

THE
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Recent acquisitions (2016–21) at the
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts



RUMORS OF WAR

KEHINDE WILEY
2019

Recent acquisitions (2016–21) at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond

THE VIRGINIA MUSEUM of Fine Arts in Richmond, Virginia (VMFA), is the only art museum in the United States that is free and open 365 days a year. The museum was founded thanks to a remarkable challenge grant from Judge John Barton Payne, who in December 1919 offered to donate his art collection and \$100,000 if the Commonwealth of Virginia would match his donation and build and operate the first state-run art museum in the United States. Virginia Governor John Garland Pollard accepted the challenge and on 16th January 1936 VMFA opened its doors to the public. At that time, the museum's holdings consisted largely of four hundred paintings and sculpture from Judge Payne's collection. Today, the permanent collection encompasses more than 50,000 works of art and VMFA ranks among the top ten art museums in the United States. The museum has fifteen curators and actively collects in ten areas: African, American, Ancient, Decorative Arts after 1890 (Art Nouveau and Art Deco), East Asian, European, Modern and Contemporary, Native American, Photography and South Asian art.

In July 2015 the museum's 2015–20 Strategic Plan identified African and African American art as a major focus in line with our community outreach efforts and desire to bring new and diverse audiences to VMFA. We committed to spend one third of our acquisition funds each year on works in these collection areas and have honoured and frequently surpassed this annual goal ever since. In the fiscal year July 2019 to June 2020, for example, the museum spent thirty-nine per cent of its acquisition

funds on African and African American art, including Kehinde Wiley's monumental *Rumors of War* sculpture (see no.20), as opposed to the national average among American art museums of just two per cent. A recent peer-review survey conducted by the Boston-based nonprofit consulting firm TDC confirmed that VMFA has achieved field leadership among encyclopaedic art museums in the collection and presentation of African American art. In alignment with the museum's 2021–25 Strategic Plan, VMFA's curatorial team is dedicated to continuing the museum's commitment of spending one third of our acquisition funds on African and African American art. However, this Strategic Plan focus has also inspired all of the museum's curators to address issues of diversity, equity, inclusivity and racial and social justice in their collection areas, including the historical under-representation of Islamic, Latinx, LGBTQIA+, Native American and women artists, which will inform their acquisitions over the next five years and beyond. VMFA will also continue to support Virginia artists through acquisitions and our annual fellowship grants. The recent acquisitions that we have highlighted in the pages that follow reflect VMFA's profound commitment to representing and serving all of its diverse communities and we hope that you will have an opportunity to visit the museum in the future and see these remarkable works of art in person.

MICHAEL R. TAYLOR
CHIEF CURATOR AND DEPUTY DIRECTOR
FOR ART AND EDUCATION
VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

1. *Strigillated lion sarcophagus*. Roman, AD 260–80. Marble, 62.2 by 170.2 by 68.6 cm.

Purchased with the Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment and Jack and Mary Anne Frable Fund, 2021.2.

The acquisition of this lion sarcophagus introduces a new iconography into VMFA's collection and allows visitors to engage more fully with issues of ancient Mediterranean art, burial customs, religion and the Roman world more generally.

2. *Portrait of a lady of the Gonzaga or Sanvitale family*, by Lavinia Fontana (Italian, 1552–1614). c.1585. Oil on canvas, 115 by 87 cm.

Purchased with the Adolph D. Williams and Wilkins C. Williams Fund, by exchange; gift of Judge John Barton Payne, by exchange; gift of the Estate of Charles B. Samuels, by exchange; gift of Karl Rudolph, by exchange; bequest of William Palmer Gray, by exchange; and gift of Mr Laban Lacy Rice, by exchange, 2021.3.

This extravagant portrait is the work of Lavinia Fontana, the iconic late-Renaissance woman artist who ran a highly successful studio in Bologna. The commission was probably made in the context of the young sitter's engagement. The possible identification of the subject as Isabella Gonzaga, Duchess of Sabbioneta (1565–1637), has recently been proposed.



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3. *Tagasode* (whose sleeves?), pair of six-panel folding screens. Japanese, Edo period, 17th century. Ink, colour and gold foil on paper, each 172.1 by 378.5 cm. Purchased with the Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment, 2018.398.1-2. In Japanese classical love poetry the phrase *Tagasode* (whose sleeves?) refers to an absent woman whose beautiful robes evoke memories of their owner. The intricate designs and vibrant colours of the kimonos on lacquered stands shown in this pair of folding screens, alongside the illustrated *Tale of Genji* and opened sutra, convey not only the luxurious costumes produced in Kyoto in the seventeenth century, but also the owner's classical and spiritual pursuits.

4. *Progress (the advance of civilization)*, by Asher B. Durand (American, 1796–1886). 1853. Oil on canvas, 121.9 by 182.7 cm.

Gift of an anonymous donor, 2018, \$47.

One of the most renowned landscape paintings of the Hudson River School, Asher B. Durand's *Progress* points to several competing forces in nineteenth-century American cultural and social history, including ecology, Native American policies, railroads and the Industrial Revolution. Offsetting the locomotive, canal, townscape and the log cabin at right, the presence of Native Americans in the left foreground reminds us of the sacrifices engendered by 'the advance of civilization'.





5. A Southern Cheyenne ledger drawing, by Howling Wolf (Honanistto) (Southern Cheyenne, 1849–1927). c.1875. Watercolour and ink on paper, 35.6 by 59.1 cm. Purchased with the gift of Mrs Alfred duPont, by exchange, 2020.176. 'Ledger drawing' is the term used for works by Native Americans in pencil, ink and watercolour that were often made on paper taken from ledgers or account books. The Southern Cheyenne warrior Howling Wolf is one of only two Native American ledger artists who created the art form in all three phases of his life: as a warrior from 1861 to 1875; as a prisoner from 1875 to 1878 (when he made this drawing); and upon his return home from 1878 to 1927. This ledger drawing is one of the largest and best examples of Howling Wolf's work. The rich colours and historical importance of this work on paper resulted in a world-record price for a single ledger drawing when VMFA acquired it for \$106,250 at Heritage Auctions in May 2020.

6. *The three-pond cottage at Le Pouldu*, by Paul Sérusier (French, 1864–1927). 1889. Oil on canvas, 73 by 92 cm.

Purchased with the gift of Mrs Alfred duPont, by exchange. Acquired in honour of Mr and Mrs Paul Mellon to reflect the spirit of their collection and their generous support of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 2020.165.

Completed in the autumn of 1889, during one of Paul Sérusier's visits to Brittany with Paul Gauguin, this painting is a masterful testimony to the deep consideration the artist applied in adapting the aesthetics of the Pont-Aven School to the earliest developments of what would become the Nabi style. This painting was purchased in honour of VMFA patrons Paul Mellon and Rachel Lambert Mellon and will be installed in the newly renovated Mellon Galleries at VMFA, which are scheduled to open in October 2021.

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7. *Wisteria 'Glycines' choker*, by Philippe Wolfers (Belgian, 1858–1929). 1900–02. 18-carat gold, watermelon tourmaline, opal wisterias, purple and green plique-à-jour enamel, rubies and garnets, 5 by 38 cm.

Purchased with the gift of Mrs Alfred duPont, by exchange, 2020.1.

This rare and splendid jewelled and enamel choker by the Belgian artist Philippe Wolfers represents an important addition to the museum's collection of Art Nouveau works, which is considered among the finest in the world. The exceptional quality of this piece is due to its artistry and the spectacular use of enamel.

8. *Covered tureen, tray and ladle*, by Peter Carl Fabergé (Russian, 1846–1920). c.1908–17. Silver, silver-gilt, cabochon amethysts, chrysoprases, chalcedonies and garnets, tureen with cover: 57.2 by 34.9 by 29.8 cm.; tray: 12.7 by 73.7 by 53.3 cm.; and ladle: 32.4 by 8.23 by 11.4 cm.

Purchased with the gift of Mrs Alfred duPont, by exchange, 2020.166a–d.

VMFA has more than two hundred objects by Fabergé in its collection, including five imperial Easter eggs. This rare jewelled tureen, ladle and tray, created in Moscow in the Old Russian style, is decorated with swans, porpoises and other ornamental motifs. The presence of swans (emblematic of fidelity as they mate for life) and the possible entwined initials surrounded by a garland of flowers on the finial to the lid suggest that this piece was intended as a wedding or anniversary gift.

9. *Autostrasse im Taunus (Taunus Road)*, by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (German, 1880–1938). 1916. Oil on canvas, 71.5 by 59.5 cm.

Purchased with the Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment, by exchange; and gift of Eva Fischer Marx, Thomas Marx and Dr George and Mrs Marylou Fischer, 2021.1.

Recently restituted to the Fischer family heirs and reunited with the Ludwig and Rosy Fischer Collection at VMFA through a gift-purchase arrangement, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's *Taunus Road* joins more than two hundred works in the Fischer Collection of German Expressionism, which will be the focus of a major exhibition at the museum in 2025.



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10. *Elsie Houston*, by Man Ray (American, 1890–1976). 1933. Gelatin silver print, 23.2 by 17.6 cm.

Purchased with the Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment, 2018.364.

VMFA recently acquired fifty photographs by the American artist Man Ray, including this glamorous portrait of the Brazilian singer Elsie Houston (1902–43). A versatile performer, Houston was equally at home singing mezzo-soprano in an opera house as she was performing Brazilian folk songs by candlelight in a bar or nightclub. VMFA is organising a major exhibition entitled ‘Man Ray: The Paris Years’, which will open in Richmond in October 2021 and focuses on the artist’s first stay in Paris, between 1921 and 1940.

11. *Tennis at Newport*, by George Bellows (American, 1882–1925). 1920. Oil on canvas, 16.9 by 20.9 cm.

James W. and Frances Gibson McGlothlin Collection, 2017.155.

In 2017 James W. and Frances Gibson McGlothlin generously donated five arresting works by the American realist painter George Bellows, including *Tennis at Newport*. In 1919 Bellows attended the United States National Lawn Tennis Association Championship in Newport, Rhode Island, and completed this celebrated painting the following year. It demonstrates the artist’s facile brushwork and interest in athletic spectacle. This painting is displayed in the museum’s 2010 McGlothlin Wing alongside other works from the collection of these generous VMFA patrons.



12. *Three folk musicians*, by Romare Bearden (American, 1911–88). 1967.
Collage of various papers with paint and graphite on canvas, 127 by 152.4 cm.
Purchased with the Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment, 2016.336.

Three folk musicians showcases Romare Bearden's deft use of musical imagery to evoke memory and lived experience. The acquisition of one of Bearden's largest and most ambitious collage paintings reflects VMFA's Strategic Plan commitment to bolster its holdings of works by African American artists and *Three folk musicians* has swiftly become one of the most beloved works of art in the museum's collection.





13. *Born again (homage)*, by Sam Gilliam (American, b.1933). 1968. Magna and acrylic on canvas with aluminium powder, 302.3 by 447 cm.

Purchased with the Sydney and Frances Lewis Endowment Fund; and a partial gift of Jeffrey L. Humber, Jr, 2018.307.

An iconic figure in American painting, Sam Gilliam has related this majestic work to the liberating impact of Jackson Pollock's monumental, all-over compositions in poured and spattered paint, as well as the turbulent political period in the United States during the late 1960s, including the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. Gilliam began the work by pouring paint directly onto the unprimed, unstretched canvas, which he then folded while still wet to create luminous striations and bursts of colour. Gilliam then stretched the canvas over a bevelled-edge wood frame, which projects the work off the wall into the physical space of the viewer. The intense labour involved in the making of this abstract painting led the artist to also consider it as his homage to the ordinary person who works with their hands.

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14. *America seen through stars and stripes, New York City, NY*, by Ming Smith (American, b. c.1951). c.1976. Gelatin silver print, 31.8 by 47 cm.

Purchased with the Adolph D. and Wilkins C. Williams Fund, 2016.241.

VMFA has built a collection of nearly two hundred works by the early members of the Kamoinge Workshop, an African American photography collective formed in New York in 1963. In 1972 Ming Smith became the first woman artist to join the group and she has since gone on to achieve international acclaim for her pioneering work as a photographer.

15. *Marine, hotel near airport, Richmond*, by Susan Worsham (American, b.1969). 2009. Archival pigment print, 83.8 by 104.1 cm.

Purchased with the Aldine S. Hartman Endowment Fund, 2017.117.

This photograph is from Richmond artist Susan Worsham's series 'By the Grace of God' and, as that name suggests, the image is the result of a chance meeting. In search of subject-matter, the photographer was driving near Richmond International Airport when the weather turned for the worse. Deciding to return home, Worsham turned her car around in a motel parking lot, where she saw a number of US Marines in uniform. She asked the young men where they were from, to which they replied, 'all over, ma'am'. The subject here agreed to let her take his picture in his motel room with her large format, 4 by 5 inch viewfinder camera. The pared-down directness of this carefully staged photograph makes the subject seem intensely familiar, despite his anonymity.

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16. *A small band*, by Glenn Ligon (American, b.1960). 2015. Neon, paint and metal support, 594.4 by 670.6 by 228.6 cm.

Purchased with the Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment, 2018.350.

The flashing neon words 'blues', 'blood' and 'bruise' in Glenn Ligon's monumental light installation, which was installed in the museum's atrium in 2018, come from the testimony of Daniel Hamm, who was wrongly accused of murder in 1965 and later exonerated, along with other members of the 'Harlem Six'. Hamm spoke publicly about the beatings he experienced at the hands of police officers and *A small band* inspires reflection on past and ongoing instances of police brutality against communities of colour.

17. *Luxation I*, by Tsherin Sherpa (American, b.1968 Nepal). 2016. Acrylic on sixteen canvases, each 45.7 by 45.7 cm.

Purchased with the Adolph D. and Wilkins C. Williams Fund, 2017.195a-p.

Tsherin Sherpa – who was born in Kathmandu, Nepal, but is ethnically Tibetan – leverages his mastery of traditional Tibetan thangka painting to create such vibrant compositions as *Luxation I*, the first contemporary work to enter VMFA's renowned Himalayan collection. VMFA is now organising the artist's focused retrospective exhibition, 'Tsherin Sherpa: Spirits', which will open in Richmond in February 2022.

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18. *Let them be children*, by Deborah Roberts (American, b.1962). 2018.

Acrylic, pastel, ink, gouache and collage on canvas, 114.3 by 335.3 cm.

Purchased with the Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment, 2019.1.

In *Let them be children* – the artist's largest and most complex composition to date – Deborah Roberts applies her signature style of collage, painting and drawing onto the surface of the canvas. The work identifies the challenges faced by Black youth, who balance building their identities and enjoying their childhood with the social pressures and forced expectation to prematurely grow up.

19. *Butterfly whorl*, by Susan Point (Coast Salish, b.1952). 2018. Red cedar, copper and pigment, diameter 127 cm.

Purchased with funds provided by Margaret A. and C. Boyd Clarke, 2019.48.

Coast Salish artist Susan Point's large-scale carving – a medium generally the purview of male artists among the indigenous peoples of the Canadian Pacific Northwest Coast – illustrates six hummingbirds embedded into the central butterfly motif. The knife-work, copper embellishments and compositional skill are all indicative of her artistic strengths.

20. *Rumors of war*, by Kehinde Wiley (American, b.1977). 2019. Bronze on a limestone pedestal, 835.3 by 776.9 by 481.7 cm.

Purchased with the gift of Virginia Sargeant Reynolds in memory of her husband, Richard S.

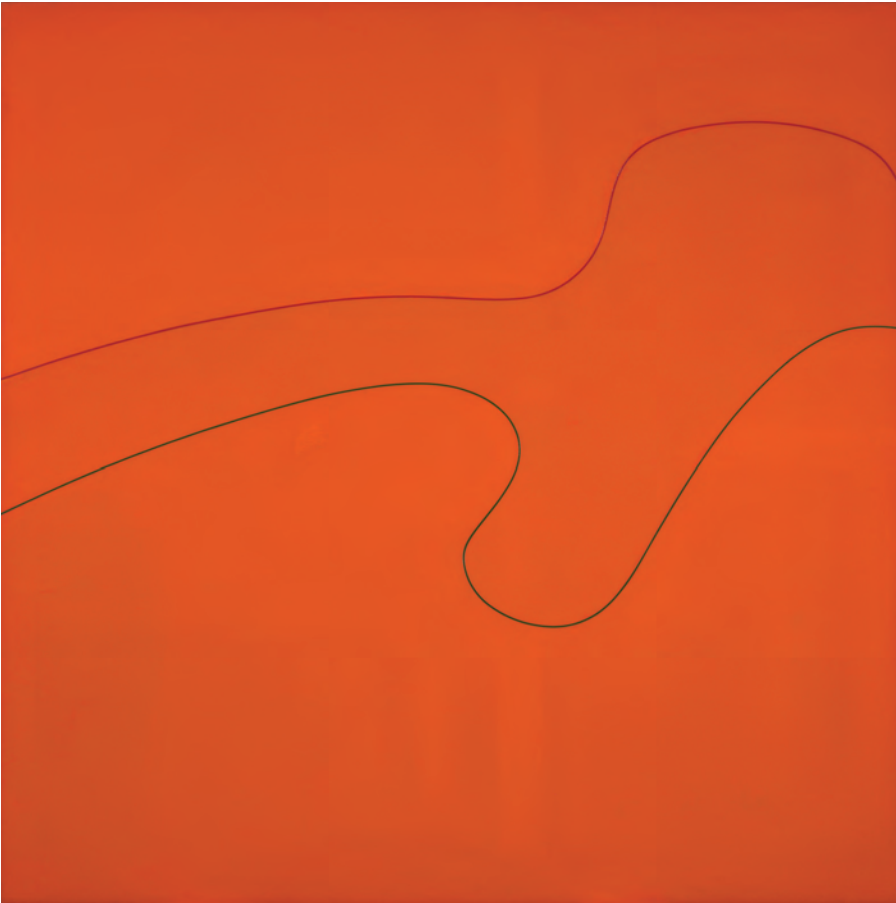
Reynolds, Jr, by exchange; Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment; Pamela K. and William A. Royall, Jr; Tom and Angel Papa; and additional private donors, 2019.39.

Challenging ideas of memorialisation, Kehinde Wiley's monumental bronze equestrian sculpture *Rumors of war* reimagines the statue of Confederate General J.E.B. Stuart, which until recently stood on Richmond's Monument Avenue, as a Black male figure with a high fade haircut with dreadlocks, jeans ripped at the knees and Nike Kyrie sneakers. Wiley created this sculpture – his first public artwork – specifically for VMFA and in December 2019 it was permanently installed at the entrance to the museum to welcome all visitors. Since that time, *Rumors of War* has become a symbol of a better, brighter and more inclusive future for the city of Richmond, the Commonwealth of Virginia and the United States of America.

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21. *Time fractal*, by Virginia Jaramillo (American, b.1939). 1973. Acrylic on canvas, 183.2 by 183.2 cm.

Purchased with the Adolph D. and Wilkins C. Williams Fund, by exchange, 2020.19.

Virginia Jaramillo is celebrated for her pioneering abstract paintings that combine monochromatic fields of vibrant colour with gestural linear markings in a bold, yet minimal style that is uniquely her own. Drawing upon the history of painting, as well as her Mexican American heritage, Jaramillo explores in this work perceptions of time and space and the mental structural patterns we impose on the world.

22. *Procession*, by Odili Donald Odita (American, b.1966 Nigeria). 2020. Acrylic latex matt (flat) wall paint, acrylic soft gel medium and varnish, dimensions variable.

Purchased with the Adolph D. and Wilkins C. Williams Fund, 2019.43.

Beautifully transforming VMFA's atrium, *Procession* is a dynamic mural of colourful lines and complex patterns by Nigerian-born artist Odili Donald Odita. The VMFA's light-filled architecture as well as its African and African American collections served as Odita's inspiration for the work.

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