

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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## **The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts Celebrates Black History Month with Special Exhibitions and Events**

VMFA's Commemoration Honors Black Artists and Community Contributions



RVA Community Makers Unveiling. Photo by Sandra Sellars © 2023 Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

**Richmond, Virginia** — This February, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA) will celebrate [Black History Month](#) with an exciting array of exhibitions, art installations and special events honoring African American artists and community-makers.

“The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts welcomes all Virginians to participate in a variety of Black History Month programs offered this February,” said Director and CEO Alex Nyerges. “While the museum offers exhibitions, educational programming and events spotlighting African American artists throughout the year, we offer special programs every February to recognize their significant artistic contributions and how they shape our collective American history.”

The acclaimed exhibition [Dawoud Bey: Elegy](#), on view through Feb. 25, 2024, invites visitors to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of embedded histories on our present-day experiences. Mesmerizing and evocative, more than 40 photographs and two film installations by contemporary artist Dawoud Bey (American, born 1953) contemplate the harrowing journeys and human realities of the Virginia slave trail, Louisiana plantations and Ohio’s Underground Railroad.

Organized by Valerie Cassel Oliver, VMFA's Sydney and Frances Lewis Family Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art, *Dawoud Bey: Elegy* showcases three photographic series, including *Stony the Road*, a group of 12 photographs commissioned by VMFA that takes viewers to the historic trail in Richmond where Africans arrived in bondage to an unknown land and were walked into enslavement.

[Theaster Gates: Wonder Working Power](#), a site-specific art installation by the multidisciplinary artist, is on view at VMFA through Jan. 1, 2025. Visitors will behold Theaster Gates's (American, born 1973) passion for — and mastery of — the medium of clay. Organized by Cassel Oliver, *Wonder Working Power* is a focused look at an artist who uses the potter's wheel to drive crucial conversations and effect cultural change.

For Gates, the medium of clay not only reflects the ancient, elemental traditions of so many cultures but also to the precarious fragility of our contemporary selves. Using land development, sculpture, performance and spatial theory to provoke dialogue and revitalize spaces of urban decay, Gates activates an astonishing array of materials to, in his words, “redeem spaces that have been left behind.”



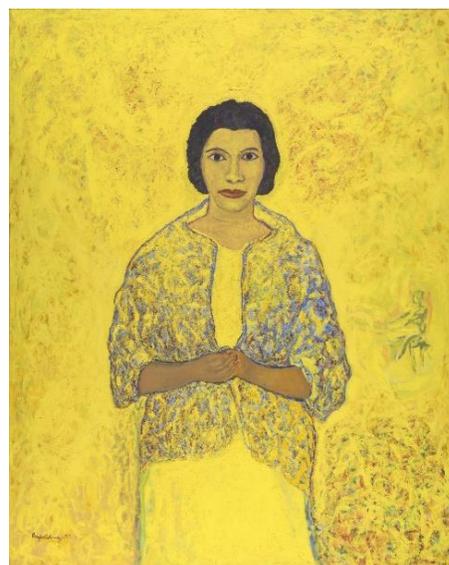
Artist Theaster Gates. Photo by Lyndon French © Lyndon French

Works by Black artists throughout the span of history are included in the museum's permanent art collection. Since 2015, VMFA has spent an average of 34% of its endowed acquisition funds each year to purchase works by African and African American artists.

Visitors can discover the breadth and depth of VMFA's growing [collection of works](#) by African American artists on display in the permanent collection galleries, free of charge. Among the must-see masterpieces from early American to modern and contemporary Black artists that are on view in the museum's galleries are the impressive neon light work *A Small Band* (2015) by Glenn Ligon (American, born 1960), the glowing portrait *Marian Anderson* (1965) by Beauford Delaney (American, 1901–1979), the shimmering nature-based abstract painting *Forsythia and Pussy Willows Begin Spring* (1970) by Alma Thomas (American, 1891–1978), and the moody religious painting *Christ and His Disciples on the Sea of Galilee* (1910) by Henry Ossawa Tanner (American, 1859–1937).

Special events planned for Black History Month at VMFA include the sixth annual RVA Community Makers awards program, an open studio art workshop led by artist Hamilton Glass, the African American Read-In in the galleries, an Art After Hours celebration and a West African drum performance.

VMFA is the only art museum in the United States open 365 days a year with free general admission. For more information about Black History Month related exhibitions, events and programs at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, visit [www.vmfa.museum](http://www.vmfa.museum).



*Marian Anderson*, 1965, Beauford Delaney (American 1901–1979), oil and egg tempera emulsion on canvas. J. Harwood and Louise B. Cochrane Fund for American Art, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, © Beauford Delaney

**Black History Month at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts  
Exhibition | *Dawoud Bey: Elegy***

Through Feb. 25, 2024 | Tickets: \$12 adults, \$10 for seniors 65+, \$8 for youth 7–17 and college students with IDs  
Dawoud Bey's evocative landscape photographs in *Elegy* meditate on place as profound repository of memory and witness to American history.

**Exhibition | Theaster Gates: Wonder Working Power**

Through Jan. 1, 2025 | Free admission

A conceptual portrait, this site-specific art installation draws upon Theaster Gates's upbringing as well as his embrace of the ceramic medium and the use of clay as a transformative material that embodies myriad elements.

**After 5 Fridays | First Fridays: Rhythms of West Africa with Ifasola Osunponmile Favemi**

Friday, Feb. 2, 2024 | 6–8 p.m. | Free admission

Visitors will learn about vibrant traditions from West Africa from priest of Ifa, Ifasola Osunponmile Fayemi. Dancers and drummers will perform demonstrations to celebrate the region's rich cultural heritage.



African American Read-In for Families. Photo by Sandra Sellars © 2023 Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

**Open Studio | RVA Community Makers Public Art Workshop**

Sunday, Feb. 4, 2024 | 1–3 p.m. | Free admission

Participants of all ages can help design a large-scale quilt-inspired paper collage with Virginia artist Hamilton Glass.

**Gallery Program | 3 in 30 - Predicaments: Africa**

In-person: Tuesday, Feb. 6, 2024 | 11–11:30 a.m. | Free admission

Virtual: Thursday, Feb. 8, 2024 | 11–11:30 a.m. | Free, registration via Zoom required.

VMFA's Curator of African Art Dr. Ndubuisi Ezeoluomba talks about the exploitative politics that continue to affect many nations of Africa and the resilience and candor with which many cultures face tribulations.

**Conversation | Soundings: Collaborations with Dawoud Bey**

Friday, Feb. 9, 2024 | 6:30–7:30 p.m. | Tickets: \$8 (\$5 for VMFA members)

VMFA's Sydney and Frances Lewis Family Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art Valerie Cassel Oliver will lead a discussion highlighting photographer and film installation artist Dawoud Bey's collaborations with composer and vocalist Imani Uzuri and dance scholar Dr. Gaynell Sherrod.

**Event | Art After Hours: Trilogy**

Saturday, Feb. 10, 2024 | 7–11 p.m. | Tickets: \$55 (\$45 for VMFA members) | Ages 21+

The spectacular museum-wide event — featuring art, culture, music, dancing, food and cocktails — is hosted by Kelli Lemon with music by DJ Lonnie B. Event tickets include admission to *Dawoud Bey: Elegy*.

**Gallery Program | 2024 RVA Community Makers Award Program and Public Art Unveiling**

Thursday, Feb. 15, 2024 | 6–7 p.m. | Free admission

VMFA's sixth annual recognition event commemorates Black History Month with an art installation that brings together local artists and the community to honor individuals who positively impact the metro Richmond community.

**Conversation | Art: A Platform for Change**

Thursday, Feb. 15, 2024 | 7:15–8:30 p.m. | Free admission

Moderator Donzell 'Ackshun' Jackson and panelists Chris Visions, Hamilton Glass, Silly Genius and Keena Carson will talk about ways to support and promote Black artists in Richmond. Art as a platform for social justice, an engine of economic development and a source of beauty and meaning in urban spaces will also be discussed. This

conversation about the city's art infrastructure is co-hosted by VMFA and the City of Richmond's Office of Strategic Communications and Civic Engagement.

**Art Installation | 2024 RVA Community Makers Art Exhibit**

Feb. 16–March 18, 2024 | Free admission

The collaborative public artwork made with Hamilton Glass as part of VMFA's 2024 RVA Community Makers program will be on view along with textile-based artworks celebrating the honorees by local artist Unicia Buster.

**After 5 Fridays | Dance After Work**

Friday, Feb. 16, 2024 | 6–8 p.m. | Free Admission

Kula Voncille's hip-hop cabaret offers a lively fusion of '90s music and empowering stories.

**Gallery Program | African American Read-In**

Thursday, Feb. 22, 2024 | 5:30–7:30 p.m. | Free admission

See and hear notable figures from the greater Richmond community, including current and former VMFA trustees, as they lend their voices in prose and poetry readings throughout the galleries.

**Gallery Program | African American Read-In for Families**

Saturday, Feb. 24, 2024 | 11 a.m.–12:30 p.m. | Free admission

Notable figures from the greater Richmond community will read stories for children throughout the galleries.

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**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 the James W. and Frances G. McGlothlin Wing I after a transformative expansion, previously the largest in its history. A new expansion, the McGlothlin Wing II, is planned to open in 2028. Comprising more than 170,000 square feet, it will be the largest expansion in the museum's history and will make VMFA the fifth largest art museum in the United States.

**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).**