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Institute for Contemporary Art at VCU will open in April with exhibition that celebrates diverse perspectives

Designed by Steven Holl Architects, the ICA is a gateway between university and city, anchoring Richmond's vibrant arts district

Richmond, Va. (Feb. 5, 2018) – On April 21, Virginia Commonwealth University will unveil the Institute for Contemporary Art, a new, noncollecting contemporary art institution designed by Steven Holl Architects. The ICA will open with the inaugural exhibition, “Declaration,” an exploration of contemporary art’s power to respond to pressing social issues through the voices of 33 emerging and established artists from Richmond and around the globe. More than a third of the works presented will premiere at the ICA, including site-specific installations by Paul Rucker, Stephen Vitiello and Peter Burr with Porpentine Charity Heartscape; new works in all media by Autumn Knight, Deb Sokolow, Lily Lamberta and All the Saints Theater Co., Sonya Clark, Andrea Donnelly, Edie Fake, Cannupa Hanska Luger and Geof Oppenheimer; and performances and participatory works at the ICA extending into the city by Rucker, Hope Ginsburg, Marinella Senatore, Winter Count, Tania Bruguera and Amos Paul Kennedy Jr., among others.

The exhibition will remain on view through Sept. 9.

In conjunction, the ICA will present related programs throughout the duration of the exhibit, including:

- A pair of 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, Richmond Mayor Levar Stoney, VCU President Michael Rao, members of the ICA team and voices from the community
- Opportunities for visitors to request personalized in-person tours of “Declaration,” focusing on any theme they wish
- The “Artists Choice” monthly series — kicked off by VCU School of the Arts professor Stephen Vitiello — an evening program curated by artists, bringing a range of perspectives to the new institution

“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.”

“We are delighted to share more details about our opening exhibition and programs to demonstrate the role that the ICA can play in Richmond and beyond,” said Joseph H. Seipel, interim director of the ICA. “Given our location on a major research university campus, the ICA can serve as a forum for open dialogue, collaboration and sharing perspectives. I look forward to welcoming our Richmond, VCU and art world communities to the ICA in April.”

Located at the intersection of Richmond’s historic Belvidere and Broad streets, the ICA anchors one of the city’s busiest junctures. The new building provides a striking new gateway for Richmond, with dual entrances opening to the city’s arts district on one side and VCU’s Monroe Park campus on the other. Free of charge, the ICA will be a significant new cultural resource for Richmond and VCU, in direct dialogue with VCU School of the Arts, the No. 1-ranked public school of art and design in the United States. The ICA will offer a vital new dimension to a premier urban research university and contribute to a national and international cultural dialogue. With nearly 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. Its fluid spaces are designed to support the diverse practices characteristic of the art of today, mirroring VCU’s interdisciplinary approach and supporting the varied needs of contemporary art and audiences.

About Declaration

The ICA’s inaugural exhibition showcases the transformative power of art and artists. Featuring a dynamic, cross-generational group of established and emerging artists, “Declaration” includes many exciting new commissions — including several created in collaboration with the VCU and Richmond communities. 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, as well as off-site collaborations and performances. The ICA’s open circulation will allow visitors to experience the exhibition in a nonprescribed sequence from multiple sightlines, reinforcing the importance of choice and agency and the wide range of responses that art can foster.

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.
- **Paul Rucker:** Rucker, who is currently in residence at the ICA as part of VCU’s new iCubed (Inclusion, Inquiry, Innovation) transdisciplinary core, is creating an expanded and reinterpreted presentation of Ku Klux Klan robes, “Storm in The Time of Shelter.” Using diverse fabrics and patterns, he reinterprets the robes to illustrate the repetitive nature of history. Rucker will contextualize his installation through a selection of historical artifacts and interpretive materials.

He also will premiere a new music/sound composition created in collaboration with artist Vaughn Whitney Garland and the People's Record of Richmond, a new ensemble of student and professional musicians.

- **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 also will be shown at the participating shops and salons to reach an even wider public.
- **Autumn Knight:** In a new installation and performance that extend 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. During "Declaration," Knight will work with VCU graphic design professor Nontsikelelo K. Mutiti to transform an area adjacent to ICA administrative offices into a "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 Richmond citizens as they collectively write and produce "Richmond: Symphony of a City," a new radio drama. It will premiere as a live performance during "Declaration," will be broadcast on local independent radio station WRIR, and will become part of "Estman Radio: Richmond" — a participatory installation that combines social space and a web radio station within the ICA.
- **Stephen Vitiello:** Vitiello, a VCU professor, is producing 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. Produced with support from the National Endowment for the Arts, the work features recordings by creative professionals as well as local teens reciting phrases from 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, Hope Ginsburg, 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 Smith, Lisa Freiman, and Amber Esseiva, with Johanna Plummer and Lauren Ross.

The exhibition is made possible by Altria.

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About the Institute for Contemporary Art

The Institute for Contemporary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University is a noncollecting institution that will showcase a fresh slate of changing exhibitions and programs. The ICA will be 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 will create a new environment for artists and scholars from around the world to test ideas. As a university-wide resource, the ICA will link 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 will be an agile, responsive institution that offers a broad range of artistic perspectives from across the world, with the goal of questioning assumptions and encouraging critical discourse. Additional information on opening programming will be available in the coming months. For more information on the ICA, please visit ica.vcu.edu

About the ICA's Design

The open design of the ICA features dynamic exhibition and programming spaces that can be creatively activated to 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 and café, bar, and concept shop radiate from the ICA's central forum and frame an outdoor garden, which Steven Holl describes as the "Thinking Field," that 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 the reliance on nonrenewable energy. These include the use of geothermal wells to provide heating and cooling energy for the building, and four green roofs to 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 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. The \$37-million capital campaign was completed thanks to more than 1,000 gifts.

Major gifts from the Saunders Family Foundation, Dominion Energy, McGuireWoods, and a number of individual donors during 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 ICA for generations to come, with an initial \$12-million goal.

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 1976, 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 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; and the Maggie's Centre Barts in London, which opened in 2017. Steven Holl Architects currently has seven 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; and the Institute for Contemporary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, VA.

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. Currently ranked the No. 1 public school of art and design by U.S. News and World Report, the 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 and 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, a region of increasing significance in the contemporary art world.