

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**VMFA Receives Significant Support for Work by Contemporary Black Artists**  
21st-Century Gallery to be Renamed to Recognize Drs. Monroe and Jill Bussey Harris



Dr. Monroe Harris Jr. and Dr. Jill Bussey Harris

Richmond, Virginia — The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA) announced today that it recently received an important contribution from Dr. Monroe Harris Jr. and Dr. Jill Bussey Harris. One of the museum’s 21st-Century Art galleries will be renamed to honor the Harris’ support.

“Monroe and Jill are avid art collectors and tremendous supporters of VMFA,” said Alex Nyerges, VMFA’s Director and CEO. “Their generous gift offers significant support for the museum’s continued efforts to expand and exhibit its collection of contemporary work by Black artists.”

Supporting African and African American art has been the Harris’ passion for many years. “From offering support to local artists and those who are well established, we are preserving our diverse culture,” said Monroe. Jill added, “It’s important for us to not simply be involved but to also give back to our community.”

Dr. Monroe Harris, who was elected president of the Board of Trustees for VMFA in July 2018, is the first African American to hold the position in the institution’s 82-year history and the first African American board chair of a major comprehensive art museum in the United States. During his tenure, he championed the expansion of the museum’s collection to include more works by African and African American artists, including Kehinde Wiley’s *Rumors of War*. Previously, he held the offices of executive vice president and vice president of the museum’s Board of Trustees and served as president of the Foundation Board of Directors.

Both Harris’ have longtime careers in dentistry. Dr. Monroe Harris is an oral and maxillofacial surgeon in Richmond and a partner in the practice of Virginia Oral & Facial Surgery. Dr. Jill Bussey Harris is a cosmetic dentist who maintains her own private practice, Beautiful Smiles, in the museum district. In 1989, she became the first African American female full-time assistant professor at VCU/MCV School of Dentistry.

“As collectors of African American art, as donors, and as dedicated professionals, they demonstrate what it means to be visionary leaders, not only for VMFA but the entire Richmond community,” Nyerges said. “We are grateful for their support.”

### **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, 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 is the only art museum in the United States open 365 days a year with free general admission. For additional information, call 804.340.1400 or visit [www.VMFA.museum](http://www.VMFA.museum).**

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