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**Virginia Museum of Fine Arts Reveals the First Look at Its Expansion**  
Preliminary architectural renderings re-envision VMFA after expansion, the largest in the museum’s history



Preliminary rendering of the west-side exterior of the McGlothlin Wing II, planned for the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (subject to change). Image courtesy of SmithGroup

**Richmond, VA** — The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA) released the first preliminary architectural design renderings of the museum’s exterior today, showing what the institution might look like after it undergoes its planned expansion and renovation project.

“Both functionally and aesthetically, this project reflects our values of innovation, sustainability and collaboration,” said Director and CEO Alex Nyerges. “Expanding the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts increases our capacity to build access and share more of our world-class collection with our visitors.”

The forward-thinking design is the work of international integrated design firm SmithGroup, the project lead on VMFA’s expansion and renovation project. With the support of the Governor and the General Assembly, the museum kicked off its transformative expansion and renovation project with a discovery and design phase during summer 2021.

With minimal encroachment into the E. Claiborne and Lora Robins Sculpture Garden on the museum’s campus, a new wing comprising approximately 173,000 square feet will be added to the south and west sides of the building. The

preliminary renderings released today show west-side and north-side views from the perspective of the sculpture garden. The look of the expansion will signal VMFA's commitment to openness and community engagement.

"The expansion's exterior will have a novel surface that plays with natural light, changing throughout the day and across time. It recalls the past while reflecting our present and anticipating our future," said Dayton Schroeter, Design Director for SmithGroup and Lead Designer for the project.

Jamē Anderson, SmithGroup's Cultural Practice Director elaborated, "Our design blurs the boundary between the museum's interior and the outside world. It connects, invites, engages. These characteristics serve to embody VMFA's mission to be a place where art welcomes all."

VMFA's expansion and renovation project has been informed by Virginians. Since undertaking the project, the museum and SmithGroup have worked together to actively engage internal stakeholders and the community to better understand the visitor experience and learn more about the public's vision for the future of the institution.

Over the past two years, VMFA held multiple two-way listening sessions to engage a diverse range of individuals, groups and communities from the Commonwealth. The museum also heard from more than 3,500 survey participants. This invaluable community input will influence the final design. The community has expressed an interest in improving accessibility and wayfinding, connectivity between indoor and outdoor spaces, additional spaces for pause and reflection, the activation and preservation of the sculpture garden, and beautiful, yet functional architecture that blends in with the rest of the museum building.

The expansion and renovation will support the museum's commitment to enhancing the visitor experience and the institution's strategic plan, which calls for offering a range of visitor-centered, curator-led art experiences that engage, captivate and delight a diverse audience. The project will also enable the museum to display more art, welcome more visitors and provide more enjoyment.

Currently the museum, one of the top ten comprehensive art museums in the U.S., comprises 718,831 square feet. This is the largest expansion in VMFA's history.

The newly planned McGlothlin Wing II will comprise approximately 173,000 square feet of new gallery spaces for American art (approximately 30,000 square feet), African art (approximately 8,600 square feet), contemporary art (approximately 12,400 square feet), a special events space that seats 500 people, meeting rooms, a cafe and bar and a second special exhibition gallery suite (approximately 12,000 square feet).

The project will also renovate approximately 45,000 square feet of existing gallery space in the 1936, 1970 and 2010 wings highlighted by approximately 5,500 square feet of new gallery space for photography and approximately 7,000 square feet for the Raysor Center for Works on Paper, including a study room and expanded spaces for conservation, matting and framing and storage for works on paper and photography. There will also be expanded galleries for European art from Medieval to Impressionism.

Final architectural renderings are anticipated in early 2025, pending approval by the Commonwealth of Virginia, with the conclusion of the preliminary design process. The museum's campus will then be prepared for construction, with groundbreaking for VMFA's expansion scheduled for late 2025. VMFA will remain open to visitors throughout construction.

The global firm Gilbane Building Company is the construction manager at risk. One of the top construction companies in the United States, Gilbane is responsible for coordinating and supervising the construction of the museum's new, additional wing and renovations to existing spaces, including VMFA's Leslie Cheek Theater.

Housed within the museum, Cheek Theater is currently undergoing a renovation and is expected to reopen at the end of this year. The Richmond Ballet will move its studio series *Moving Art* to Cheek Theater beginning in March 2025.

The McGlothlin Wing II, which is currently scheduled to open to the public in 2028, will enable visitors to experience a seamless journey through the collections in VMFA's added galleries housing contemporary art, African art, American art, rotating special exhibitions and a special events space.

As with any expansion and renovation project, designs and dates are subject to change.

This landmark building project marks the fifth expansion project VMFA has undertaken since the museum's opening in 1936. The total cost for the expansion and renovation is \$261 million, which will be funded through a combination of public and private funds. To learn more about VMFA's expansion and renovation project and get project updates, visit [www.VMFA.museum](http://www.VMFA.museum).



Preliminary rendering of the McGlothlin Wing II seen from the north (subject to change). Image courtesy of SmithGroup

### **About SmithGroup**

SmithGroup is one of the world's preeminent integrated design firms. Working across a network of 20 locations in the U.S. and China, a team of 1,400 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. The award-winning firm'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.

### **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 more than 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 approximately 173,000 square feet, it will be the largest expansion in the museum's history and will make VMFA the fourth largest comprehensive 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).**

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