
VMFA
*Council
Connections*

11.20.23

The Council - Serving VMFA as Volunteers since 1955

A Seismic Transformation in Conservation

It was 1984 and a change in the Conservation Department was planned by Paul Perrot, former director of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA), when he recruited Carol Sawyer from the Metropolitan Museum of Art (the Met). Mr. Perrot wanted to create an art conservation and scientific center in the Southeast, and specifically at the VMFA. Carol had been at the Met for 4 years, and prior to that had completed her graduate training in Florence, Italy. Because of her deep interest in science as it applies to art conservation, she enthusiastically embraced Perrot's vision.

When Carol first started her career at VMFA, she was responsible for the entire collection including all paintings (American, European, East Asian and South Asian) as well as works on paper, objects, textiles and frames. Carol was also tasked with addressing the conservation needs of the Paul Mellon and Sydney and Frances Lewis collections in preparation for the opening of the 1985 wing. To help address the conservation disciplines outside her expertise in paintings, Carol applied for more than 12 national grants to hire contract conservators. She also received some valuable assistance from The Council.



Paul Perrot, former VMFA director, and Carol Sawyer in the first painting conservation studio located in the basement. Photo: © Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.

Elsie Donnahoe, the President of The Council when Carol first started, volunteered to assist with administrative work. Carol was thrilled with her offer and says Elsie was “an absolute godsend and invaluable assistant.” The Council also contributed to Paul Perrot's effort, offering funds to purchase a vacuum hot table, a critical piece of conservation equipment in the painting conservation field.

The Conservation Department grew over the years requiring several relocations. Initially, it was positioned in the basement (a 940 SF room) but moved to an area across from the Leslie Cheek Theater where it remained until 2009 when it was relocated to three closed gallery spaces on the second floor. The first two conservation studio spaces had never been purpose-built for conservation work, so Carol, well in advance of the 2010 wing, convinced former VMFA Director Katherine Lee to support a new conservation space in the new wing. Architect Rick Mather



Carol Sawyer, Margaret H. & William E. Massey Sr. Conservator of Paintings and Head of Painting Conservation. Photo: Travis Fullerton © Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.

embraced Carol's new painting conservation studio design which resulted in today's enviable and beautiful, light filled, ca. 10,000 SF lab in the Susan and David Goode Center for Advanced Study in Art Conservation.



Carol Sawyer treating *For Heraclitus* by Willie Anne Wright for VMFA's 2023 Wright exhibition. Painting on the easel is oriented upside down to retouch the top corner. Photo: Debbie Linn © Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.

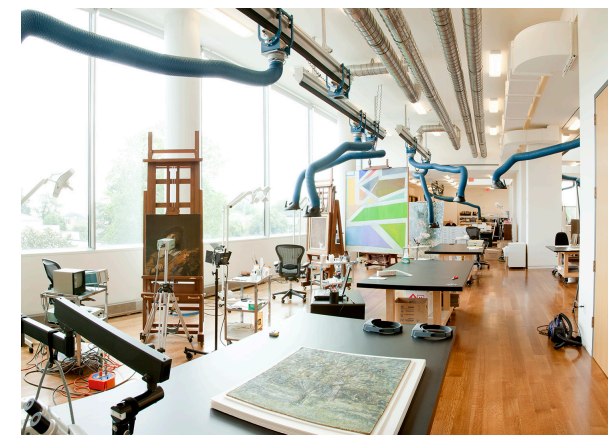
In addition to examining and treating paintings, Carol was also publishing and lecturing and needed administrative assistance. In response, The Council again reached out to help. Under the guidance of Alex McGrath (past Council President) and Stephanie McGrath (Council Information Technology Specialist), a Council team was assembled that included Alex, Stephanie, Diane Barbour, Pam Chavis, and Debbie Turner who worked on sorting and filing. The Council team was frequently included in discussions regarding condition issues, treatment methods and matting approaches with Carol and her staff, Bruce Suffield and Danny Brisbane. This experience gave the Council team new insight and helped them to better understand the appearance and condition of the paintings being treated and helped to make the experience of volunteering in painting conservation not only educational but fun and rewarding.

Carol has always strived to outfit VMFA's studio with state-of-the-art scientific equipment. Most recently she worked with scientists and university professors researching and demoing various spectral imaging systems. This effort, with the support of former Senior Deputy Director Stephen Bonadies, led to the acquisition of a hyperspectral scanner and an X-ray fluorescence scanner. With these instruments a conservator can view what is underneath a painting's surface and can perform elemental analysis of an entire painting to identify pigments. On several occasions, Carol graciously shared, with many of the volunteers in the Conservation Department, the interesting analytical findings provided by these two instruments.

The Goode Conservation Center is a model for museums across the country and has made the VMFA a well-recognized and admired conservation landmark. As Carol retires from her position as the Margaret H. and William E. Massey Sr. Conservator of Paintings on January 1, 2024, she can walk through the galleries and reflect on the many collection items that she was responsible for examining, researching and treating over approximately four decades.

Thank you, thank you, Carol. The Council is grateful to you for the experiences you have given to all of us. We will forever enjoy the beautiful work you performed at the museum during your remarkable tenure at VMFA.

Article by Pam Chavis and Diane Barbour



Painting Conservation Studio in the 2010 Susan and David Goode Center for Advanced Study in Art Conservation. Photo: Travis Fullerton © Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

Four New Members Find Satisfying Roles In The Council

The next Special Edition of Council Connections (December 11) will include an interview with some of the original Council members. For this issue of Council Connections, members of the editorial board, along with Frank Dellinger, Chair Council Operations, interviewed some new Council members. All have been successful at becoming integrated into The Council. They are not only active new members, but they have also become leaders in their volunteer areas.

One of the key requirements for continuing to improve an organization is to keep asking questions. The participants in this interview provided some well thought out observations and suggestions, particularly about onboarding new members, as they responded to our interview questions.

Carol McCoy, Evans Dowdy, Diane Sheehey, and Liz Teviotdale joined The Council approximately one year ago. All were assigned volunteer placements (not always their first choice) and some have become the leaders of their volunteer activity.

Carol McCoy was a tax partner at Klynveld Peat Marwick Goerdeler (KPMG) and retired in 2011. She joined The Council in the Spring of 2023 as a Museum Ambassador and is now Chair of that volunteer activity. She shared the challenge of keeping current on changes taking place at the museum so that her team can be armed with the latest information to share with guests. Carol enjoys the museum most when it is busy with many visitors. One of the numerous rewards of her position is getting to know other Museum Ambassadors and connecting with members of Visitor Services.

Evans Dowdy, who retired 4 years ago, works as a volunteer in the VMFA gardens. She has always had a love of the outdoors and gardening. She worked in a bank before retiring. Evans is a certified horticulturist, and she is looking forward to volunteering for Fine Arts & Flowers joining the Logistics team, even if they only need help with clean up and maintenance.



Evans Dowdy, Carol McCoy, Diane Sheehey, and Liz Teviotdale

Diane Sheehey, who has not yet retired, joined The Council in the Spring of 2023 after responding to a Council recruitment activity. She is new to Richmond so one of the benefits of Council membership for her has been to meet other Council members and thereby broaden her social connections in her new community. Diane pointed out that this added benefit was one of the reasons she joined The Council. She observed that VMFA (and The Council) is the organization that brings all cultures, religions, and races together. Diane is an attorney who manages local offices. She is now working as a Museum Ambassador for The Council.

Liz Teviotdale is also new to the Richmond area and recently assumed leadership as co-chair of the Gallery Care Assistants, replacing Frank Dellinger when he became the new Chair Council Operations. Liz was an academic administrator prior to retirement. Liz also provided observations and suggestions for improving the onboarding process as well as ideas on how to improve participation in Volgistics. All of these suggestions will be passed on to the Council Executive Committee.

Council members come from varied backgrounds and experiences. What all Council members have in common is a love of the art that VMFA provides.

Diane Barbour and Pam Chavis

Announcements from Nan Boyd, VMFA Council President

- The Council has a new tagline that will be used in all publications, website, promotional materials, etc.

[The Council - Serving VMFA as Volunteers since 1955](#)

- This year's BOG meeting minutes are available to read on the Council website. From the Council home page, click on *Member Info* and then on *Board of Governors*.

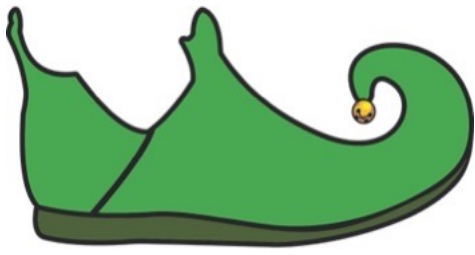
Council Members Preview the Beautiful New Tea Room in the Pauley Center

Forty members enjoyed a preview of the new VMFA Tea Room in the Pauley Center on Monday, November 13 at noon. The Pauley Parlor has been transformed into a tea room and Council members were the first to enjoy the beautifully redesigned space, completed by designer Marie Fedowitz and her studio Abode. Culinary Director Cody Dickey welcomed everyone, provided a brief overview of the Tea Room and introduced Chef Chainey Kuykendall and Tea Room Manager Heather Condon. Chef Chainey Kuykendall created the menu which included both sweet and savory items accompanied by two new tea flavors. The room was filled with beautiful flowers to complement the older elegance of the Pauley Center. We look forward to additional opportunities to visit this very special space.

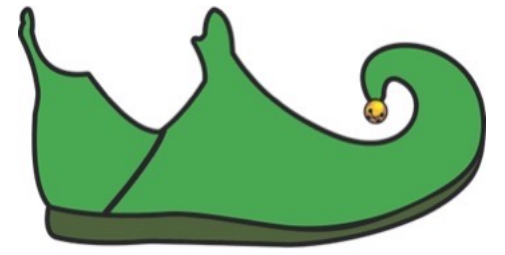
Katie Carr, VMFA Shop Manager, provided a pop up shop in the room across from the Tea Room which included Caspari items, tea paraphernalia and items from local artists.







Elves Needed!



The holidays are upon us and that means that the Shop needs gift wrappers. If you would like to be one of the elves, please contact Shop Chair, Joan Richards (jsr4003@gmail.com). The shifts are 1:00 to 4:00 most days. The wrapping desk will be in the atrium on Black Friday and weekends and in the Shop on weekdays. Written instructions will be provided. Here are your opportunities to be in Santa's workshop:

Black Friday, 11/24 - Need three (3) wrappers

Saturday, 11/25 - Need two (2) wrappers

Sunday, 11/26 - Need two (2) wrappers

Saturday, 12/2 - Need two (2) wrappers

Sunday, 12/3 - Need two (2) wrappers

Saturday, 12/9 - Need two (2) wrappers

Sunday, 12/10 - Need two (2) wrappers

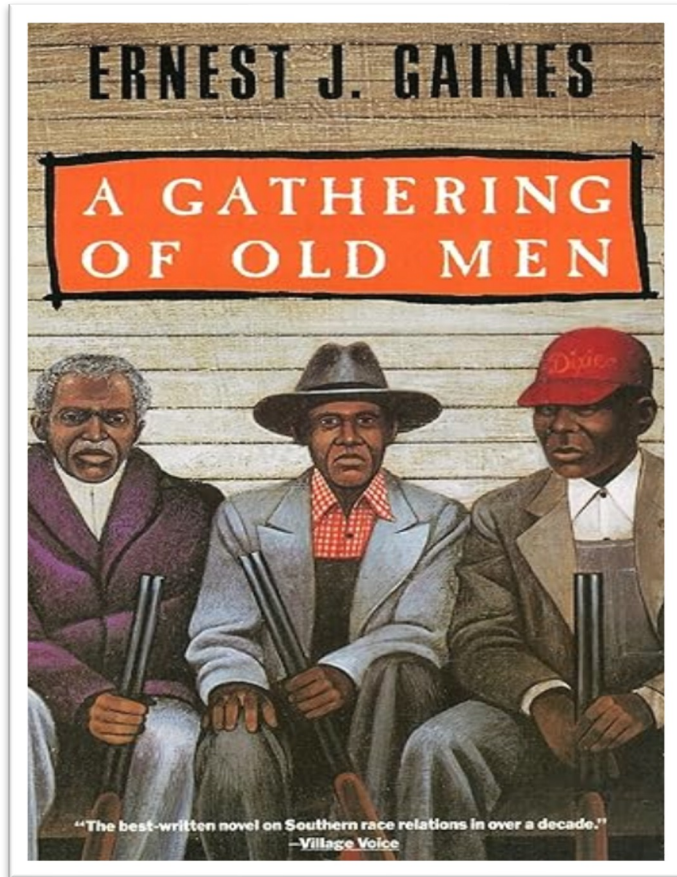
Saturday, 12/16 - Need two (2) wrappers

Sunday, 12/17 - Need two (2) wrappers

Week of December 18 - Need one (1) wrapper each weekday

December 23 and 24 - Need two (2) wrappers each day.

Mark your Calendar for Upcoming MEP Events!



We hope you have already purchased your copy of the novel, ***A Gathering of Old Men*** by Ernest J. Gaines (available in the VMFA Shop).

There will be **two book discussions and docent tours** the week after Thanksgiving. The first one will be held Monday, November 27 at noon and a second one is scheduled for Thursday, November 30 at 5:30 PM. Both discussion groups will meet in the Founder's Room across from Cheek Theater.

Click [here](#) to register for the **Monday, November 27** event at noon.

Click [here](#) to register for the **Thursday, November 30** event at 5:30 PM.



Update on The Council Holiday Luncheon - New Date and Location **Friday, December 15, 2023, 12-2 pm in the Tearoom, Pauley Parlor, VMFA**

We are excited that the new Tea Room in the Pauley Parlor at VMFA has been made available to The Council for our Holiday Luncheon. The date of the luncheon has been changed to Friday, December 15. You are welcome to invite a guest to this event. Guests may be added when you register. Cost is \$68.95 per person. The luncheon menu remains the same:



Ice Tea and Water

Sweet Potato-Lemongrass Soup (vegan)

BBQ Braised Short Ribs, Pimento Cheese Grits, Collard Greens, Sweet Corn Relish (gluten free)

OR

Vegan Option - Roasted Potato & Harvest Vegetable Hash - Arugula, Carrots, Wild Mushrooms, Spinach, Asparagus, Sweet Pepper Coulis

Assorted Petite Dessert Platter

Participants will receive a complimentary glass of red or white wine to celebrate the holiday season and welcome the coming New Year.

You may register for the Council Holiday Luncheon by clicking [here](#) or by going to the Events page on The Council website. Additionally, an email announcement will be sent on November 21 and you may use the link provided to register. If, however, you clicked NOT ATTENDING in response to the first announcement sent November 7, you will not receive the email announcement. If you have any problems or do not receive the announcement and would like to attend the Council Holiday Luncheon on Friday, December 15, please email: MaryMoss Walker mmwalker901@gmail.com.



**Happy Holidays,
MaryMoss Walker**

Happy Thanksgiving!

Look for Council Connections
Special Edition
on December 11, 2023



Please log in to Volgistics [here](#) and enter
your volunteer hours today.

If you have an article to include in the Special Edition of Council Connections,
please contact Linda Gill (lagill@verizon.net) or Diane Barbour
(dbarb9214@aol.com) by noon on Monday, December 4.
