

## Institute for Contemporary Art at VCU Announces Winter/Spring 2019 Program

### Upcoming Exhibitions will Feature New and Recent Work by Multidisciplinary Artists Cauleen Smith, Irena Haiduk, and Martine Syms

**Richmond, VA – November 14, 2018** - In early 2019, the Institute for Contemporary Art (ICA) at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) will feature new and recent work by artists Cauleen Smith, Irena Haiduk, and Martine Syms in two exhibitions, *Dialogues: Irena Haiduk + Martine Syms* and *Cauleen Smith: Give It or Leave It*. Convening the work of three visionary artists whose practices comprise diverse media, including video, installation, sound, performance, and photography, the ICA will activate the Steven Holl-designed Markel Center with immersive and experiential installations and dynamic public programming. These exhibitions build off of the ICA's commitment to presenting socially informed art that engages local, national, and international audiences in conversations about the current moment. Both exhibitions will open on February 15, 2019.

"Artists and visitors alike come to the ICA to be inspired—by the art, the architecture, and the vibrant cultural landscape of Richmond," said Dominic Willsdon, the ICA's incoming executive director. "I am thrilled to join the ICA at this exciting time, as we launch the 2019 season with a series of projects that stem from this inspiration, interacting with the distinctive topography of the Markel Center to produce meaningful and thought-provoking experiences for those who encounter them."

In the inaugural exhibition of the ICA's annual *Dialogues* series, artists **Irena Haiduk** (b. 1982, Belgrade, Yugoslavia) and **Martine Syms** (b. 1988 Los Angeles, USA) will produce new projects for the ICA, titled respectively *Tableaux Économique* and *Shame Space*. These projects extend Haiduk's and Syms' investment in economy and entrepreneurship through installations that invite active participation from audience members. Inspired by the architecture of the ICA's Markel Center, the *Dialogues* series pairs two artists to activate the distinctive "V" shape of the second-floor galleries. Each artist will occupy their own space, but the series invites consideration of overlap, resonance, and difference between their practices. Co-curated by Chief Curator Stephanie Smith and Assistant Curator Amber Esseiva, *Dialogues: Irena Haiduk + Martine Syms* will be on view through May 12, 2019.

**Irena Haiduk** is the founder of Yugoexport, a corporation modeled after the self-managed, autonomous, unofficial organizations and experimental clubs within the larger state infrastructure of the former Yugoslavia. Incorporated in the United States (where corporations are people, and Yugoexport is a *she*), launched in Paris, and headquartered in Belgrade, she is a copy or an avatar of Jugoeksport, a defunct Yugoslav apparel manufacturer and weapons exporter. The full principles of Yugoexport are demonstrated by her founding maxim: *how to surround yourself with things in the right way*. Yugoexport's process of in-corporation continues with *Tableaux Économique*, where she possesses the ICA's physical, technical, and interpersonal infrastructures with an economy that assumes the form of an exhibition. The tableaux is an interior architecture operating in two modes: leisure mode, in a state of rest, and labor mode, when attendants transact verbally and financially with visitors, communicating the equivalence between people and things.

Haiduk's counterpart in *Dialogues*, **Martine Syms**, uses a combination of video, installation, and performance, interwoven with explorations into technique and narrative, to examine representations of

blackness and their relationship to vernacular, feminist thought, and radical traditions. Syms' research-based practice frequently references and incorporates theoretical models concerning performed or imposed identities, the power of the gesture, and embedded assumptions concerning gender and race. For this exhibition, Syms will present a new project, *Shame Space*, which centers around an interactive video installation. On the screens we encounter the protagonist *Mythiccbeing* (my thicc being) embodying the postures of a Los Angeles life, as if from the journal pages of a dark shadow. Through SMS conversation with a chatbot programmed by the artist, gallery viewers can control the appearance of animation, image, and text across the monitors, live-editing the narrative of *Shame Space*.

"Bridging perspectives and artistic approaches allows for a richer conversation," says Stephanie Smith, ICA Chief Curator. "It's exciting to launch the series by producing important new projects that bring two strong voices—artists who are imagining new ways to occupy institutions—into dialogue with each other, with the building itself, and with our audiences."

"It is with pleasure that we bring the visionary work of these two powerful artists to the ICA," says Assistant Curator Amber Esseiva. "Both Syms and Haiduk explore structures that we as citizens engage with every day, and their work offers a reminder of the power of artists to help reimagine our futures."

**Cauleen Smith: *Give It or Leave It*** will travel to the ICA following its premiere in September 2018 at the Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania. The solo exhibition of film, video, and sculpture by filmmaker and artist **Cauleen Smith** (b. 1967) will fill the ICA's Beverly W. Reynolds Gallery and reach into the adjacent Royall Forum with an overlapping series of immersive installations. Taking its title from a revision of the threat "take it or leave it," *Give It or Leave It* cultivates a spirit of generosity, hospitality, and selflessness, and proposes a new rule for a better world: creating something, offering it, and gifting it, regardless of recognition, acceptance, or rejection. *Cauleen Smith: Give It or Leave It* is curated by Anthony Elms, Chief Curator of the Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania, and coordinated at the ICA at VCU by Assistant Curator Amber Esseiva, Adjunct Assistant Curator of Film Enjoli Moon, and Chief Curator Stephanie Smith. The exhibition will be on view through May 5, 2019.

Establishing the thematic core of the exhibition are two new films—"Pilgrim" (2017) and "Sojourner" (2018)—that navigate four distinct universes: musician Alice Coltrane (1937–2007) and her ashram; a 1966 photo shoot by Bill Ray at the Watts Towers; Noah Purifoy (1917–2004) and his desert assemblages; and black spiritualist Rebecca Cox Jackson (1795–1871) and her Shaker community. For Smith, each of these sites embodies an act of creativity and radical generosity rooted in current events and social communities, allowing her to reimagine a future that is black, feminist, spiritual, and unabashedly alive. *Give It or Leave It* places these films in conversation with thematically related projects that include handmade banners as well as installations that mix video with sculptural and textural elements. These include "Two Rebeccas" (2018), in which footage projected onto an assemblage of disco balls fractures across an expanse of shag carpet and artist-designed wallpaper, and "Epistrophe" (2018), in which multi-channel projections of dreamlike landscapes are generated by closed-circuit cameras trained on an elaborate table-top tableau. Smith also will intervene directly in the Markel Center's architecture with a new site-specific application of colored film gels to exterior windows, which will temporarily bring new hues to the building's facade and create shifting pools of color within interior spaces as light moves across the building.

**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](http://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.*

###

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****For media in Richmond:**

**CONTACT:** Lesley Howson Bruno, Institute for Contemporary Art  
Phone: 804-828-8223; Email: [lhbruno@vcu.edu](mailto:lhbruno@vcu.edu)

**For media outside of Richmond:**

**CONTACT:** Delaney Smith / Juliet Vincente, Resnicow and Associates  
Phone: 212-671-5160 / 212-671-5154; Email: [dsmith@resnicow.com](mailto:dsmith@resnicow.com) / [jvincente@resnicow.com](mailto:jvincente@resnicow.com)