

Virginia Union University
Dr. Claude G. Perkins, President & CEO
1500 N. Lombardy Street
Richmond, VA 23220

The galleries are housed in the L. Douglas
Wilder Library. For information and special
appointments, contact Barbara Grey, Director at (804)
257-5660.

Admission is free, donations are welcome



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The Museum Art Galleries



Akua'ba Fertility Statue

Virginia Union University

Welcome to the museum art galleries at Virginia Union University. This collection of artifacts were housed on campus for several years before finding a home in the L. Douglas Wilder Library. Our galleries include artifacts from Papua New Guinea, masks and sculptures from West and Central Africa, Coptic crosses from Ethiopia and an extensive collection of African American Folk art.

Thornton Dial Sr.

In celebration of our 150th anniversary we are proud to present the art of renowned Contemporary Artist Thornton Dial Sr. Mr. Dial is a self-taught artist from Alabama, born in 1928. He is still actively creating significant works of art. He prints, sculpts and draws from his own life experience.



Three Tigers

Mr. Dial says, “I make art out of things. My art is about how ideas come from what I see.”



Guatemalan Textiles

Virginia Union's primary donors, James and Barbara Sellman shared with the University (as early as 1985) a sizeable number of

Mayan Costumes from the highlands region of Guatemala, dating from the 1960s to the 1970s.

The Maya Indians of Guatemala have hand-woven their personal clothing and accessories for centuries. These years of practice and passing on weaving tradition has

resulted in a wide array of textiles unequalled in quality, color and design.

The most important of The Maya Woman's costumes is her blouse, which is called Huipil.



More on Thornton Dial Sr.



The Man Loves His Mule



Lady Swims with the Catfish



A Man in the Hills



A Woman Holds Up the Man

South Pacific

The Papua New Guinea displays begin with ceremonial regalia and musical instruments along with unique masks.

These wooden masks were worn by men who presume to possess the power of the spirit represented. Man cannot simply vary the painting of a mask at will. He must keep the designs worn by the dead man during his lifetime.

There are similarities between this art and the art from Africa. Much of this art is ceremonial regalia supporting the tradition that religious beliefs govern ceremonies.



Carved Wooden Masks

Helen King Hattorff

Helen was born in Huntington, Indiana in 1900. Her interest in painting began at the age of twelve. Mrs. Hattorff specialized in abstract oils and watercolors and her art, along with her husband's, was exhibited in every major art show in Virginia from 1941 until their deaths. Mrs. Hattorff decided to share her love of art with others by becoming an art and ceramics instructor for the Chicago public school system from 1923 to 1937. She also instructed at Thomas Jefferson high School in Virginia for fifteen years.

Education: She received her bachelor's degree from Northwestern University in 1921 and studied at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1924 and the Chicago Normal School in 1925. Mrs. Hattorff later went on to receive her master's degree from Columbia University Teachers College in 1950. She and her husband studied painting under Vytlačil and Morris Kantor in New York at the Art Students League.

Alvin Fredrick Hattorff

Alvin was born in Newport News, Virginia in 1899 and grew up in the local Richmond area. He served in the armed forces in World War I and went on to become a clerk for the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway Company, from which he retired in 1951. Alvin began painting as a hobby around 1930 after attending an art class in Denver while visiting relatives.

Education: He studied painting under Vytlačil and Morris Kantor in New York at the Art Students League where he met his wife Helen Hattorff, as well as the Henry Hensche School of Art in Massachusetts. He focused mainly on abstractions of landscapes and urban scenes done in watercolor and oils. ¹³

Virginia Union is the owner of a unique collection of paintings by Alvin and Helen Hattorff. These works are presently on display in the L. Douglas Wilder Library Reference Reading Room.

The Hattorffs hold a very special place in the history of Richmond art. People who knew them will tell you they lived only for their passion to paint.

Upon relocating to Richmond, Alvin continued his work with the railroad and Helen became an art teacher at Thomas Jefferson High School. Upon their deaths, Alvin in 1976 and Helen in 1977, their works were spread throughout Richmond and in other locations around the country.



West and Central Africa

The continent of Africa has many countries and tribes where various languages are spoken. We hope to share information that will increase your appreciation for this vast continent that has so much to offer the rest of the world.

There are countries represented by only one object and others by several items.



African Drum



Chi Wara Masks

A sizeable group of artifacts are from Zaire, Benin, Cameroon, The Congo, Gabon, Nigeria and the Ivory Coast.

A special emphasis has been given to Mali. The Virginia State Standards of Learning require the continent of Africa, the country of Mali, and the city of Timbuktu be taught in third grade. We offer material to supplement the mandate.



**Superstructure
Mask**



**Dogon Standing
Figure**



**Korubla
Mask**

Born in 1934 in Memphis Tennessee, Joe Light spent his youth on a farm before enlisting in the US Army in 1951. He was discharged from the Army after suffering a self-inflicted injury.

Light's conversion to Judaism, during his second prison term, changed the course of his life. Possessed by the fervor of a convert, he began making signs, driftwood sculptures, and paintings that expressed his political and spiritual views.

After a few years of experimenting, Light came up with a very recognizable artistic style. He used bold black lines to contain larger areas of primary colors. His simple drawings and paintings are quite riveting and have become favorites with many folk art collectors.



Dawn, 1988

Joe Light

Virginia Union University's vast collection of folk art contains a small selection of works from artist Joe Light. His works depict nature scenes and his landscapes coincide with his views as a spiritualist and environmentalist.

He constantly appropriates imagery and ideas from his surroundings. Light often paints over framed reproductions from the flea markets, retaining the imagery of the originals while transforming them into personal statement.



Blue River Mountain, 1987



Eight Point Star, 1992



"Connection", 1992

Coptic Crosses from Ethiopia

The history of Christianity in Ethiopia dates back to the Fourth Century A.D. At that time, King Eja-na, Ruler of Aksum, made it the court religion. Crosses were commonly given to important monasteries by Ethiopian monarchs and the clergy would remember the donors in prayers. Processional crosses play an active role in Christian religious life in Ethiopia, where churches have one or more. These crosses imbue sacred occasions with reverence and majesty.



Processional Cross

Mose Tolliver

Virginia Union University owns an extensive collection of the unique folk art works of Mose Tolliver. This collection is currently housed in the Belgium Building Art storage area.

Tolliver's influence in the Montgomery, Alabama art community began in the 1960s. His works are in major museum collections, including the American Folk Art Museum in New York City, The Montgomery Museum of Art and the Birmingham Museum of Art.

Many of Tolliver's themes were derived from his own experiences and he was considered one of America's most highly regarded self-taught artist's.

"Mose T", as he signed his self portraits and paintings of birds, flowers, watermelons and people, began painting in the 1960's following a workplace accident that left him unable to walk unassisted. Tolliver painted with leftover house paint on scraps of board, causing his rich palette to vary depending on what was available.

Tolliver was beloved by many, especially his friends in Montgomery and was the last surviving artist from the landmark exhibition "Black Folk Art in America: 1970-1980," organized at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington DC in 1982. His death in 2006, at the age of 82 marked a monumental impact on the folk art community.

