

Institute for Contemporary Art at VCU, Richmond's First Institution Dedicated to the Art of Today, Opens to the Public on April 21

Inaugural Exhibition *Declaration* Activates the New, Steven Holl-Designed Building

Richmond, VA – April 12, 2018 – On April 21, 2018, the Institute for Contemporary Art (ICA) at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), the new, non-collecting contemporary art institution designed by Steven Holl Architects, will open to the public, free of charge. The ICA will debut with its inaugural exhibition, *Declaration*, an exploration of contemporary art's power to respond to pressing social issues through the voices of 34 emerging and established artists from Richmond and around the globe. The ICA is Richmond, VA's first art institution dedicated exclusively to exhibiting contemporary art and will be a significant cultural resource for Richmond and VCU, in direct dialogue with the VCU School of the Arts, the #1-ranked public school of art and design in the U.S.

Located at the historic intersection of Richmond's Belvidere and Broad streets, the ICA's striking new building, the Markel Center, anchors one of the city's busiest gateways. With dual entrances opening to the city's arts district on one side and VCU's Monroe Park campus on the other, the ICA provides a venue for connection between the two vibrant communities. Activating the 41,000 square feet of flexible space, including an inviting 33-foot-high central forum, the ICA will feature a dynamic slate of changing exhibitions, performances, films, and interdisciplinary programs. Envisioned as a forum for collaboration and conversation, the ICA will serve as an incubator for innovation, piloting curatorial and educational programs. Its fluid spaces are designed to support the diverse practices characteristic of the art of today, mirroring VCU's collaborative approach and supporting the varied needs of contemporary art and audiences.

On view through September 9, 2018, *Declaration* will fill the building's galleries and reach into the city with a dynamic mix of multimedia projects. More than a third of the works in *Declaration* will premiere at the ICA, including site-specific installations by Paul Rucker, Stephen Vitiello, and Peter Burr with Porpentine Charity Heartscape; new works in a range of media by Autumn Knight, Deb Sokolow, Lily Lamberta and All the Saints Theater Company, Sonya Clark, Andrea Donnelly, Edie Fake, Cannupa Hanska Luger, and Geof Oppenheimer; and performances and participatory works at the ICA in collaboration with the Richmond community by Winter Count Collective, Tania Bruguera, and Amos Paul Kennedy Jr., among others.

As an extension of the programming in *Declaration*, the ICA and the Richmond Symphony are co-commissioning three new performances by artists Hope Ginsburg, Marinella Senatore, and Paul Rucker to be premiered at the Festival of the River, a three-day event featuring contemporary art and musical performances on Brown's Island in Richmond, June 8–10, 2018.

In October 2017, the ICA successfully completed its \$37-million capital campaign toward the cost of the \$41-million project, the balance of which was covered by private university funds. At the same time,

the ICA launched its ongoing endowment campaign with an initial \$12-million goal, to ensure the sustained growth of the institution.

“We are delighted to open the ICA and welcome the Richmond, VCU, and art world communities into the building,” said Joseph H. Seipel, interim director of the ICA. “Beginning with our inaugural exhibition *Declaration*, our programming will demonstrate the significant role the ICA will play in our vibrant community. Given our location on a major research university campus and our commitment to free admission, the ICA is well suited to serve as a forum for open dialogue, collaboration, and the exchange of perspectives.”

About *Declaration*

The ICA’s inaugural exhibition highlights the transformative power of art and artists. Featuring a dynamic, cross-generational group of established and emerging artists, *Declaration* includes many exciting new commissions. Themes such as racial justice, gender, communication across barriers, human impact on the built and natural environment, and responses to social dysphoria weave throughout the exhibition, emerging through a variety of artistic media and methods of impact. Art will fill the fluid volumes of the building, activating sites beyond the ICA’s four galleries, from the entrance forum to the café to the auditorium. *Declaration* also will feature off-site collaborations and performances, including those presented at the Festival of the River on Brown’s Island in Richmond, VA, June 8–10, 2018. The ICA’s open circulation will allow visitors to experience the exhibition in a non-prescribed sequence from multiple sightlines, reinforcing the importance of choice and agency and the wide range of responses that art can foster.

“Why a declaration? Because declarations are strong statements that mark beginnings, clarify intentions, and propose a social contract,” said Stephanie Smith, ICA’s chief curator. “This is true whether we think about something as personal as a declaration of love between two people, or as grandly public as the Declaration of Independence. Simultaneously grounded in our rich local context and engaged with global concerns, *Declaration* affirms the ICA’s commitment to researching, supporting, and sharing projects that strengthen the common good.”

In conjunction, the ICA will present related educational programs throughout the duration of the exhibition, including specialized audio tours featuring both the building’s architecture and its inaugural exhibition, *Declaration*, with insights from architects Steven Holl and Chris McVoy, select *Declaration* artists, members of the ICA and VCU team, and voices from the community. Visitors also will have the opportunity to request custom in-person tours of *Declaration* focusing on any theme they wish, or attend an “Artist’s Choice” monthly series—kicked off in May by VCU School of the Arts Professor Stephen Vitiello—an artist-curated evening program that will provide a range of perspectives.

Declaration will feature new commissions and premieres, including:

- **Peter Burr with Porpentine Charity Heartscape:** The ICA will premiere *Dirtscraper*, an immersive, interactive media installation. The work simulates an underground structure whose inhabitants move through spaces shaped by economies and class hierarchies—from mining zones to areas blazing with advertisements to luxury terraces adorned with sculpture. Visitors will be able to explore the many levels of the *Dirtscraper* and observe the lives of thousands of inhabitants of this dystopian world, including Aria End, a janitor and caretaker working within the labyrinth.
- **Hope Ginsburg:** Ginsburg, a VCU professor and project-based artist, will present a video, *Land Dive Team: Bay of Fundy*, which is set in the Bay of Fundy on Canada's Atlantic coast, a site known for exceptionally strong tides. In the video, a small group of divers, including the artist, sit in full scuba gear in meditative postures near the shore until they are covered by the incoming tide, a commentary on the human response to rapid climate change. Ginsburg also will premiere a new commissioned performance for *Declaration* at the Festival of the River on Brown's Island in June 2018. Expanding her *Land Dive Team* series, the piece draws inspiration from the James River's rich ecosystem and will combine audio broadcast from divers with music performed by classically trained musicians.
- **Paul Rucker:** Rucker, who is currently in residence at the ICA as part of VCU's iCubed (Inclusion, Inquiry, Innovation) transdisciplinary core, addresses entrenched, systemic racism with his piece, *Storm in The Time of Shelter*. Using diverse fabrics and patterns, he reinterprets Ku Klux Klan robes to illustrate the repetitive nature of history and further contextualizes his installation through a selection of historical artifacts and interpretive materials. He also will premiere a new, site-specific, symphonic work that will be performed at the Festival of the River on Brown's Island in June 2018. The performance, presented in collaboration with members of the Richmond Symphony, and Vaughn Whitney Garland and the People's Record of Richmond, will complement his installation at the ICA and extrapolate on his ongoing investigations into structural and systemic racism in the United States.
- **Amos Paul Kennedy Jr.:** Kennedy has created a new suite of hand-pulled letterpress prints for the ICA that combine rich layers of color and socially conscious text generated in collaboration with owners of barber shops and salons around Richmond. The prints will be grouped into a large wall installation in the ICA and will also be shown at the participating shops and salons to reach an even wider public.
- **Autumn Knight:** In a new installation and performance that extends Knight's ongoing project, *The La-a Consortium*, Knight envisions an alternate reality in which the innovative contributions of African diasporic people are widely recognized and celebrated as institutional namesakes. Her consortium serves as an umbrella organization for these fictional institutions. For *Declaration*, Knight has collaborated with VCU Graphic Design Professor Nontsikelelo K. Mutiti to transform an area adjacent to ICA administrative offices into a deconstructed "waiting room" for La-a Consortium headquarters. At the close of the exhibition, Knight and collaborators will continue to probe these issues in a critically playful performance on the ICA stage.

- **Marinella Senatore:** Senatore will collaborate with acclaimed director Tawnya Pettiford-Wates and Richmond citizens as they collectively write and produce *Richmond: Symphony of a City*, a new radio drama. This piece will premiere as a live performance during the Festival of the River on Brown's Island, and broadcast later on Richmond independent radio station WRIR. It also will become part of *Estman Radio: Richmond*—a participatory installation that combines social space and a web radio platform within the ICA, in which visitors may share their own declarations, stories, and perspectives.
- **Stephen Vitiello:** Vitiello, a VCU professor, created the 18-channel sound installation, *whether there was a bell or whether I knocked*, to explore the power of multiple voices and the relationship between text and spoken word. Commissioned by the ICA and produced with support from the National Endowment for the Arts, the work features recordings by creative professionals as well as local teens reciting varied translations of Argentine writer and poet Jorge Luis Borges' "The Garden of Forking Paths" (1941).

Additional artists featured in *Declaration* include Nidaa Badwan, Martín Bonadeo, Tania Bruguera, Cassils, Chim↑Pom, Sonya Clark, Andrea Donnelly, Edie Fake, GVAR, Kate Just, Titus Kaphar, Lily Lamberta and All The Saints Theater Company, Lee Mingwei, Cannupa Hanska Luger, Noor Nuyten, Geof Oppenheimer, Amalia Pica, Cheryl Pope, Curtis Talwst Santiago, Jon-Phillip Sheridan, Deb Sokolow, Tavares Strachan, Felix Gonzales-Torres, Betty Tompkins, Levester Williams, and Winter Count Collective.

Declaration is co-curated by Stephanie Smith, Lisa Freiman, and Amber Esseiva, with Johanna Plummer and Lauren Ross.

About the ICA's Design

The open design of the ICA features dynamic exhibition and programming spaces that can support widely varied forms of contemporary art. The glass walls and windows create continuity between the interior and exterior spaces of the building. On the first floor, a 4,000-square-foot gallery, café, bar, and concept shop radiate from the ICA's central forum and frame an outdoor garden. Referred to by the architect as the "Thinking Field," the garden will be used for social gatherings and public programs. The first floor also features a state-of-the-art, 240-seat auditorium for film screenings, performances, lectures, and other programs. The second floor includes two forking galleries and an adaptable "learning lab" for interactive engagement. It also includes a publicly accessible terrace, featuring one of four green roofs. The third floor features a gallery with soaring, 33-foot-high walls and houses one of the administrative suites and the boardroom. Additional staff offices are located in the building's lower level, which also includes a lobby for visitors, art storage and preparation facilities, a fabrication workshop, a green room, the catering kitchen, and general storage.

“We designed the ICA to be a flexible, forward-looking instrument that will both illuminate and serve as a catalyst for the transformative possibilities of contemporary art,” said architect Steven Holl. “Like many contemporary artists working today, the ICA’s design does not draw distinctions between the visual and performing arts. The fluidity of the design allows for experimentation and will encourage new ways to display and present art that will capitalize on the ingenuity and creativity apparent throughout the VCU campus.”

In keeping with VCU’s master sustainability plan, the ICA’s design incorporates state-of-the-art technologies and environmentally conscious design elements and makes use of numerous natural resources. The pre-weathered, satin-finish zinc exterior of the Markel Center, which houses the ICA, includes interspersed clear- and translucent-glass walls and skylights that infuse the building with natural light and lessen reliance on nonrenewable energy. Geothermal wells provide heating and cooling energy for the building, and four green roofs absorb storm water, offset carbon emissions, and maximize insulation. Native plantings include wood oats, little bluestem, Pennsylvania sedge, and goldenrod. Building materials include Virginia bluestone and custom glass cavity walls, designed to exhaust heat in the summer and harness it in the winter. The project is designed to meet LEED Gold Certification standards.

About the ICA’s Capital Campaign and Endowment

The ICA completed its \$37-million capital campaign in October 2017 to support the construction of the Markel Center, home of the ICA. The completion of the capital campaign was made possible through more than 1,000 gifts from individual donors, corporations, and private foundations.

The ICA is the largest privately funded arts project in VCU’s history and is supported by generous leadership gifts of \$5 million each from ICA Campaign Co-Chairs Steve and Kathie Markel, and Pam and Bill Royall. Additional major donors include: Cabell Foundation, private VCU funds, John David and Meg Newell Gottwald, Lewis and Butler Foundation, George W. and Helen H. B. Logan, True and Charlie Luck, Markel Corporation, Abby W. Moore, NewMarket Corporation, The Mary Morton Parsons Foundation, Patsy K. and Hunter R. Pettus, Jr., and Carolyn and John Snow.

Major gifts from the Saunders Family Foundation, Dominion Energy, McGuireWoods, and a number of new individual donors over the summer of 2017 helped close the capital campaign. Support for the ICA’s opening events is provided by Altria Group.

The ICA also is raising funds for an endowment campaign to sustain the legacy of the institution for generations to come, with an initial \$12-million goal.

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About the Institute for Contemporary Art

The Institute for Contemporary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University is a non-collecting institution that showcases a fresh slate of changing exhibitions and programs. The ICA is a place to explore new ideas, providing an open forum for dialogue and collaboration across the region and the world. Mirroring the increasing emphasis on cross-disciplinary studies across VCU, the ICA has created a new environment for artists and scholars from around the world to test ideas. As a university-wide resource, the ICA links campus, community, and contemporary artists by supporting local creative communities, engaging an international network of contemporary artists and organizations, and encouraging collaborations with VCU departments, faculty, students, and the Richmond community. The ICA is a responsive institution that offers a broad range of artistic perspectives from across the world, with the goal of questioning assumptions and encouraging critical discourse. For more information on the ICA, please visit ica.vcu.edu.

About Steven Holl Architects

Steven Holl Architects has realized architectural works nationally and overseas, with extensive experience in the arts (including museum, gallery, and exhibition design), campus and educational facilities, residential work, and master planning. Steven Holl Architects is a 40-person architecture and urban design office founded in 1977, and working globally as one office from two locations, New York City and Beijing. Steven Holl leads the office with partners Chris McVoy and Noah Yaffe. Most recently completed are the Maggie's Centre Barts in London, completed December 2017; the Lewis Arts Complex at Princeton University which was completed in October 2017, the Visual Arts Building at the University of Iowa, which opened in October 2016. Steven Holl Architects currently has five projects under construction: the John F. Kennedy Center Expansion in Washington, D.C.; the Glassell School of Art and the Kinder Building at the Museum of Fine Arts Houston; the ChinPaoSan Necropolis in Taiwan; the Hunters Point Community Library in Queens, New York.

About VCU and VCU School of the Arts

VCU is a major, urban public research university with national and international rankings in sponsored research. Located in downtown Richmond, VCU enrolls more than 31,000 students in 222 degree and certificate programs in the arts, sciences, and humanities. One of the nation's leading schools of arts and design, VCU School of the Arts offers 15 undergraduate and 10 graduate degree programs in fine arts, design, performing arts, historical research, and pedagogical practice. Distinguished faculty members are internationally recognized in their respective fields, contribute significantly to the stature of VCU, and are committed to mentoring the next generation of artists, entrepreneurs, scientists, scholars and engaged citizens of diverse communities around the world. Its campus in Qatar provides students and faculty with a direct tie to the Middle East, and underscores the school and university's commitment to global education and experience.

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