

The new Institute for Contemporary Art at VCU opens to critical and public acclaim

Richmond's first major contemporary art institution welcomed more than 7,000 during opening weekend.

RICHMOND, Va. (April 25, 2018) – The Institute for Contemporary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond's first major arts institution dedicated to contemporary art, opened to the public on April 21 with a celebratory block party welcoming more than 7,000 members of the VCU and Greater Richmond communities. Located at the intersection of Richmond's Belvidere and Broad streets, the ICA anchors one of the city's busiest gateways in a building designed by Steven Holl Architects with dual entrances to the city and campus. The ICA is a significant new cultural resource for Richmond, in addition to offering a vital dimension to the research university. Admission to the ICA is free.

"Our opening weekend exceeded our expectations in so many ways. More than just numbers, the people who walked through our doors hailed from a diverse set of backgrounds, locales, and perspectives. The cross-section of community present inside and outside of our walls this weekend was beautiful to witness," said Joseph H. Seipel, interim director of the ICA. "Beginning with our inaugural exhibition 'Declaration,' our programming demonstrates 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 a forum for open dialogue, collaboration and the exchange of perspectives."

"This weekend we opened an incredible new resource for our community in an iconic building that will become a new landmark for Richmond," said VCU President Michael Rao, Ph.D. "We are proud to welcome the ICA to the VCU community and know that the ICA will significantly extend VCU's reach, creating a new destination for art lovers from around the world and a space where art can help facilitate engagement with important issues of our time."

Designed by internationally renowned firm Steven Holl Architects, the ICA's building, named the Markel Center, provides a striking gateway to the city, with its iconic torqued design and dramatic geometries. Its titanium-zinc and etched-glass exterior has "a contemporary sculptural personality unlike anything else in Richmond," (The Wall Street Journal, Julie Iovine) and "provides a counterpoint to its red brick surroundings, announcing that something different will be going on here" (Architectural Record, Beth Broome).

Inside the monolithic and sculptural Markel Center, visitors can "explore the building's unfolding interiors ... [to experience] the ICA's full immersive power," and "will find an organic, constantly changing embrace within" (The Architect's Newspaper, Jonathan Hilburg). Comprising 41,000 square feet, the ICA features dynamic exhibition and programming spaces, including an inviting 33-foot entrance forum, four galleries, an outdoor green space, auditorium, café and classrooms that can support widely varied forms of contemporary art.

Envisioned as a forum for collaboration and conversation, the ICA will serve as an incubator for innovation, a pilot space for curatorial and educational practices, and a source of programming that will foster experimentation across artistic disciplines. 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, will "boldly confront pressing social issues in a

city that was once the capital of the Confederacy” (The New York Times, Hilarie M. Sheets) and “stir conversations in the Richmond community] that might otherwise remain hush-hush” (The Wall Street Journal, Kelly Crow).

“We are thrilled to open the ICA and ‘Declaration’ to our community,” said ICA Chief Curator Stephanie Smith. “In our planning, it was important for us to think about what can the ICA contribute to VCU, Richmond, and the art world at large, and how we can add to the diverse and rich fabric of artistic exchange and inquiry that already exists locally and nationally. We hope the ICA and future programming will provide a platform for continued conversations on today’s most pressing issues.”

About ‘Declaration’

The 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 fills 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 features off-site collaborations and performances, including those for the Festival of the River on Brown’s Island in Richmond on June 8-10. The ICA’s open circulation allows 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.

“Why a declaration? Because declarations are strong statements that mark beginnings, clarify intentions, and propose a social contract,” Smith said. “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.”

The ICA will present related educational programs throughout the duration of the exhibition, including specialized audio tours featuring both the building’s architecture and art, 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 can request custom in-person tours of “Declaration” focusing on any theme they wish or attend an “Artist’s Choice” monthly series — kicking off in May with VCU School of the Arts Professor Stephen Vitiello — an artist-curated evening program that will provide a range of perspectives.

Artists featured in “Declaration” include: Nidaa Badwan, Peter Burr and Porpentine Charity Heartscape, Martín Bonadeo, Cassils, Chim↑Pom, Sonya Clark, Andrea Donnelly, Edie Fake, Hope Ginsburg, GWAR, Kate Just, Titus Kaphar, Amos Paul Kennedy Jr., Autumn Knight, Lily Lamberta and All the Saints Theater Company, Lee Mingwei, Cannupa Hanska Luger, Noor Nuyten, Geof Oppenheimer, Amalia Pica, Cheryl Pope, Paul Rucker, Curtis Talwst Santiago, Marinella Senatore, Jon-Phillip Sheridan, Deb Sokolow, Tavares Strachan, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Betty Tompkins, Stephen Vitiello, Levester Williams, and Winter Count.

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

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. 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: The 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 Corp., Abby W. Moore, NewMarket Corp., 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 was 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 in December 2017; the Lewis Arts complex at Princeton University, 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 Nancy and Rich Kinder Building at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; the ChinPaoSan Necropolis in Taiwan; and the Hunters Point Community Library in 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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