



## The Museum as Brave Space



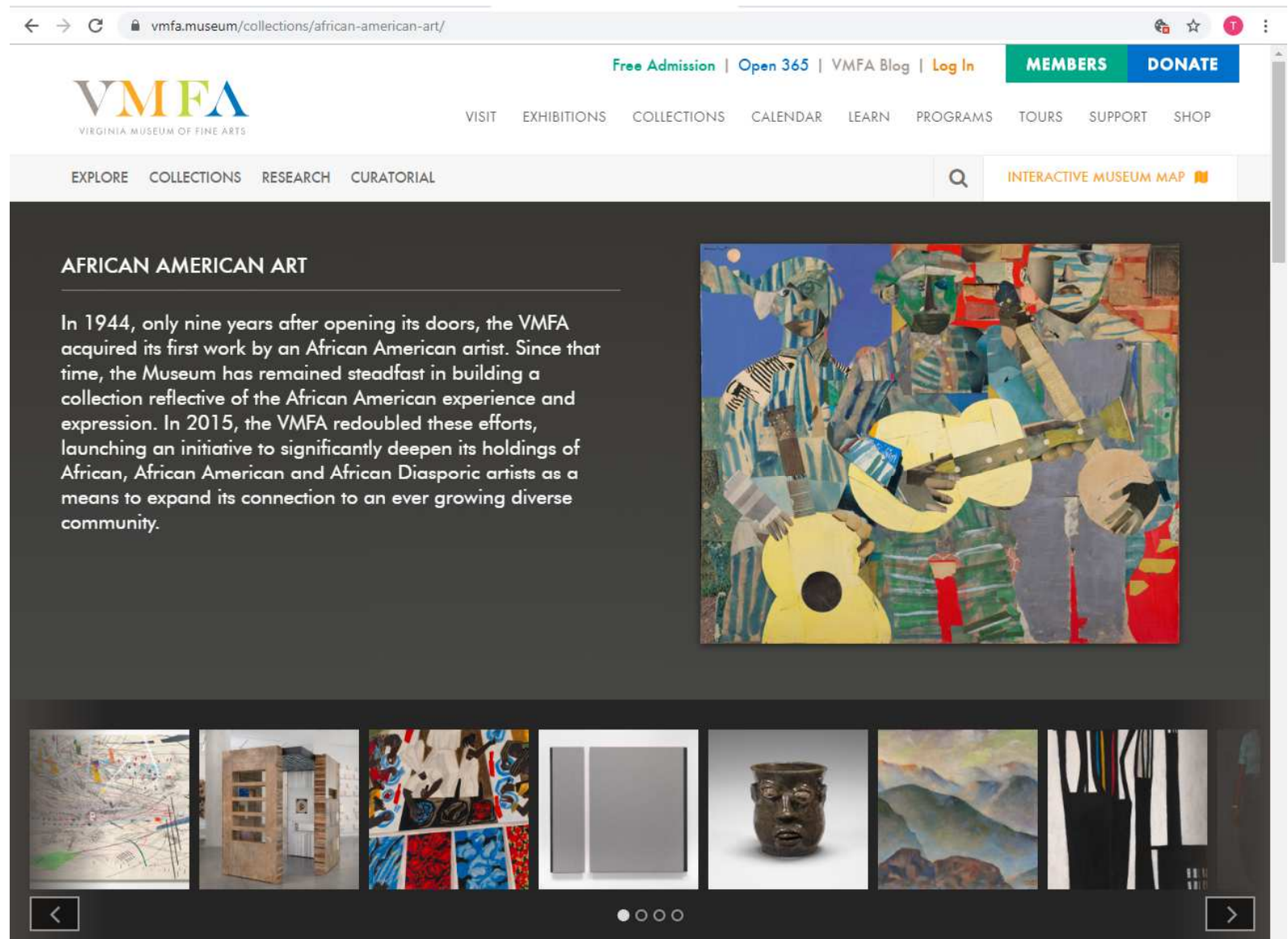
Glenn Ligon, American, born 1960, *A Small Band*, 2015,

Neon, paint, metal support. Arthur and Margaret Glasgow Endowment, 2018.350

This work by Glen Ligon is positioned so that it can be seen day and night from passersby on Arthur Ashe Boulevard.

How can scholarly discourse be inclusive of all audiences?

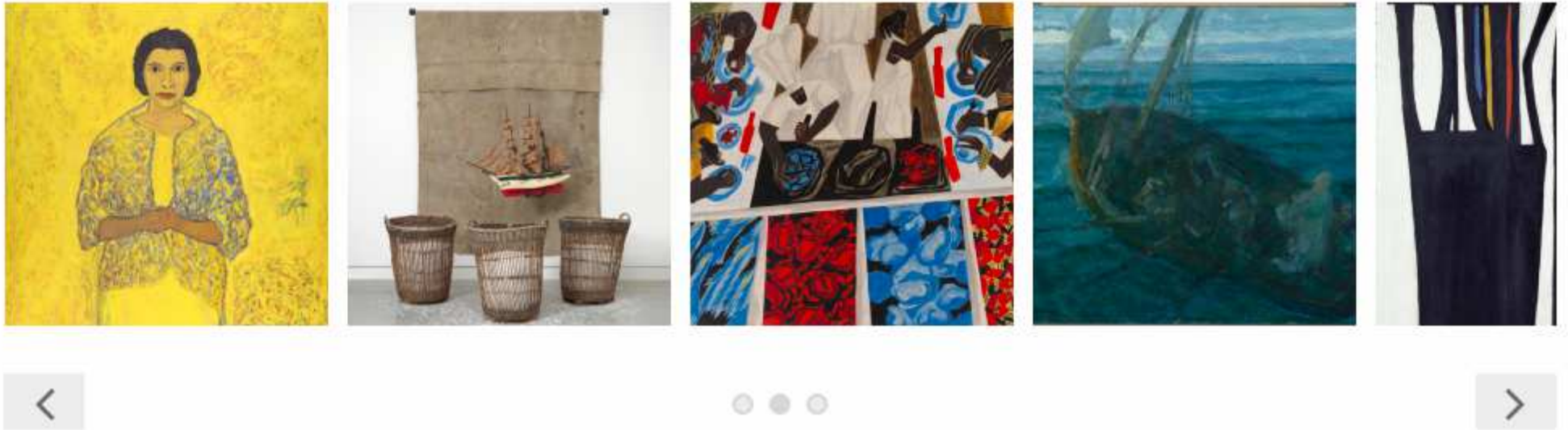
VMFA's website features a "collection section" on African American Art that actually includes works of art that fall under several curators.



In 1944, only nine years after opening its doors, the VMFA acquired its first work by an African American artist. Since that time, the Museum has remained steadfast in building a collection reflective of the African American experience and expression.

In 2015, the VMFA redoubled these efforts, launching an initiative to significantly deepen its holdings of African, African American and African Diasporic artists as a means to expand its connection to an ever growing diverse community.

## Highlights



The collection features masterpieces from early American to modern and later, contemporary artists. With such a vast arch across time, **these works collectively underscore the dramatic shifts in the artistic, social and political landscape and their impact upon the creative expression.** Through the work of such remarkable artists who range from Joshua Johnson to Kehinde Wiley, we are able to see the transformations within our society that continue to inform our multivalent culture.



## RECENTLY ACQUIRED



These recently acquired works of art include from left to right, Gordon Park's photograph *White Police Officer Standing between Two Black Protestors*, 1963; Eldzier Cortor's *Southern Landscape*, 1941; Palmer Hayden's *Untitled (Dreamer)*, 1941; Romare Bearden's *Three Folk Musicians*, 1967; and a partial view of Louis Draper's photograph *Boy with Lace Curtain*, nd. The Draper image includes a link to a video recording of an interview with Draper's sister, Nell Draper Winston, a native of Richmond (Henrico), Virginia, who participated in civil rights protests in 1960.

## WORKS ON PAPER

Many artists made their greatest masterpieces using paper, such as Romare Bearden's collage, *Three Musicians*. Works on paper, however, are much more sensitive to light than paintings or sculptures and require measured presentation. To preserve these objects, VMFA follows the American Alliance of Museum's protocol of resting works on paper up to four times as long as the work has been on view. When not hanging in the galleries, these works can be found on the Museum's website.




Scrolling down the page, the site makes it clear that not all works can be on view all the time, but can be accessed through the VMFA website. Included here are works by Kara Walker, Jacob Lawrence, Martin Puryear, Robert Pruitt, and Leroy Henderson.

The last section of this webpage offers African American artists speaking about their artistic processes and intent. The main feature is Radcliffe Bailey offering insights into his *Vessel* installation. On the left are talks by Julie Mehretu, Leroy Henderson, Kehinde Wiley, and Hank Willis Thomas.

vmfa.museum/collections/african-american-art/

## VIDEOS




Radcliffe Bailey @ VMFA

5:14

Artist Radcliffe Bailey talks about his artistic process and what he hopes his art conveys. Come see "Vessel" in VMFA's permanent collection.


- Radcliffe Bailey @ VMFA 5:14
- Julie Mehretu @ VMFA 4:12
- LeRoy Henderson @ VMFA 1:04:08
- Kehinde Wiley @ VMFA 14:57
- Hank Willis Thomas @ VMFA



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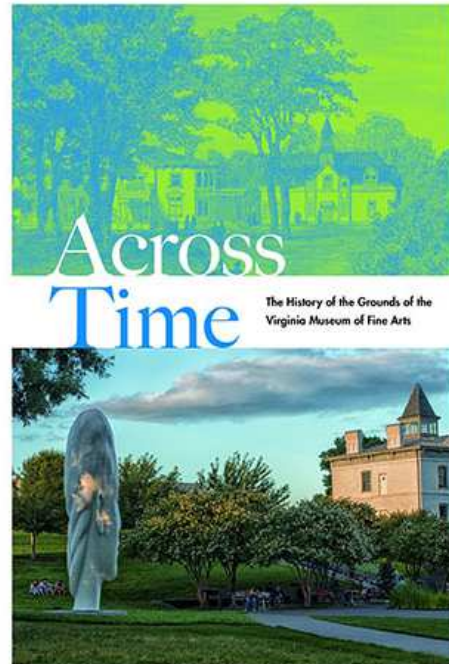


How can we exhibit historic art collections that reflect the culture of their time but now elicit controversy because in our time they would be considered abject promoters of colonialism, slavery, racism, etc.?

How can we address the way our understanding of these artworks and collections has evolved?

## *Across Time: Robinson House, Its Land and People.*

VMFA's grounds offer numerous opportunities to delve more deeply into the past to discover voices and stories previously missing from information provided.



The free exhibition *Across Time: Robinson House, Its Land and People* interprets the multilayered history of the museum grounds from the 17th century to the present.

Richly illustrated with maps, prints, and period photographs, the narrative includes Virginia's native peoples and English colonists; an antebellum family and the enslaved people who labored for and sometimes escaped from them; the R. E. Lee Camp Confederate Soldiers' Home—a veterans' facility born out of a spirit of reconciliation between North and South; an innovative scientific research institute; and a creative center for art programs and studio classes.

The exhibition is curated by Dr. Elizabeth L. O'Leary, former associate curator of American art for VMFA, and supported by The Council of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Robert Edmond Hill, and the Roller-Bottimore Foundation.



*J.E.B. Stuart* statue, by Frederick Moynihan, unveiled May 30, 1907

Coming Soon! An addition to the VMFA grounds



*Rumors of War*, 2019, by Kehinde Wiley, will soon be installed near the entrance to VMFA looking out to the newly renamed Arthur Ashe Boulevard.



Curatorial choices provide opportunities!



Unknown artist called the Payne Limner,  
American, 1780–1803, *Alexander Spotswood Payne  
and His Brother, John Robert Dandridge Payne, with  
Their Nurse*, ca. 1790-1791, Oil on canvas, Gift of  
Miss Dorothy Payne, 53.24



*Anti-Slave Trade Medallion*

Modeled 1787, manufactured early 19th century  
Wedgwood Factory –modeled by William Hackwood;  
designed by Henry Webber, English  
Blue-and-white jasperware  
Virginia Museum Art Purchase Fund, 2001.13





Label copy:

Taking residence in the manor house at New Market, a large plantation in Goochland County, Virginia, an unknown artist painted ten portraits of the family of Archer and Martha Payne. This depiction of their son Alexander, his baby brother John, and an enslaved nursemaid is among them.

The obviously self-taught artist, known today as the Payne Limner, struggled with anatomy and composition (evidence of his changes are visible on the canvas). Still, he managed to capture something of his subject's appearances. **He also conveyed the family's privileged circumstances through setting, clothing, and the addition of the unnamed African American girl, whose legal status as a slave rendered her valuable taxable "property."** Despite recent Revolutionary rhetoric about liberty and freedom – including the famous speech by Archer Payne's relation Patrick Henry – an economic system based on slave labor would continue in the South for another seventy-five years.



Label copy:

A few years before the Payne family of Goochland County, Virginia, sat for their portraits – including the nearby image of two brothers with their enslaved nurse – **the London-based Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade approved a powerful new emblem: a kneeling black man in chains who asks, “Am I Not a Man and a Brother?”** Josiah Wedgwood, a prominent English ceramic manufacturer and Society member, produced the image as a jasperware cameo at his pottery factory.

In 1788, Wedgwood sent a shipment of medallions to Benjamin Franklin in Philadelphia, where the Society of Friends (also known as Quakers) promoted the abolitionist cause. During the following decades, the medallions became popular and persuasive political ornaments on both sides of the Atlantic. In abolitionist circles, they were variously framed, worn as pendants, and inlaid on snuff boxes.

How can we use collections (non-European arts, fine arts, etc.) to reflect cultural diversity in contemporary society without presenting them in an inappropriate way?

How do we propose a constructive and critical discourse around the presentation of universal historic collections?

## *Perspectives on Master Narratives*



Asher B. Durand, American, 1796–1886,  
*Progress (The Advance of Civilization)*, 1853, Oil on canvas, Gift of anonymous donor, 2018.547



Detail of *Progress (The Advance of Civilization)*, 1853





Jaune Quick-to-See-Smith (Salish/Kootinai, b. 1940 ),  
*War Torn Dress*, 2002



*War Town Dress*, by artist Jaune Quick-to-See Smith in 2002, will also be displayed next to *Progress*. It's a mixed media work featuring the form of a war dress superimposed on top of newspaper articles to make a statement to about the treatment of Native Americans.

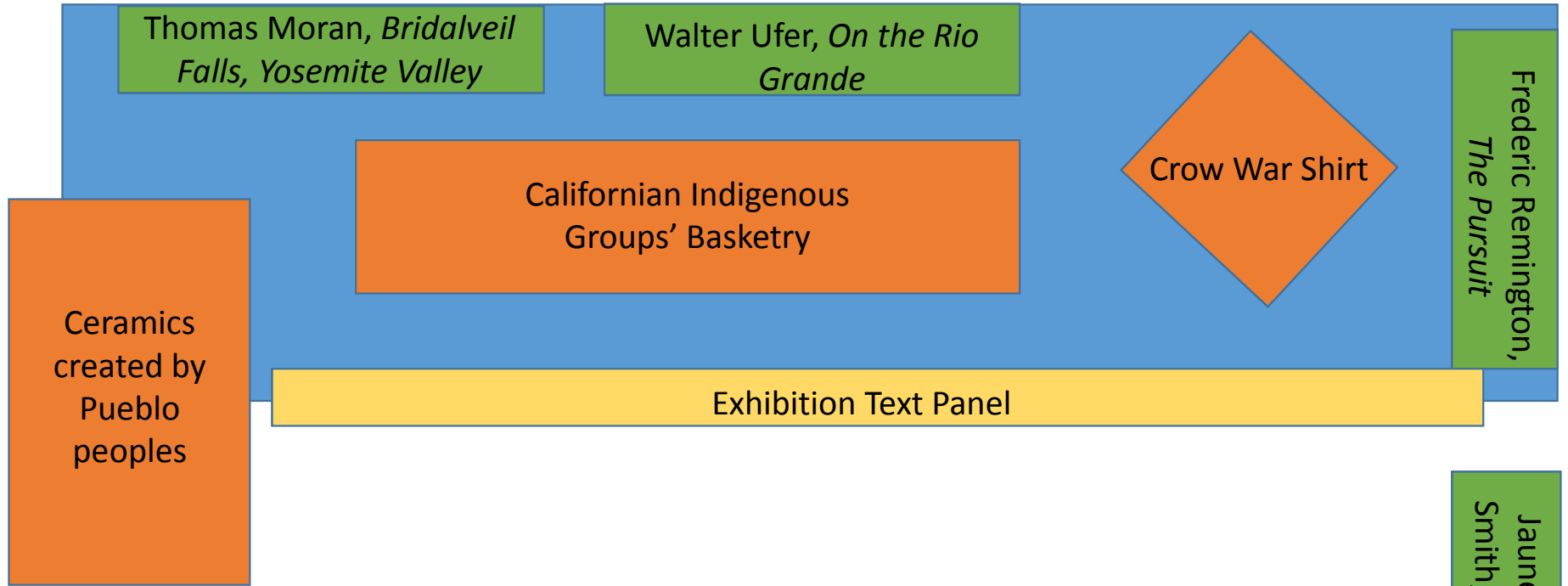


*Warshirt*, 1850–1880, Crow,  
Elk or antelope hide, porcupine quills,  
wool cloth, ermine, horsehair, glass  
beads, pigment,  
Robert and Nancy Nooter Collection,  
Adolph D. and Wilkins C. Williams  
Fund, 2016.127

The original plan was to exhibit both shirts near the Durand, but after hearing concerns from a focus group that included experts in Native American history, the interpretation team and curator are re-evaluating the interpretation of the warshirt.



Gallery  
Entrance



Proposed Installation

Asher B. Durand,  
*Progress*

Jaune Quick-to-See-  
Smith, *War Torn Dress*

Gallery  
Entrance





There are also several other recently acquired works that speak to this issue.

Virgil Ortiz is a Pueblo artist inspired by two loves: the traditional figurative ceramic style he learned from his mother, and Star Wars. These influences resulted in Revolt 1680/2180, a sculpture series retelling the story of his ancestors' rebellion against Spanish colonizers in 1680, complete with laser blasters and an ancient astronaut vibe.

<https://rvamag.com/art/rva-31-the-sci-fi-rebellion-of-virgil-ortiz.html>

Virgil Ortiz, Native American, Cochiti Pueblo, born 1969,  
*Aeronauts: Steu* and *Cuda*, 2014, Clay, slip and wild spinach paint,  
Adolph D. and Wilkins C. Williams Fund, 2016.247.1 and 2

I recently included this image and question in a teacher workshop for second grade teachers on the topic of American symbols. It evoked engaged discussion of how mainstream culture has represented Native American people.

What do you think Wendy Red Star is trying to say in this staged photograph?



Wendy Red Star, American, Crow, born 1981,  
"Fall," 2006, printed 2016 from *Four Seasons* series, Archival pigment print  
on Sunset fiber rag mounted on Maxx Metal, Aldine S. Hartman Endowment Fund, 2016.215



Can museums remain apolitical while exhibiting contemporary art that addresses divisive social and political issues?



Museums can be neutral, but many leading contemporary artists are not.



Paul Rucker, American, born 1968, *Proliferation*, 2009,  
Digital video with sound (10:30 minutes), Gift of the Artist,  
2018.502

Label copy: Formally trained as a musician and composer, Rucker has established himself as a visual artist engaged with social practices that illuminate the legacy of slavery in America and its relationship to the current sociopolitical moment. His work is the product of a rich interactive process, through which he investigates community impacts, human rights issues, historical research, and basic human emotion.

In *Proliferation*, Rucker visually chronicles the growth of the American prison system over three centuries. Through music and visual composition, he slowly reveals the phenomenal growth of the United States penal system from 1778 through 2008.

Are there lines in this area that we must not cross?

Time will tell.



Members of the Robinson family assemble in front of their residence in this 1880 photograph. Today, this building houses the exhibition *Across Time: Robinson House, Its Land and People*