

Press Release
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Oh, Shenandoah: Landscapes of Diversity
Exhibit Opening at the Virginia Museum of History & Culture

Richmond, VA — The Virginia Museum of History & Culture (VMHC) will display a selection of masterful landscape paintings by Washington, D.C., based artist Andrei Kushnir. *Oh, Shenandoah: Landscapes of Diversity* will open on Saturday, December 8, with a gallery tour and book signing by the artist at 1:00 p.m. These breathtaking works capture the extraordinary beauty and vitality of the Shenandoah Valley region, qualities that enticed pioneers to settle there and inspired artists from all over the world to travel there. The buildings and patterns of land distribution that are the substance of Kushnir's paintings provide tangible evidence of the Valley's settlement and diversity, from communities and historic sites to farmlands and waterways. Fifty-two of Kushnir's 263 painted landscapes of the Valley will be featured in this exhibition, with the entire body of his Valley landscapes pictured and described in the exhibition's companion catalog available for sale in the VMHC museum shop, ShopVirginiaHistory.org.

Kushnir grew up in Scott, Mississippi and Chicago, Illinois. After experimenting with various media, he started painting in oils in 1980, and quickly discovered the joys of painting landscapes outdoors, *en plein air*. Essentially self-taught, he developed a naturalistic, realist style, and has painted outdoors in every type of weather and focused on the landscape. He has painted across the nation and abroad, but with great consideration to the Shenandoah Valley. His attention to detail and sense of place exude his love for the region.

Kushnir's paintings of the Valley are more than spectacularly beautiful. They reveal the Valley as a landscape of American settlement. Across a natural setting that extends some 200 miles from the Potomac River to the James River, the story of our nation's mixing of cultures is visibly evident through farmsteads, bridges, fences and roads. Styles of architecture reflect the heritage of different cultures, and the rolling hills and meadows call to mind those who might have camped there but left no trace. Native Americans, such as the Iroquois, were first active in the Valley. The Iroquois were the Six Nations tribe, which included Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas, Senecas and later Tuscaroras. During the 17th century, permanent colonial settlements appeared from Quebec to Charleston, West Virginia. Control issues over travel ways developed. Iroquois warriors traveling through the region began to collide with colonists moving west. Through a series of treaties, the Six Nations agreed to leave. They accepted payment for their claims to the lands west of the Blue Ridge, thus clearing the way for further Virginia settlement. And for the next three centuries, pioneers of English, German, Scots-Irish, French, and African descent moved into the Valley in waves of settlement. They carried remarkably varied religious beliefs: Anglicans, Quakers, Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, French Huguenots, Jews, Lutherans, Anabaptists (including Mennonites and German Baptist Brethren), and members of the German Reformed Church all enjoyed the religious freedom of the region and the religious solitude that it offered. The new population of the Valley was characterized by its diversity of faith.

Throughout the nineteenth century, settlers prospered in this agriculturally productive region and continued to carve homesteads and communities—many of which survived the Civil War and remain highly visible to this day. *Oh, Shenandoah* will be on display at VMHC through September 1, 2019. The gallery tour with the artist on December 8 is included with museum admission.

The Virginia Museum of History & Culture is owned and operated by the Virginia Historical Society — a private, non-profit organization established in 1831. The historical society is the oldest cultural organization in Virginia, and one of the oldest and most distinguished history organizations in the nation. For use in its state history museum and its renowned research library, the historical society cares for a collection of nearly nine million items representing the ever-evolving story of Virginia. The Virginia Museum of History & Culture is located at 428 North Boulevard in Richmond's Museum District. Hours are Monday – Sunday 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. for the galleries and museum shop, Monday – Saturday 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. for the research library. For more information call (804) 358-4901, visit VirginiaHistory.org, or connect with the Virginia Museum of History & Culture on Facebook and Twitter.

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