Elegance and Wonder: Masterpieces of European Art from the Jordan and Thomas A. Saunders III Collection* is now on view at the museum in Richmond. This exceptional private collection, which the Saunders have assembled over the past 25 years, includes rich oil paintings by preeminent 17th- and 18th-century European artists such as the Brueghel family, Canaletto, Francesco Guardi, Frans Hals, Peter Paul Rubens, Hubert Robert and Pierre-Jacques Volaire, as well as three early 19th-century paintings. The vast display of over 80 works of art also features exquisite decorative art objects from the period.

“I am delighted that Jordan and Tom have chosen to share their collection, one of the most revered private collections in America, with people in the Commonwealth,” said Alex Nyerges, VMFA’s Director and CEO. “We are excited to host these incredible works of art at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts for our visitors to experience and enjoy. The opportunity to see these magnificent works is rare and should not be missed.”

Jordan and Thomas A. Saunders III assembled their collection of European art between the late 1990s and the early 2000s. What began as an avid interest in Flemish and Dutch painting soon encompassed beautifully intricate Asian-inspired decorative artworks as well as stunning paintings and sculptures by several prominent Italian and French artists who worked in the styles of rococo and neoclassicism. Reflecting the couple's shared vision and distinct tastes, the Saunders Collection is illustrative of one of the most multidimensional periods of European history.

Elegance and Wonder: Masterpieces of European Art from the Jordan and Thomas A. Saunders III Collection is organized for the museum by Dr. Sylvain Cordier, VMFA's Paul Mellon Curator and Head of the Department of European Art. "The Saunders Collection covers an extraordinary range of artistic genres, offering us images of people who lived in the 1600s and 1700s through portraiture, glimpses into their everyday environments through close-up perspectives of genre scenes and still lifes, and vistas of the landscapes where they worked, socialized, loved and built families," said Dr. Cordier. "The inclusion of rare and marvelous decorative arts has allowed us to broaden our regard for the specific social periods that are superbly represented in the paintings, which are rich in character and accented by touches of flamboyance."

Visitors to the exhibition will have a unique viewing experience — the remarkable works of art are installed in newly renovated galleries in the museum's original 1936 structure. In an enfilade of elegant rooms, the installation invites viewers to experience the works of art in the manner they would have been displayed in an 18th-century palace. To that effect, most rooms are adorned with murals developed from historical designs for interior decors and adapted from original 18th-century architectural drawings carefully selected from the collections of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris, France.

"It is the first time that the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts has presented works of art in its permanent collection galleries in such an immersive way. Our aim is to engage the public's imagination by creating an environment wherein they can inhabit elegant domestic spaces from bygone eras," said Dr. Cordier. "The Saunders Collection offers a spectacular, thought-provoking journey throughout historical Europe. It is an invitation to discover the multifaceted contributions of societies and cultures that still have so much to teach us about the world in which we live today. It is a pleasure and an honor for us to have this opportunity to showcase these astounding works at VMFA."

Admission is free to see *Elegance and Wonder: Masterpieces of European Art from the Jordan and Thomas A. Saunders III Collection*. For more information about this collection and exhibitions at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, visit www.VMFA.museum.

***Masterpieces of European Art from the Jordan and Thomas A. Saunders III Collection* The Galleries**

The first room of 17th-century art is dedicated to *Gods, Heroes, and People of the Baroque* and comprises paintings of religious and mythical figures, as well as portraits that depict the sitters as mythological gods. This room features Peter Paul Rubens's captivating sketch *The Abduction of Dejanira by Nessus* (1636), which he painted as part of a series of canvases for the king of Spain, and Nicolas de Largillière's spectacular *Portrait of Jean-Marie de Pravioux, as Diana* (ca. 1715–1720). Paintings of children of influential families capture the importance of the dynasty during this era.

Cabinet of Curiosities is a cornucopia of still lifes, landscapes and genre scenes from Holland and Flanders. Serving as private museums within private apartments, cabinets of curiosities were rooms that displayed a range of objects including carefully composed and heavily symbolic still life paintings like *Still Life with a Crown of Flowers, Tazza, Jewelry Box, Watch, and Vase of Flowers* by Jan Brueghel and his son, Jan Brueghel the Younger (ca. 1620), as well as a battle scene and detailed studies of insects and butterflies by Jan van Kessel.

Aristocratic society in plush and ornate rococo pastels is on view in *Theatrics of Social Life in 18th-Century France* where paintings display sensual courtship scenes amidst idyllic and theatrical settings, including *Young Lady with a Love Letter*,

by Jean-Baptiste Santerre (ca. 1708) and the amorously charged painting by Louis Léopold Boilly, *The Unburdened Musician* (ca. 1789–1793).

Chinoiserie reflects on the 18th-century European fascination with Asian culture and aesthetics during the so-called Age of Enlightenment. Works in this gallery comprise a variety of Eastern-inspired paintings, such as Jean Barbault's *The Chinese Ambassador* (1748), intricately designed objects like a clock made by Etienne Le Noir, hand-painted porcelain charger plates produced in China for the Dutch art market, ca. 1720, bearing an association of Chinese traditional motifs and European heraldic symbols, and a stunning gilded mirror ornate with Eastern-inspired figures.

Though landscapes are included throughout all of the galleries, *Grand Tour* commemorates the expeditions that sophisticated travelers would take throughout Europe. This gallery spotlights representations of iconic sites in 18th-century Naples, Rome and Venice, including a spectacular grouping of Venetian views by celebrated landscape painters Antoni Canaletto and Francesco Guardi.

Antiquity Revived conveys the renewed interest in classicism, explored in art, furniture and decorative objects inspired by ancient Greece and Rome. Hubert Robert's inventive and intriguing composition *Capriccio with the Pyramid of Maupertuis* (1798) harkens back to antiquity in direct contrast to the flamboyant rococo aesthetic seen earlier in the exhibition.

About Jordan and Thomas A. Saunders III

Thomas A. Saunders III is president of Ivor & Co., LLC, a private investment firm he founded in 2000, and a former partner at Morgan Stanley. Saunders received his BS degree from the Virginia Military Institute in 1958 and an MBA from the University of Virginia Darden School of Business in 1967. He is married to Jordan Saunders, the daughter of the late U. S. Marine Corps Major General Matthew C. Horner.

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 has begun its \$190 million expansion and renovation project led by the international architecture firm SmithGroup. Tentatively scheduled for completion in 2026, the project consists of adding a new wing of nearly 170,000 square feet and renovating 45,000 square feet of existing spaces, while maintaining four acres of green space in the Sculpture Garden. Visitors will experience a seamless journey through the collections in the new wing, which will house contemporary art, African art, American art, a new suite of galleries for rotating special exhibitions and a special-events space. The expansion and renovation will enable the museum to display more art, welcome more visitors and provide more enjoyment.

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

Kyla Coleman | 804.204.2702 | kyla.coleman@vmfa.museum

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