

Field Trip to the Lora Robbins Gallery - Feb. 27, 2010

By Robert Miller



On February 27, five members of the Southern Maryland Rock & Mineral Club – Dave Lines, Lorna Larson, Fotini Vourlekis, and Robert and Stephanie Miller – visited the Lora Robbins Gallery at the University of Richmond in Virginia. The gallery's web site describes it thusly:

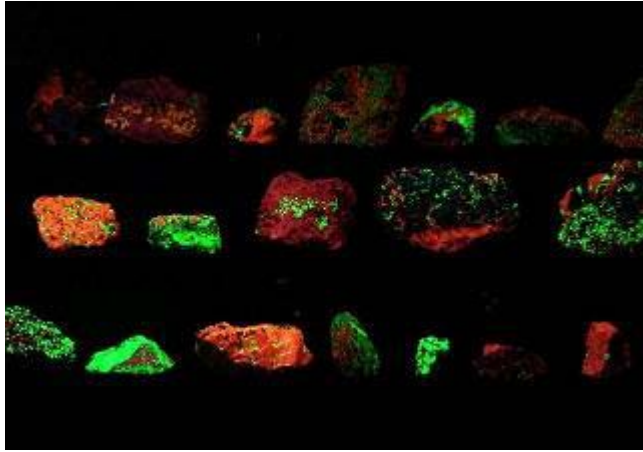
“As the University's natural sciences and decorative arts museum, the Lora Robbins Gallery of Design from Nature, with its collections of natural objects, cultural art and artifacts, and decorative and fine arts, holds over 100,000 pieces ranging from Jurassic dinosaur fossils to contemporary glass art by

Dale Chihuly. Pre-Columbian vessels, ancient coins, Hindu art, and Oceanic art contrast with rare gems and minerals, prehistoric shells, coral, and fluorescent rocks. The collection of Asian art and artifacts includes more than 300 Chinese ceramics, spanning twenty centuries.

The museum began with the donations of longtime benefactor, Mrs. Lora Robbins, in 1977. The original museum, which housed minerals, decorative arts, and shell specimens, was expanded and relocated in 1989 to its present location in a separate wing of the Boatwright Memorial Library.”

The gallery is in a gothic-looking building yet looks very bright and modern on the inside. There are several long display cases that house some very fine examples of minerals that had been found or mined in Virginia, such as specimens from the Amelia mines and from the Rutherford mines. There were also specimens from around the world and works of art made from minerals. One of the cutest artifacts (or oddest, depending on your tastes) was a small statue of Mickey Mouse carved out of a single piece of bright yellow sulfur!

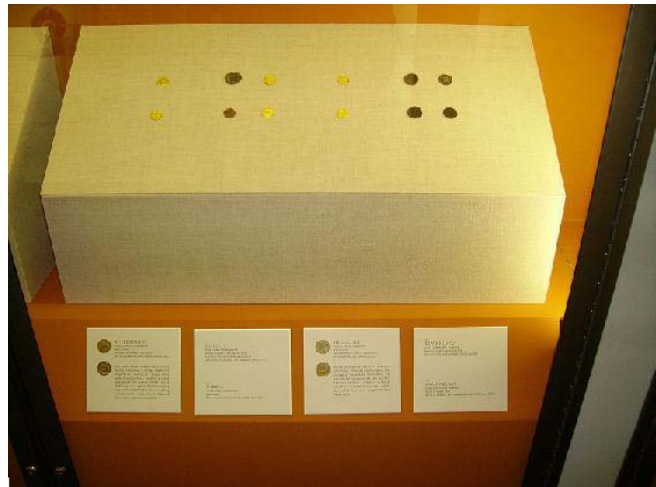




I especially enjoyed the fluorescent mineral room. At the touch of a switch it changed from white light to bands of UV light, and cycled from longwave to midwave to shortwave. There are display cases on all walls of the room, and it was truly impressive to watch all of the minerals react to the UV light. One thing that made it even more impressive was that several of the minerals were from local mines and quarries, as well as having specimens from Franklin, New Jersey, which is one of the finest fluorescent mineral localities in the world.

The mineral collection overall is excellent, and it was made even more interesting by the stories Dave Lines told about collecting from the very locations represented in the display cases. His wealth of knowledge on local minerals and their localities made the trip educational as well as enjoyable.

In addition to the fine mineral specimens, the gallery also houses a collection of fossils, including a giant prehistoric fish head fossil, as seen in the group photo, that looks like he had a rather nasty disposition! Along with the fossils are several fine examples of corals, starfish, and shells of marine animals. And even better, there was a fantastic collection of ancient gold, silver, and copper coins, with posters describing how they were minted by hand, how they were weighed and assessed, and what the markings on them meant.



It was a wonderful and educational field trip, and one that was well worth the driving time. And best of all, the gallery is free to the public, being generously maintained by Lora Robins as a gift to the university.

You can learn more about the gallery at: <http://museums.richmond.edu/lrg/>