

Institute for Contemporary Art at VCU Announces Inaugural ICA Research Fellows and Two Staff Promotions

Richmond, VA – November 12, 2019 The Institute for Contemporary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University (ICA at VCU) today announced the creation of a Research Fellows program and two staff promotions, which together will enhance the scope and capacity of the ICA's programming.

The ICA Research Fellows program, designed to create new opportunities for cross-disciplinary collaboration and study between the ICA and VCU, will launch with Paul Rucker and Nontsikelelo Mutiti as the two inaugural Fellows. The ICA also announced the appointment of Egbert Vongmalaitong, currently retail manager at the ICA, to the newly created position of Assistant Curator for Commerce and Publications, and the promotion of Amber Esseiva to Associate Curator.

"We are thrilled to welcome Paul, Nontsikelelo, Egbert, and Amber in their new roles at the ICA," said Dominic Willsdon, executive director of the ICA. "The launch of the new Research Fellows program allows the ICA to open critical pathways for creative collaboration with VCU and expand staff capacity by sharing resources across the university. Through the artistic practice and scholarship of Paul, Nontsikelelo and future fellows, we hope to create new opportunities for interdisciplinary study at the university, and extend the impact of contemporary art in Richmond and beyond."

Willsdon continued, "Egbert and Amber's curatorial practices allow us to experiment in new ways. Egbert taking on a curatorial approach to the shop gives us a unique opportunity to reimagine commerce, creative exchange, and the dissemination of ideas. Amber has long been an integral member of our curatorial team, and her new title recognizes the work she has already done and will continue to do across our multidisciplinary programming."

The newly created ICA Research Fellows program gives VCU faculty members the opportunity to collaborate with the ICA on long-term projects that are integrated with ICA programming and reflect the research interests and creative practices of the Fellows. The selection of future fellows will be based on the research and program needs of the ICA.

A visual artist, composer, and musician, Rucker's appointment as the ICA's iCubed Research Fellow builds on his work serving as a Visiting Arts Fellow within VCU's Institute for Inclusion, Inquiry and Innovation (iCubed) in the Racial Equity, Arts and Culture Transdisciplinary Core. From 2017 until the present, Rucker was embedded at the ICA as an iCubed Fellow where he piloted a series of career development programs for Richmond-based creatives. Rucker also presented his work *Storm in the Time of Shelter* (2018) as part of the ICA's inaugural exhibition, *Declaration* (2018).

In his new role as the ICA's iCubed Research Fellow, Rucker will expand and establish the career development programs, and will also work with Holly Alford (VCUarts Director of Diversity and inclusion) to support students of color in the VCU School of the Arts; lead the ICA's internal IDEA (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access) initiatives; and organize an annual research-driven performance and dialogue event that surfaces and examines histories that impact contemporary life, the first of which will take place in fall 2020. His fellowship will extend through 2022.

Nontsikelelo Mutiti is an interdisciplinary artist, Assistant Professor of Graphic Design at VCUarts, and co-founder of Black Chalk & Co., a collective that fosters curatorial and publishing collaborations between writers, artists, designers, academics, and technologists. As an ICA Research Fellow, Mutiti will create a visually driven publications strategy. She will collaborate with Egbert Vongmalaithong in his new position as Assistant Curator for Commerce and Publications in developing the ICA shop as a concept shop and curatorial platform that extends the dialogue created in the ICA's gallery spaces. Mutiti's fellowship will run through 2020.

Vongmalaithong is a 2012 alum of VCUarts' Sculpture and Extended Media Program and, as the retail manager of the Lewis and Butler Foundation ICA Shop, developed a comprehensive business plan that supports the institution's mission to circulate creative and critical discourse. Via LA and NY Art Book Fairs and other networks, he connected with small presses and independent publishers, profoundly shaping the ICA's approach to book curation. He has also built extensive connections in Richmond's local creative community of makers working in print as well as other media. In his new role as Assistant Curator for Commerce and Publications, Vongmalaithong will further develop the ICA Shop as a site of creative exchange.

Amber Esseiva steps into her new role as Associate Curator from her prior role as Assistant Curator at the ICA. A VCU alumna, Esseiva has been essential to the ICA's programming since joining the institution. Esseiva co-curated the ICA's inaugural exhibition, *Declaration* (2018), and shows featuring work by Corin Hewitt, Jonathas de Andrade, and others. Most recently, she curated *Great Force* (October 5, 2019 – January 5, 2020), the ICA's current exhibition featuring new commissions and recent work by an intergenerational group of 24 established and emerging artists, exploring how art can be used to envision new forms of race and representation freed from the bounds of historic racial constructs. Esseiva has also curated *Provocations: Guadalupe Maravilla* (November 9, 2019 – July 1, 2020), the second iteration of the ICA's annual commission series, which debuts new work by the El Salvador-born multidisciplinary artist.

About the Fellows / Staff

Paul Rucker is a visual artist, composer, and musician who often combines media, integrating live performance, sound, original compositions, and visual art. He was awarded a 2017 John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship, a 2012 Creative Capital grant, a 2018 TED Fellowship, a 2015 Joan Mitchell Painters & Sculptors Grant, and the 2018 Arts Innovator Award from the Dale and

Leslie Chihuly Foundation and Artist Trust. His work is the product of a rich interactive process, through which he investigates community impacts, human rights issues, historical research, and basic human emotions surrounding a particular subject matter. Much of his current work focuses on the Prison Industrial Complex and the many issues accompanying incarceration in its relationship to slavery. He has presented performances and visual art exhibitions across the country and has collaborated with educational institutions to address the issue of mass incarceration. Presentations have taken place in schools, active prisons, and also inactive prisons such as Alcatraz.

Nontsikelelo Mutiti is a Zimbabwean-born interdisciplinary artist and educator. Mutiti holds a diploma in multimedia art from the Zimbabwe Institute of Vigital Arts, and an MFA from the Yale School of Art, with a concentration in graphic design. She has been a resident artist at the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, and Recess, and the Centre for Book Arts, both in New York City. In 2015, Mutiti was awarded the Joan Mitchell Foundation Emerging Artist Grant and the 2019 Soros Arts Fellowship Award. Mutiti has participated in several group shows including *Salon Style* at the Studio Museum, a special screening for *Dreamlands* at the Whitney Museum, *Talking Pictures* at the Metropolitan Museum, and *THREE: On Visibility and Camouflage* at We Buy Gold. Mutiti produces project-based works, founding Black Chalk and Co with Tinashe Mushakavanhu, a collective of writers, artists, curators, and educators that initiate research-based projects that result in publications, archival projects, and events. Mutiti maintains a design practice and has produced publications and other printed ephemera on commission and through collaborations with cultural institutions such as the Guggenheim Museum, The New Museum, and CCA Lagos as well as with artists Simone Leigh, Derek Fordjour, and Tomashi Jackson.

Egbert Vongmalaitong is the Assistant Curator for Commerce and Publications at the Institute for Contemporary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU). After graduating from VCUarts' Sculpture and Extended Media Program, he joined a modern dance company for three years, worked at Warby Parker, and then Need Supply Co during the flagship's major renovation and reopening in 2016, all while pursuing his artistic career in performance and writing. His research currently spans topics of economies, value, language, and politics of the human body. He has recently exhibited/performed at Goodyear Arts (Charlotte, NC), Twoforty (Brooklyn, NY), and Vox Populi (Philadelphia). He joined the ICA as the shop's retail manager, where he developed a business plan, buying strategy, and content strategy with a mission to circulate creative and critical discourse.

Amber J. Esseiva is the Associate Curator at the Institute for Contemporary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU). She holds a B.A. in Art History (2009) from VCUarts and has worked in several arts institutions, including the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts and VCU School of the Arts Anderson Gallery. In 2012, she was a guest curator at VCUQ in Doha, Qatar. Esseiva received her M.A. in 2015 from the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College (CCS Bard). At CCS Bard, she curated and co-curated numerous exhibitions featuring works by artists such as David Altmejd, Louisa Chase, Roe Ethridge, Gabriel Orozco, Jason Rhoades, Mika Rottenberg, Kenny Scharf, and Avery K. Singer.

About the Institute for Contemporary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University

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.