

New Institute for Contemporary Art at VCU Unveils Fall 2018 Exhibitions
Projects by Rashid Johnson, Abbas Akhavan, David Hartt, Jonathas de Andrade, Julianne Swartz, and
Pascale Marthine Tayou

Richmond, VA – September 20, 2018 – This fall, the new Institute for Contemporary Art (ICA) at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) will present two exhibitions featuring leading international contemporary artists, including a major site-specific commission and artist-led performances. Opening simultaneously on October 17, 2018, both *Provocations: Rashid Johnson* and *Hedges, Edges, Dirt* explore socially and culturally specific issues in nuanced, conceptual, and poetic ways. Through these initiatives, the ICA will continue to present exhibitions that engage audiences with dynamic programming on themes of social relevance and local resonance.

“Building from our inaugural exhibition, *Declaration*, we have continued to ask what the ICA can contribute to our place and time,” says Stephanie Smith, ICA Chief Curator. “These new projects by an extraordinary group of artists will activate the Markel Center in fresh and beautiful ways and catalyze conversations that reach beyond our walls.”

To launch the ICA’s annual commission series, *Provocations*, artist Rashid Johnson (b. 1977) will create *Monument* (2018), a new, large-scale work that responds to the soaring, light-filled expanse of the ICA’s top-floor exhibition space, the True Farr Luck Gallery. Known for conceptual multimedia work, Johnson’s site-specific installation for the ICA will center on a pyramid-like tower that will be activated by a weekly performance series in which musicians, poets, and others based in Richmond will respond to *Monument* over its eight-month run. Continuing motifs from recent projects, Johnson will fill a custom-built steel structure with a selection of plants, shea-butter sculptures, books, textiles, and video.

His first project designed to spark collaboration with a range of other artists and performers, *Monument* marks significant developments within Johnson’s practice. It is also his first major solo project south of the Mason-Dixon line. Johnson hopes that his work will be understood in relation to his multifaceted identity—artist, intellectual, son, father, Black, male, cosmopolitan, seeker, maker, collaborator. The *Provocations* series takes its name from Steven Holl’s design intention for the ICA’s top-floor gallery space, which he calls “a provocation for artists to engage.” The True Farr Luck Gallery features a sculptural ceiling, cathedral-like acoustics, and ample natural light that filters through opaque glass. Curated by ICA Chief Curator Stephanie Smith, *Provocations: Rashid Johnson* will be on view through July 14, 2019.

Exhibition *Hedges, Edges, Dirt* presents new and recent work by Abbas Akhavan, Jonathas de Andrade, David Hartt, Julianne Swartz, and Pascale Marthine Tayou. Each artist will show a single project or body of work that explores how we relate to our surroundings and to each other, when rooted in place or in transition. Through a range of aesthetic approaches and global perspectives, these artists pose pointed questions, including: What does it mean to perceive ourselves and others as native or non-native, as welcome guests or invasive species? How do we navigate tangible and intangible boundaries? How do expressions of power, dominance, and vulnerability permeate our experience of place, self, and others? This international group of artists deploy play, beauty, and poetry to complicate and reimagine relationships among nature and culture, bodies and spaces.

Featured works include:

- A living hedge of cedar trees that seems to block access to one of the ICA's galleries. This work, *Untitled Garden* (2008/2018), and *Study for a Curtain* (2015/2018) an installation comprised of plants non-native to Richmond, are newly updated versions of conceptual installations by **Abbas Akhavan** (b. 1977, Tehran, Iran; lives in Toronto, Canada). Both reflect Akhavan's interest in how gardens can be used defensively, as ways to define and control territory and influence how we move through spaces.
- **Jonathas de Andrade's** (b. 1982, Maceió, Brazil; lives in Recife, Brazil and New York, USA) emotive video entitled *O peixe (The Fish)*, 2017 and related photographs explore power, vulnerability, empathy, and otherness through depictions of a fictitious fishing ritual.
- **David Hartt** (b. 1967, Montreal, Canada; lives in Philadelphia, USA) presents his video *The Last Poet* (2017) and related works including sculpture, photographs, and a new, ICA-commissioned tapestry. Through these objects and images, Hartt assesses the detritus of our late capitalist moment, honing in on the frayed edges of urban spaces and social fabrics.
- In **Julianne Swartz's** (b. 1967, Phoenix, USA; lives in New York, USA) installation *Sine Body* (2017), electronics activate small organically-shaped sculptures of porcelain and glass to create a shifting sonic landscape of pure sine tones that blur the edges between body and space. The installation will be activated by a live performance on Wednesday, October 17, in tandem with the exhibition's public opening.
- **Pascale Marthine Tayou** (b. 1967, Yaounde, Cameroon; lives in Brussels, Belgium) presents two large installations from his ongoing series *Plastic Trees* and *Colored Stones* that address globalization and environmental degradation.
- In addition, a presentation within the ICA's DePillars Learning Lab introduces VCU's 2018 Common Book selection, *Tell Me How it Ends: An Essay in 40 Questions*. The author, Valeria Luiselli, is a translator in the federal immigration court system in New York tasked with asking undocumented Central American children facing deportation a series of 40 questions. The book challenges readers to understand the complexities of contemporary emigration/immigration issues, as well as the shifting landscape of the "American dream." The Common Book Program brings VCU together as a scholarly learning community focused on understanding contemporary issues that need our collective attention and that do not have a single or simple solution. The ICA and VCU are partnering to connect this university-wide initiative to the themes of borders, boundaries, power, and vulnerability within *Hedges, Edges, Dirt*.

"The projects in *Hedges, Edges, Dirt* use beauty and artifice to critically engage with spatial and ideological boundaries between culture and nature," says Amber Esseiva, Assistant Curator. "At the ICA, sharing a variety of aesthetic approaches allows us to reimagine the ways in which we engage with our immediate surroundings as well as faraway places."

Hedges, Edges, Dirt will be installed in the Beverly W. Reynolds Gallery and second floor galleries. Co-curated by Assistant Curator Amber Esseiva and Chief Curator Stephanie Smith, the exhibition will be on view through January 6, 2019.

The ICA will host exhibition-related public programs throughout the fall, including film screenings, a performance by Julianne Swartz, artist talks by de Andrade and Hartt followed by a discussion with Dr. Ravi Perry, chair of VCU's department of political science, in addition to other opportunities for students, faculty members, and the community at large to connect with the exhibition and its themes. Visit icavcu.org for additional programming details this fall.

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 icavcu.org.

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 217 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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