

For Immediate Release
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VMFA Acknowledges the Historic Presence of Indigenous Peoples in Virginia
Special Webpage Highlights Works by Native American Artists, Related Programs, Events and Educational Resources



From right to left: Dr. Michael Taylor, VMFA's Chief Curator and Deputy Director for Art and Education; Alex Nyerges, VMFA's Director and CEO; Dr. Monroe Harris, President of VMFA's Board of Trustees; Dr. Johanna Minich, VMFA's Assistant Curator of Native American Art; Lynette Allston, Nottoway Indian Tribe of Virginia's Chief and Vice President of VMFA's Board of Trustees; Katie Payne, VMFA's Director of Government Relations; Stanley J. Olander, Jr., President and Director of VMFA's Foundation Board of Directors; and Kelly Thomasson, Secretary of the Commonwealth of Virginia. Photo by Sandra Sellars, © 2021 Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

Richmond, Virginia — Visitors to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA) in Richmond will now see a statement acknowledging the presence of Indigenous peoples on the land on which the museum now stands inside its main entrance and in the Native American galleries, as well as on VMFA's website. The newly installed land acknowledgment text panels were unveiled at a private ceremony attended by representatives from Virginia's Native American tribes, state government officials, and VMFA staff and board members last Tuesday, November 9.

“The museum continues to strive to become a more welcoming and inclusive cultural leader,” said Alex Nyerges, VMFA's Director and CEO. “With this land acknowledgment, VMFA recognizes and honors the presence of all the Indigenous peoples in Virginia, both past and present, and celebrates their incredible contributions to art and culture, not only during Native American Heritage Month, but all year round through our Native American gallery displays, collections, exhibitions, programming and website. We are committed to strengthening our relationships with the Native American community, and this land acknowledgment is an important milestone in our goal to make VMFA a welcoming place for all of our visitors.”

The Commonwealth of Virginia was one of the first points of contact between Indigenous peoples and European settlers. Today, Virginia is home to seven federally recognized tribes: Chickahominy Indian Tribe, Chickahominy Indian Tribe - Eastern Division, Monacan Indian Nation, Nansemond Indian Tribe, Pamunkey Indian Tribe, Rappahannock Tribe and the Upper Mattaponi Indian Tribe. In addition to these federally recognized tribes, the Commonwealth of Virginia also recognizes the Cheroenhaka (Nottoway) Indian Tribe, Mattaponi Indian Tribe, Nottoway Indian Tribe of Virginia and the Patowomeck Indian Tribe of Virginia.

“Through art, VMFA tells the stories of people and cultures that span millennia from around the world. As this museum raises awareness and educates, it offers a view for respect and understanding through inclusion and cultural diversity,” said Lynette Allston, Nottoway Indian Tribe of Virginia’s Chief and Vice President of VMFA’s Board of Trustees. “Acknowledgement opens a gateway. It is time to expand the story of the first people who lived and live here on the land called Virginia. Knowledge is what we have learned. Acknowledgement is the desire to learn more. My hope is that this land acknowledgement is an awakening of interest and a catalyst for learning more about Virginia’s first people.”

VMFA’s growing [Native American art collection](#) includes two- and three-dimensional works dating from prehistoric times to the present day. The collection comprises artwork by modern and contemporary artists as well as objects by unnamed Indigenous artists from the Arctic North, Northwest Coast, Plains and Southwest regions.

“Diversifying VMFA’s art collection and exhibitions is a fundamental priority of VMFA’s strategic plan,” said Dr. Michael Taylor, VMFA’s Chief Curator and Deputy Director for Art and Education. “Curatorial collecting endeavors address issues of diversity, equity, inclusivity and racial and social justice, with a focus on African and African American art as well as Native American, Islamic, Latinx, LGBTQIA+ and women artists. Within the past five years, VMFA has acquired more than 350 Native American works including works by Native artists from Virginia.”

The museum conducts [provenance](#) research on all works of art in its collection, tracing the ownership history and location of an object, from its creation to the present. VMFA is committed to the fair consideration and resolution of restitution and repatriation claims. The museum, which is in full compliance with the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), has repatriated three works to the Tlingit Tribe in Alaska since 2004, and there are currently no outstanding claims on any artworks in the collection. To learn more about VMFA’s Native American collection, visit www.VMFA.museum.

In celebration of Native American Heritage Month the museum has launched a special [webpage](#) dedicated to the artistry and cultures of Indigenous peoples in the United States, which highlights works in the museum’s collection by Native American artists and features related programs, upcoming events, educational resources and videos that showcase enriching voices and perspectives.

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 museum has undertaken an exciting \$190 million expansion and renovation, anticipated to be complete in late 2025. International architectural firm SmithGroup is charged with designing a 105,000-square-foot wing for contemporary art, African art, photography, special exhibitions and events; a new 40,000-square-foot collections center to accommodate an expanded conservation department and collections storage; and 45,000 square feet of renovations to the museum's 1936 building, 1970 building and Leslie Cheek Theater.

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.

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