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VMFA Response

Often, when something is on a large scale, it can come off very intimidating. Although the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts is grand, it creates an open environment for any audience. Whether one is viewing pottery from ancient Greece or Barkley Hendrick's "Sisters" oil and acrylic painting from 1977, one is transported through time and forgets about the outside world and is absorbed in culture inside the spacious museum.

With high ceilings and an open display, the museum is welcoming and the audience is able to focus on each painting. The paintings are often presented on a wall by itself. As a result, the audience can focus on that single piece of work. In addition, the rooms have a smooth transition between spaces. This creates an unstressful format for the viewer. Although there is much to see, the viewer can be decisive in where they go due to the explicit organization of the museum. Therefore, when entering a new section, the viewer is able to interpret where the art is from and give more context to the culture it is reflecting. Therefore, when all the spacious characteristics of the museum are combined the audience is able to flow between time periods with essential context. This can be best seen when shifting from ancient Greek and Roman art filled with polytheistic themed statues, paintings, and narrative vases to seeing the influence of Christianity; containing art works such as "Paolo De Matteis" and "Virgin of Guadalupe." The exhibits placement by each other entails that they are associated. However, the slight separation implies that the art evolved due to the religious shift happening after Rome adopted Christianity.

The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts has a diverse collection. It varies in time period, location, and the type of art on display. For example, decorative eggs from Russia stood out because they were not the standard painting. By putting them on display the audience is able to recognize what a common practice was for displaying wealth in Russia. In addition, the labels and organization of art make it easier to compare the art. After one views the "Drop-Front Secretary" one is able to see how furniture and decoration differed between the bejeweled Russian decor and Indian cabinet displays. However, not all art is for display. In Kenneth Miller's 1924 painting "Leaving the Bank," he is showing the societal shift of women in the

work place. His painting shows a strong woman; as the only subject of the painting, it is evident that she is independent. Miller combines the beauty of art with the feminist movement in American history.

The diversity and structure of the museum serves to educate the audience. In addition, the vast amount of art on display gives the opportunity for any one person to connect with a piece. For example, someone who is African might enjoy seeing the “Hunter’s shirt” because it comes directly from their native culture. Contrasting, someone might appeal to “The Hour of Prayer at Moti Mushid” due it being a large painting that has exquisite detail. The audience may catch the insane detail that associates with body position and shadows in just one single foot. Although it is probably a one hundredth of the painting, the work dedicated to every square inch exhibits the passion of the artist. Therefore, the viewer may connect with the painting as a result of this passion.

Overall, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts is very sophisticated, however this sophistication embraces anyone who walks through the door. As a result, the audience is emerged, with little distraction, into a whole new experience.