

# MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS ST. PETE

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## **Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg Spotlights Iconic Artists and their Rarely-Seen Designs for the Theater**

*Art of the Stage: Picasso to Hockney pulls back the curtain on extraordinary collaborations showing how visual artists designed for the stage — and brings it all to life with live performances*

**ST. PETERSBURG, FL (January 14, 2020)** — Picture standing in a gallery filled with more than 100 original stage, scene, and costume designs, as well as original costumes from dozens of world-famous theater productions. Now imagine viewing those works while hearing the music from those productions played live, witnessing the grace of a ballerina in movement, or experiencing the emotions from a dramatic monologue — all within the same museum.

The Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg is presenting this extraordinary intersection of visual art with the performing arts in *Art of the Stage: Picasso to Hockney*, on view January 25-May 10, 2020. The new exhibition includes the unique works of noted artists from the nineteenth century to present day, including Henri Matisse, Natalia Goncharova, Pablo Picasso, David Hockney, Robert Indiana, Lesley Dill, and a host of others. These artists contributed stunning designs to world-renowned plays, operas, and ballets, such as *Pulcinella*, *La Création du Monde (The Creation of the World)*, *King Arthur*, and *The Mother of Us All*. The exhibition showcases the historical breadth of theatrical collaboration and the ways in which artists, often having achieved great success in one area, took their artistic talents in a new direction. Many of these artists were drawn to depicting energy and movement in their art. Working in the world of stage became a natural fit to explore and experiment with that artistic desire.

*Art of the Stage: Picasso to Hockney* is organized by the McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, Texas, culled from its prestigious Tobin Collection of Theatre Arts. The Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg is the first museum in the country to host the exhibition after it debuted at the McNay in late 2019.

The late collector and philanthropist Robert Tobin firmly believed that “designs come to life only when they are used.” In keeping with that idea, the MFA, St. Petersburg is presenting nearly 30 live performances of classical music, opera, dance, and theater (as well as film screenings and lectures) on a performance stage inside the exhibition galleries and throughout the museum — truly bringing the art of the stage to life. All the performances are directly tied to theater productions presented in *Art of the Stage*.

The MFA worked with celebrated designer Rush Jenkins of WRJ Design (Jackson Hole, Wyoming) to transform the exhibition space. (Jenkins was also the exhibition designer for the MFA’s 2018-2019 popular *Jewels of the Imagination: Radiant Masterworks by Jean Schlumberger from the Mellon Collection*).

For MFA Executive Director Kristen A. Shepherd, the opportunity to create collaborations for live performances was part of the appeal for presenting *Art of the Stage*. “I am immensely proud that the MFA is able to initiate this unprecedented level of collaboration between the museum and so many performing arts organizations, highlighting how we communicate and connect across disciplines,” she said. “We are very excited to activate the museum and our entire community with visual art and performance, echoing the collaborations between the artists and performers we are celebrating. We look forward to presenting this important collection, and seeing our visitors engaged and immersed in a way they have never experienced before.”

The exhibition spotlights an international roster of iconic artists and major art movements, including Cubism, Constructivism, and Neo-Romanticism. It is divided into six themes, with the anchor of the exhibition being a section that celebrates the legendary Ballets Russes. The famed dance company was founded in Paris in 1909 by Serge Diaghilev, and united the most daring visual artists (Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso), choreographers (Vaslav Nijinsky), dancers (Anna Pavlova), and composers (Erik Satie, Igor Stravinsky) of the time to create innovative, avant-garde performances. Of particular note, there are 16 designs, paintings, drawings and costumes by esteemed Ballets Russes artist Natalia Goncharova — the most of any artist in the show.

There are also spectacular costumes from the theater, such as dresses by Lesley Dill, and a number of costumes and designs by Robert Indiana. He designed the sets and costumes for Gertrude Stein and Virgil Thomson’s *The Mother of Us All* — an opera based on the life of Susan B. Anthony and her fight on behalf of women’s suffrage.

“This exhibition embraces and celebrates the collaboration and experimentation that is integral to stage design for ballet and opera, and it allows the audience to better understand the practices of artists we may typically associate with two-dimensional work,” said Curator of Contemporary Art Katherine Pill.

## PERFORMING ARTS COLLABORATIONS

The MFA is collaborating with numerous performing arts organizations in the region and across the country, including two orchestras:

- The first collaborations take place even before the exhibition opens with The Florida Orchestra (TFO). During its Masterworks concert series January 17-19, 2020, TFO will perform pieces from two ballets that are featured in the MFA's exhibition. At performances at the Museum on [January 26](#) and [February 5](#), TFO will perform selections from additional productions presented in the MFA exhibition, such as Darius Milhaud's *La Création du Monde* (*The Creation of the World*).
- Sphinx Virtuosi, comprised of 18 of the nation's top Black and Latinx classical soloists, is the nation's most dynamic professional chamber orchestra, dedicated to increasing racial and ethnic diversity in classical music. They will perform their program, *For Justice and Peace*, at the museum on [February 21](#). In addition to a three-day residency at the museum, the MFA has also arranged for Sphinx Virtuosi to perform private events throughout the community at Dr. Carter G. Woodson African-American Museum, Academy Prep Center of St. Petersburg, Creative Clay, and the Sunshine Senior Center.

Other collaborations forged by the MFA include:

- The Sarasota Ballet Conservatory: [January 25](#), [February 29](#) and [April 25](#)
- St. Pete Opera Company: [February 29](#), [March 7](#), and [March 12](#)
- Pinellas County Center for the Arts: [April 15](#)
- Open/Space Collective residency with international dancer Helen Hansen French: Final performance on [May 2](#)
- Playwright and performance artist Andrea Assaf residency: Final performance on [April 9](#)
- Pianist and New York Philharmonic Teaching Artist Robert Fleitz and violinist Giancarlo Latta of the NY-based classical duo, escapeVelocity: [March 20](#)

Multiple films will also be incorporated in the exhibition's public programming, including *Aelita, Queen of Mars* with a new score composed and performed live by La Lucha. Other events include a special discussion with [Philomena Marano](#), studio assistant to the late artist Robert Indiana on February 1, March 7, April 11 and May 9.

**Please see for the complete schedule of *Art of the Stage* programming and live performances:** <https://mfastpete.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Art-of-the-Stage-Programs-and-Performances-Museum-of-Fine-Art-St.-Petersburg-2.pdf>

## **ABOUT THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, ST. PETERSBURG, FLORIDA**

The MFA at 255 Beach Drive NE has a world-class collection, with works by Monet, Morisot, Rodin, O'Keeffe, Willem de Kooning, and many other great artists. Also displayed are ancient Greek and Roman, Egyptian, Asian, African, pre-Columbian, and Native American art. Selections from the photography collection, one of the largest and finest in the Southeast, are on view in a gallery dedicated solely to the medium. Kristen A. Shepherd is the Executive Director. Hours are 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday, until 8 p.m. on Thursday, and noon-5 p.m. Sunday. Regular admission is \$20 for adults; \$15 for those 65 and older, Florida educators, college students, and active duty military; and \$10 for students 7 and older. Children under 7 and Museum members are admitted free. Groups of 10 or more adults pay only \$14 per person and children \$4 each with prior reservations. Also, admission is only \$10 after 5 p.m. on Thursday. For more information, please call 727-896-2667 or visit [mfastpete.org](http://mfastpete.org).

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