

Stephen Friedman Gallery

ARTFIX daily
VMFA receives significant support for work by contemporary Black artists
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Image: Dr. Monroe Harris Jr. and Dr. Jill Bussey Harris

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 Harrises's 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 Harrises's 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 Harrises 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."