ON THE COVER: Stellar Photographer
Interns at NASA

Photography major Allison Bills (B.F.A. ’16) spent her summer interning with the photography staff at NASA’s Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas. Bills, pictured above, center, and on the cover, was the only photography intern on site and enjoyed a wide range of assignments — from traditional portraits of astronauts in their space suits and NASA personnel training in zero-gravity flight to creative compositions of what is known as the space cup, a zero-gravity coffee cup.

Astronaut Don Pettit, who helped invent the space cup when he was aboard the International Space Station, allowed Bills to be the first person to photograph it. “I was able to photograph the cup on three separate occasions, which is unheard of. I was granted a lot of artistic freedom,” says Bills.

Bills had access to a variety of specialized equipment, including 3-D rotary orbit cameras, high-speed cameras, and quality lenses, but she credited her fine art background as the real tool that helped her succeed in her work.

She credits VCUarts photography faculty for turning her on to the internship opportunity. “As students, we’re so lucky to have such great professors who are genuinely eager to help us progress through our careers.”

Bills, who is passionate about fine art photography, hadn’t considered photojournalism as a career. Working with NASA completely changed her perspective. “The internship taught me that I could follow my passion of photo-making while incorporating it into a climactic career,” she says.

We’ve Got a New Look

Thanks to the VCUarts web design and development team — Mark Luetke (B.F.A. ’10), Cody Whitby (B.F.A. ’11) and Dan Strogioy (B.F.A. ’16) — for their role in creating the new VCUarts website. Have thoughts, suggestions or a correction? We would love to hear from you: arts.vcu.edu/feedback

GREETINGS FROM DEAN JOSEPH H. SEIPEL

In September, millions watched Richmond take center stage as the city hosted the UCI Road World Championships. The eyes of the world were on our city for this elite cycling event. It demonstrated something that we — the faculty, students, alumni and supporters of the arts — have always known: Richmond is happening.

The arts play a major part in driving the creative economy and culture of Richmond, and this is happening, in no small part, because of VCUarts. We’re educating students to become the next generation of thinkers, performers, artists and scholars who define culture as they connect art to life. Our role includes giving our students access — access to great faculty, to extraordinary opportunities and to new modes of thinking that will help them shape their lives and careers as they leave VCUarts to make their way in today’s complex world.

Our remarkable faculty members — a number of which appear in this edition of Studio — are at the center of what makes VCUarts great. People like Associate Professor Toni-Leslie James and Professor David Leong are more than just academics — they’re working professionals who provide unparalleled opportunities as they mentor students. (Read about our students’ involvement in the Broadway production “Amazing Grace” on page 8.)

We believe it is imperative to support creativity and innovative thinking as it arises, and we commit to that with internships and grant funding. You can learn about some of these projects on pages 10 and 11, including how VCUarts Undergraduate Research Grants helped to fund the development of a sustainable skateboard.

But we don’t just rely on what we’ve always done; VCUarts is constantly re-inventing itself, in an effort to be not only nimble and respond to the times, but to lead. We did that over 15 years ago, when VCUarts began its partnership with the Qatar Foundation in Doha, Qatar. Now, VCUQatar is our mark in the Middle East; our campus at the center of the design revolution and scholarly discourse is happening there. We continue that commitment because we know that today’s economy is a global one and art is universal.

And we are doing it again with the VCU Institute for Contemporary Art, slated to open in 2017. This non-collecting museum will be a gathering place for dialogue and discourse. With strengthened connections to the art world and expanded opportunities for collaboration, VCUarts and the ICA will continue to raise the profile of the arts in Richmond, making our city the focus of an international conversation about art.

Richmond will continue to shine in the eyes of the world, and I promise you, VCUarts will remain a major driving force.

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Studio Contents

New Certificate in Advanced Media Production Technology 3
Tasmeen Doha International Art and Design Festival 4
Awards and Recognition 6
Update on VCU Institute for Contemporary Art 7
VCU Theatre Shines in Broadway’s “Amazing Grace” 8
Student Work and Scholarship 10
Undergraduate Research Grants 11
Alumnus Donwan Harrell Teaches Course in “Jeanology” 12
Faculty Recognition 14
VCUarts in Action 15
“New Dominion” NYC Exhibition of RVA Artists 16
Featured Alumni and Staying Connected 18

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VCUarts has added another entrepreneurship program to its lineup of courses that prepare students for professional careers. Launching this spring, the Certificate in Advanced Media Production Technology (AMPT) is designed to connect graduates with employment opportunities in the expansive field of digital media production.

The curriculum has a hands-on, project-based approach that brings disciplined craftsmanship together with innovative technology. Students will be encouraged to approach the development of digital media with a cross-disciplinary, entrepreneurial spirit and to apply information and communications technology in novel ways.

“Students will be working with industry professionals in the vast arena of the media production industry,” said Matt Woolman (M.F.A. ’96; M.B.A. ’01), VCUarts’ executive director of entrepreneurship. “And that includes sound, sight and motion. Those are the basic three categories in the technologies involved. So the applications range from animation and music videos to commercials … video games, everything that involves all those in one integrated form. The students will get an immersive experience in learning the technology while developing dynamic content for a range of applications.”

Students who want to get involved with new media technologies like gaming or post-production must master the specific artistic demands and technologies of the trade and have experience with a wide variety of disciplines, including story development, audio production, video editing, digital photography and basic live film production. AMPT provides this broad base of skills while requiring students to concentrate on one of three professional areas: audio production, digital cinema production or post-production.

AMPT runs over the course of two semesters and will be held at Richmond’s In Your Ear studio. While VCUarts anticipates a sizable amount of the participants coming from an arts or creative undergraduate background, the program is designed for students from any major. Anyone with an undergraduate degree from an accredited four-year institution is eligible to enroll in the AMPT program. The inaugural class begins in spring 2016. By Leila Ugincius, adapted from VCU News.
For 21 VCUarts students based in Richmond, a travel experience that took them to Doha, Qatar was about more than discovering an intriguing new city. While visiting VCU’s branch campus — VCUQatar — students gained an immersive experience focused on collaboration, the merging of cultures, and the global conversation on art and design.

Tasmeem Doha, the international art and design festival hosted biennially at VCUQatar, aims to highlight the globalization of design and grants students access to an international pool of innovators.

Since inception in 2004, the event has evolved to focus on both internationally-renowned speakers and workshops led by multidisciplinary artists, designers, architects, performers and musicians. The feel of the event has also deliberately morphed into an “art and design festival similar to a music festival atmosphere,” according to VCUQatar faculty member Simone Muscolino, co-chair of Tasmeem 2015. Attendees include undergraduate and graduate students and faculty members from both campuses, along with members of the public.

This year’s event focused on the theme of ‘playfulness’ as expressed by the Arabic word “3ajeeb!” (ahh-jhee-b), meaning “strange in a strange way, cool in a cool way, and slightly weird in a slightly weird way.” Richard Lombard, materials curator at VCUQatar and co-chair of the event, explains that “3ajeeb! translates consistently across many languages, which fosters an inclusive experience.”

Students from Richmond were nominated to attend by faculty members, based on the success of class projects that aligned with the “3ajeeb!” theme. Final selections were made by the Tasmeem committee based in Doha.

Ben Evjen (M.F.A. ’16), a graphic design student attendee from Richmond, was captivated by remarks about following creative pursuits from Gavin Strange of Aardman Studios, creators of Shaun the Sheep and Wallace and Gromit. “I was able to talk with [Strange] for a half hour following his presentation, and even followed up with him after the conference for resources and next steps. Most of the speakers were available for conversations after they presented.”

Twenty-six workshops took place during the conference and culminated in an exhibition on the final day. Workshop themes included a “Tokyo to Doha 3-D Print Exchange,” which enabled participants to interact with a class in Tokyo via Google Hangouts and to learn about Japanese culture and language. “The House That Knew Too Much” delved into speculative design and proposed fictional “improvements” to familiar household appliances. Participants developed prototypes, such as a super-intelligent calendar that can read an occupant’s mood and reschedule events accordingly.

Richmond student attendee Adele Ball (M.F.A. ’16) enjoyed the “Upcycling Punch-Card Knitting Machines” workshop, which examined digital manufacturing by adding new open source software to traditional knitting machines. Simone Rebaudengo of Frog in Shanghai also gave a memorable presentation about interaction design called “The Future Was Yesterday.”

Students did have time to explore beyond the conference. Ball recalls gaining different perspectives in art and identifying cultural signifiers with fellow students while in Doha. She was granted a glimpse of the lifestyles of the “intelligent, open and welcoming” students in Qatar, with whom she still keeps in touch.

Encountering incredible monuments in a desert setting is “surreal,” says Ball, as she explored the landscape with fellow students and faculty. From Richard Serra’s “East-West/West-East” installation to the iconic architecture of the Museum of Islamic Art, Ball was inspired by the beauty of Qatar.

The event in March was the most recent of eight Tasmeem conferences. Over the years, a dazzling roster of speakers has grown — including designers Bruce Mau and Stefan Sagmeister, choreographer Twyla Tharp, and architect Rem Koolhaas — and the ambitious themes of Tasmeem have gained the university widespread attention and praise. But the real impact that Tasmeem has is on the lives of those that attend. The most incredible thing, according to Evjen, “was hearing from individuals from all over the world, whose ideas echoed mine — and they’re making a living out of [their creative work].”
NEH GRANT RECIPIENT TO LEAD WORKSHOPS ON SYMBOLS AND MEMORY OF THE CIVIL WAR

Melanie Buffington, Ph.D., associate professor in the department of art education, was awarded a $179,946 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities for her project leading workshops with K-12 teachers exploring symbols and memory of the Civil War.

“It just seemed like a really good fit. The idea is that they want to bring groups of public school teachers to sites around the U.S. that have rich resources related to a humanities topic,” she said. “Because of the history and the art here in Richmond, it seemed like a particularly strong resource.”

Monument Avenue, where nearly all of the statues commemorate men who served the Confederacy, struck her as an underused learning opportunity.

“I frequently see buses of children heading to the Children’s Museum or the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, but I’ve never seen people use the monuments as a teaching tool,” Buffington said. “Because they are made of these lasting materials, they continue to tell this very limited story to the present day. We could use the street to tell more stories.”

By Patrick Kane, adapted from VCU News.

VCUARTS PROFESSORS RECEIVE $70,000 IN PRESTIGIOUS NEA GRANTS

Photography Chair Sasha Waters Freyer and Art Education Assistant Professor Ryan Patton received NEA grants worth $20,000 and $30,000, respectively. Storefront for Community Design, of which Kristin Caskey (Associate Professor, Fashion Design & Merchandising), John Malinoski (Associate Professor, Graphic Design), Camden Whitehead (Associate Professor, Interior Design) and VCUarts’ Middle of Broad project are partners, received an NEA grant for $20,000.

“Through these NEA awards, arts and design panelists from around the U.S. have acknowledged VCUarts as a source of excellence in producing original creative works, pioneering arts education and championing community-based design,” said Sarah Cunningham, Ph.D., executive director of research at VCUarts. “These projects exemplify how the arts develop new knowledge, enrich our world and make it a better place.”

Waters Freyer will use the grant to begin filming “All Things are Photographable,” a documentary about the life and work of Garry Winogrand.

Patton will use the funding to continue his project CurrentLab Game Design Institute, which supports professional development for K-12 art educators teaching digital game design as an art form.

The third grant for Storefront for Community Design will help fund Recovery by Design, a series of classes, events and workshops that engages clients in recovery for mental health issues, intellectual disabilities and substance use disorders. By Leila Ugincius, adapted from VCU News.
Above: Construction of VCU’s 43,000-square-foot Institute for Contemporary Art is underway at the corner of Broad and Belvidere streets in Richmond. The ICA (inset), a non-collecting museum that will showcase innovative exhibitions, performances, films and special programs, will be an incubator for interdisciplinary experimentation.


This fall, VCUarts and the VCU Institute for Contemporary Art will host a rising art star. Nir Evron is quickly becoming internationally renown, not only in his home country of Israel, but far beyond, with inclusion in international Biennials, gallery exhibitions and film screenings. Evron is currently in residence, teaching in the Photography and Film department. The residency culminates in the exhibition “Nir Evron: Projected Claims,” the largest gathering of his artwork in the U.S., presented at the Depot Gallery from November 6, 2015 through January 17, 2016.

The exhibition will showcase the artist’s mastery of film, video and photography, combining the beauty of technical craft with the rigor of conceptual exploration. ICA Curator Lauren Ross, who organized the exhibition, says, “I am incredibly excited to bring Nir Evron to Richmond. His presence here will have an impact, not only on VCU students, but on the entire community. Nir’s work has so much to offer... from its strange beauty to its subtle yet powerful engagement with complex subjects. I’m confident that visitors will find it rewarding.”

“Nir Evron: Projected Claims” is supported by The Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation and Altria Group. His residency is supported by the Israel Institute, which is dedicated to enhancing knowledge and study of modern Israel, as well as by the VCU Global Education Office through a 2015–16 Quest Impact Award, and the VCUarts Dean’s Office.
At any given Broadway show, one expects a lavish production with meticulous attention to detail, and the new musical "Amazing Grace" certainly lives up to these expectations. The story not immediately told, however, is how deeply VCUarts students and faculty have been involved in the spectacular 18th-century production.

"Amazing Grace" tells the story of John Newton, the son of a slave trader, who became a minister in the Anglican Church and wrote over 200 hymns, including the iconic title song.

It is also the story of an outstanding collaboration between VCU’s theatre professors and students, thanks to the leadership of renowned costume designer Toni-Leslie James, associate professor of theatre, and acclaimed choreographer David Leong, professor of theatre.

The journey to opening this large-scale, period production on Broadway began with James, who was asked in 2011 to join the creative team. Excited by the opportunity of designing 18th-century costumes — something rarely seen on Broadway due to the expense — James enlisted the help of illustrator Gloria Young Kim (B.F.A. ’13). Together, they generated 130 costume renderings in just over three months. “Both of us got about four hours of sleep over the entire period,” James jokes.

James, who needed over 16 vendors to build all of the clothes for the production, was able to hire assistant theatre professor Neno Russell and a number of VCUarts students and alumni last summer. They produced 115 of the show’s more than 160 costumes — all of the sailors’ and slaves’ clothing. Joshua Quinn (M.F.A. ’13), the assistant costume designer on “Amazing Grace,” says, “We had to construct almost everything from scratch, [which] means that every fabric, button, trim, cord, feather and edge has been carefully chosen and brought together to create a singular article of clothing.”

“We had a tremendous amount of students associated with "Amazing Grace,"” says James, “but the crucial positions that actually got [the production] on stage ... [were] primarily costume students.” Along with Kim and Quinn, James names Matt Armentrout (B.F.A. ’13), the production’s assistant wig designer/assistant wig supervisor, and Kenann Quander (M.F.A. ’10), assistant costume designer, as vital to that process. Now, all four alumni are members of professional unions.

James also brought David Leong to the production. Leong, the musical’s fight director and movement coach, choreographed all of the large crowd and fight scenes in the show — nearly 75 percent of what you see onstage. To do so, Leong worked with undergraduates and graduate students, high school students, and members of the community to workshop the show — essentially exploring each scene at VCU before setting the formal staging.

Alexis Black (M.F.A. ’16) took part in several of the workshops led by Leong. The experience taught her how to work with actors to create unique and dynamic staging. Of Leong she says, “He’s an incredible collaborator. He listens to everyone’s ideas and then adds in the spark that sets the theatrical moment on fire, so to speak.”

Theatre graduate Brad Willcuts (M.F.A. ’15), says that one of the top reasons he chose VCU was “the ability to work hand in hand with the VCU faculty in a professional setting.” And work he did; Willcuts spent four months of his two-year graduate program apprenticing with Leong—first on “Mother Courage and Her Children” with Kathleen Turner at Arena Stage in Washington, D.C., and then on “Amazing Grace.” Willcuts, now the assistant professor of musical theatre at Michigan State University, says that it was the time he spent apprenticing with Leong in the production environment that was the true learning experience for him. “One day of the rehearsal process on Broadway [provides] the opportunity for every lesson,” he says.

For Black, who is now working on Broadway with Leong on “Fool For Love,” her time at VCUarts was a turning point. “Every member of the faculty that I have had the chance to work with at VCU has given me the knowledge that has positively shaped my artistic journey,” she says. “VCUarts is an incredible place.”
SIMPLY AMAZING
VCU THEATRE SHINES IN BROADWAY’S ‘AMAZING GRACE’

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE VCUARTS STUDENTS AND ALUMNI WHO WORKED ON “AMAZING GRACE.”

Matt Amentrout (B.F.A. ’13): assistant wig designer and supervisor
Alexis Black (M.F.A. ’16): workshop actor
Cassell Jones (B.F.A. ’16): costume intern
Gloria Young Kim (B.F.A. ’13): costume illustrator, shopper, craftperson
Jahred King (B.A. ’17): workshop actor
Michael Magaraci (B.F.A. ’12): shopper
Dylan Marcuson (Theatre Foundation ’19): fight and movement development
Katie Poms (Theatre Foundation ’19): fight and movement development
Kenann Quander (M.F.A. ’10): assistant costume designer
Josh Quinn (M.F.A. ’13): assistant costume designer
Bradley Willecuts (M.F.A. ’16): workshop assistant / apprentice
Clayton Winters (M.F.A. ’14): workshop assistant
Additionally, over 40 other graduate and undergraduate performance majors were involved.

VCUarts and AAUW Support Research and Scholarship

Art History doctoral student Samina Iqbal has been awarded the American Association of University Women Fellowship Award to complete writing her dissertation “Modern Art of Pakistan after Independence 1947–57.” Her dissertation focuses on the foundational members of the Lahore Art Circle: Ali Imam, Ahmed Parvez, Anwar Jalal Shemza, Shakir Ali and Sheikh Safdar.

Iqbal says that it was challenging doing the field research for this understudied and minimally documented period. The research required frequent travel to Pakistan for extensive documentation of unpublished art works, interviews with the artists’ family and friends, and the collection of archival materials from public and private libraries. Much of this travel was made possible by grants from the art history department and VCUArts.

Iqbal, who entered the doctoral program in 2011 after teaching at Appalachian State University, North Carolina, for several years, is a non-traditional student and mother of two.

She says that the art history faculty and department have been a great support. “They have encouraged and supported my studies each step of the way; I am very fortunate to be part of the Virginia Commonwealth University community.”

Art Education Student Receives First Fellowship of Its Kind at VCU

This past year, VCU became a member of Imagining America, a network of institutions dedicated to advancing the public and civic purposes of humanities, arts and design. Already, our very own Supriya Manandhar (M.A.E. ’16), has received the organization’s Publicly Active Graduate Education (PAGE) fellowship.

“PAGE Fellows are able to develop relationships with leading publicly-engaged artists, designers, scholars and community activists across the country and to join the national conversation on 21st century democratic transformations in higher education and civic life,” says Vice Provost for Community Engagement Lynn Pelco.

“[Supriya’s] selection means that art educators are being called upon as leaders in interdisciplinary research and community engagement efforts,” says Director of Graduate Studies for Art Education Melanie Buffington. “This is an additional national honor that reinforces the strengths of the programs at VCUArts.”

STUDENT PROJECT HELPS COMMUNITY ‘NAVIGATE VCU’ DURING UCI ROAD WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

As Adam Crowe, director of emergency preparedness at Virginia Commonwealth University, began to consider the potential impact of the UCI Road World Championships, hosted in Richmond this September, he quickly identified the need for a highly interactive and engaging mobile mapping site that would allow the VCU community to continue day-to-day functions with minimum interruption.

Rather than looking to an outside company for help, Crowe and his team turned to CoLab, the VCUArts transdisciplinary internship program.

“We contacted CoLab and were greeted by Matt Woolman and Andrew Ilnicki with eagerness and enthusiasm about the possible partnership between CoLab and the bike race planning process,” Crowe said. “With the addition of Greg Hofbauer, adjunct instructor and CEO of Nimblepitch … the project surged forward with the purpose of creating a VCU-centric map for the bike race that would provide dynamic information to students, faculty and staff.”

After more than a year of development the website and app, Navigate VCU, launched the week leading up to the UCI Worlds opening ceremony.

More than a traditional internship, CoLab offers deep investigations into innovative problem solving, with an emphasis on the development and use of emerging technologies. For project member Daniel Torraca (B.F.A. ’15), the experience of working with CoLab and Hofbauer was “nothing short of incredible.” Torraca, who will receive his degree in communication arts in December, gained experience with website design and development through this project.

“I have been very fortunate to have the opportunity to work with a group of people that value professionalism and a healthy work environment,” Torraca said. “All of the faculty and university spaces have been accommodating, understanding and extremely professional in the creation of this project. [Hofbauer]’s attention and overall commitment to not only the project but to the growth and development of me as a young professional has been one of the best experiences I have had here at VCU.”

The program’s dedication to students is what draws talent such as Hofbauer to CoLab.

“It is critical for students to have the experience of working with stakeholders and to be accountable in a real life scenario. Internships check that box, but to be able to combine a classroom-based learning series with a real world component that makes students prove themselves … it’s been exciting to watch these students do this.” By Leila Ugincius, adapted from VCU News.
This year, VCUarts awarded four undergraduates from the departments of Art Education, Graphic Design, Painting and Printmaking, and Sculpture + Extended Media a research grant to study the design and production of a skateboard as a sustainable art object. This group, one of 10 grant recipients this past year, included avid skateboarder David Sparace (B.F.A. ’17), Samuel Jason Adkins (B.F.A. ’16), Noah Congedo (B.F.A. ’17), and Samuel Morgan (B.F.A. ’16). The project began when Sparace started talking to Assistant Professor Matthew Spahr (M.F.A. ’07) about his hobby, and how it related to artistic practice.

Sparace and his group questioned the environmental integrity of current skateboard production; they sought to determine if it was possible to mass produce a high-quality green board — considering durability, sustainability and the overall shape of the board. At the outset of skateboard construction, the group discussed competitive pricing with professional boards on the market and the general marketability of a new product. Each student, coming from a different discipline and perspective, wanted to apply what they were learning to a singular project.

“We wanted to design a board with integrity,” says Morgan. “First, we took sheets of maple and vacuum pressed them to create a board in the traditional way. Then, we built a concrete press, which is roughly 24 inches tall and 40 inches wide. With help from [Sparace] and [Adkins], we made our own custom molds.”

The team studied the environmental effect of maple deforestation throughout northern Canada. Current manufacturing uses these trees to make skateboards. “We have a moral obligation on how the object that you make lives in the ecosystem,” observes Sparace. But building a green board was more challenging than anyone in the group realized it would be.

As the group explored issues with skateboarding materials, like the type of wood and glue used to bind everything together, they ultimately decided to create a board that had the smallest possible impact on the environment and developed an ethical approach to their work.

The group hopes that this project will have a larger impact on the community and their faculty advisor, Matthew Spahr, thinks there is the potential for the project to take off.

“Maybe they will do a custom run of boards from a skate manufacturer. It has the potential within the hipster market in Richmond because a culture for the handmade exists,” says Spahr.

“I am truly thankful to VCUarts for this opportunity,” says Adkins. “We were really excited when we got the grant.”

The undergraduate research grant program provides $25,000 of funding across 10 groups each year. The program’s goal is to enhance traditional course work through thought-provoking discussion and hands-on experience.
PRPS founder and denim icon Donwan Harrell (B.F.A. ’92) rolled an aluminum luggage cart filled with suitcases into the Jeanology classroom. Cotton samples, indigo and dozens of vintage Levi’s blue jeans emerged as he explained the thread, pockets and wash. The month-long summer course allowed 10 students to learn how to design and make jeans.

“I felt the energy in Donwan’s love for denim the first day and was inspired by his passion,” says Josh Bigelow (B.F.A. ’16), a fashion design major.

The jeans had creases, holes in the knees, single pockets and various washes. Each pair contained a piece of American history. “All of us were scared to touch his private collection. He had pairs from the 1800s,” says Lydia Critchfield (B.F.A. ’17), another designer in the class.

“He taught us that during the gold rush, miners wore Levi’s,” adds, “When they were destroyed, they just threw them in the mine. It was compelling to touch the jeans and connect with the miners who wore them.”

The Jeanology course, a brand new offering at VCUarts, provides a unique opportunity for young designers to gain firsthand experience in the blue jean industry. As part of the inaugural class, students traveled to PRPS headquarters in New York. Harrell divided the students into two groups and had them go to stores in the city to study the competition. One group studied jeans in the high-end market and the other students targeted smaller, less expensive venues. Their assignment was to review the competition and forecast future trends. The students were required to share their findings in a formal presentation.

“Everyone sat in his office preparing our assignments very late one night,” says Londoño. “I’d never had this kind of experience.”

The final week of the course involved a trip to Europe, to visit the PRPS factory. “We were in the factory seeing the process,” describes Londoño. “And everything we learned in Richmond and New York came together. I thought to myself, why am I here right now? What events in my life led me to this moment with Donwan as my teacher? You know, it’s such an honor to learn the history behind denim—truly an American thing.”

In the factory, students were asked to select two pairs of PRPS jeans as their inspiration. They were then able to create their own designs. “We reviewed different techniques in the factory. I wanted my jeans to look distressed with paint splatters, rips, tears and dark wash,” says Critchfield. “Donwan showed us the techniques he uses to put them together.”

Fashion Professor Karen Videtic says, “Donwan is a great teacher — completely hands on. He gave our students knowledge that people work for years to obtain.”

Fashion Merchandising student Amanda Brown (B.A. ’18) was energized by the course. She says, “We were really given the opportunity to experience what it’s like working in the field. It was amazing.”

Harrell’s company name, PRPS, is an acronym for purpose; this concept influences his designs, as well as the company’s vision. PRPS was the first company to take high-end cotton from Zimbabwe and ship it to Japan for Old World style fabrication. Harrell’s brand took the manufacturing of jeans to a new level by featuring superior denim menswear with meticulous craftsmanship.

A purist in his design approach, Harrell considers every hole or tear in a jean a part of the wearer’s lifestyle and as unique as the individual who wears them. His “immaculately flawed” jeans have made PRPS a powerful force in the $15 billion blue jean industry.

The journey from VCUarts graduate to denim guru involved hard work and tenacity. After graduation, Harrell moved to New York where he secured a position as an associate menswear designer for Donna Karan. Soon after, he was hired by Nike and quickly emerged as one of their top 10 designers in Asia. For the 2002 World Cup, Harrell designed the uniforms for teams that signed with Nike, including the U.S., Italy, Brazil and Japan. He also started PRPS that same year.

Harrell believes strongly that his undergraduate study at VCUarts changed his life. His mentors, Professor Sandra Wilkins and Associate Professor Henry Swartz, were an integral part of his early fashion education. “VCU played a huge part in my confidence,” he says. “There was a point when I had given up and planned to change my path and become a religious historian. I was not as good at sewing as the other students in the class. Mr. Swartz took me outside and told me I couldn’t quit. That sewing is a minor part of the industry and not to judge myself. His confidence in me made a difference. Look where I am today.”

He adds, “I have the real world experience and I wanted to show kids that you can do it.”

Harrell’s most recent career development: being named Affiliate Professor of Fashion Design at VCUarts, which will continue to connect him — and his knowledge base — with fashion students. The Jeanology course will be offered again during the summer of 2016.
A BESPOKE DESIGNER CRAFTS A TAILOR-MADE COURSE
VCUarts Recognizes Four All-Star Faculty Members

Each year, VCUarts recognizes four faculty members for excellence in distinct categories. Awardees are nominated and selected by their peers. Congratulations to the 2014-15 faculty award recipients:

**Distinguished Achievement in Research**
Sonya Clark
Chair, Department of Craft/ Material Studies

**Award of Excellence**
Antonio Garcia
Director of Jazz Studies, Department of Music

**Distinguished Achievement in Service**
Ashley Kistler
Director, Anderson Gallery

**Distinguished Achievement in Teaching**
Roberto Ventura
Assistant Professor, Department of Interior Design

WELCOME AKEL I. KAHERA, PH.D.
DEAN OF VCUQATAR

VCUarts is pleased to announce the appointment of Akel I. Kahera, Ph.D. as the dean of VCUQatar. Kahera brings with him the expertise of nearly 25 years in public university teaching and administration. He joins us from Clemson University, where he was the associate dean in the College of Architecture, Arts & Humanities.

Kahera says that his new position “holds significant opportunities for interdisciplinary advances,” which is compelling to him, “as an educator and as a trained architect in a field that embraces approaches from interior design and the fine arts.”

His research focuses on history and theory, culture and aesthetics, sustainable design, urbanism and the practices of culture and local knowledge. His seminal text, “Deconstructing the American Mosque: Space, Gender, and Aesthetics,” has substantially altered the view of the history and theory of Mosque architecture in the U.S. and the complex cultural patterns of diaspora.

VCU President Michael Rao, Ph.D. and VCUarts Dean Joseph H. Seipel both praised Kahera as visionary, with Dean Seipel noting Kahera’s “passion for advocacy and talent for building strong relationships within the academy.”

Kahera is a native of Brooklyn, New York, and is the 2013 recipient of the Hamad bin Khalifa Symposium on Islamic Art travel fellowship. He has lived and worked in Europe, Africa and the Middle East. Kahera taught at University of Texas at Austin, Texas Tech University, and Prairie View A&M University, where he was director of graduate studies. He received his Ph.D. from Princeton University and degrees in architecture from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the Pratt Institute. He served as director of Clemson’s Pennell Center for Research in Design and Building and sits on the editorial board of the International Journal of Islamic Architecture.

NEW LEADERS AT VCUARTS

VCUarts welcomes three new faculty members across its departments and offices.

**Patricia Brown**
Chair, Department of Fashion Design and Merchandising

Brown is a fashion industry veteran with more than 20 years of design and design direction experience. In 2008, she founded Patricia Brown Designs, a high-end fashion, jewelry and accessory design firm.

**Matt King**
Chair, Department of Sculpture + Extended Media

King received his M.F.A. from Bard College in 2004. He studied at the Cooper Union School of Art and participated in the Whitney Independent Studio Program.

**Suzanne Silitch**
Director of Communications, VCUarts

Silitch brings more than 12 years of professional experience working in strategic communications, creative services, marketing and public relations. She was the director of creative services at Williams College.
ART AND SCIENCE IN HEALTH

An exhibition at the Science Museum of Virginia featured projects by VCU faculty and students to raise awareness of mitochondrial disease and the importance of healthy lifestyle choices in maintaining energy in our day-to-day lives.

“Bioenergetics: Art Meets Gentle Science in Sickness and in Health” displayed illustrations, sculptures, movies, computer games, teaching modules and personal reflections created by students from VCU’s School of Engineering and VCUarts. These pieces focused on bioenergetics, the study of the flow of energy in living systems within specialized cellular compartments known as mitochondria.

Then Kinetic Imaging senior Jessica Soumphontphakdy (B.F.A. ’15) showed clips from a documentary she shot depicting the lives of patients and families living with mitochondrial disease.

“I admire each and every person I have interviewed,” Soumphontphakdy said. “One family told me a shocking story about how they had to go to an ER while out of town and the doctors had no idea what mitochondrial disease was and had to go Google it. Because of this, they have difficulty traveling and have to carry letters stating each step on how to take care of them.”

The exhibition is the culmination of a collaborative project launched by faculty in the Schools of Engineering and Arts to devise an approach that would take advantage of different perspectives and training to educate the public about bioenergetics, mitochondria and healthy lifestyle.

The bioenergetics project was supported primarily by a grant from VCU’s Quest Innovation Fund, with additional support from the School of the Arts and the Pollak Society, among other sources. By Brian McNeil, adapted from VCU News.

GET READY TO LAUGH, CRY, CRINGE AND SING

The theatre department has outdone itself with this year’s production line-up! For times and ticket information, visit vcutheatre.showclix.com.

The Rocky Horror Picture Show
transvestite aliens give an unsuspecting couple a night they’ll never forget

It’s a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play
the holiday classic featuring George Bailey brought to life on stage

In the Next Room (or the Vibrator Play)
a “treatment” emerges for female patients with hysteria

HIV/AIDS Readings
staged readings in collaboration with VCU Humanities Research Center

Urinetown
where a visit to the restroom is not a right, but a privilege
NEW DOMINION
PAST MEETS PRESENT IN NYC EXHIBITION
OF RVA ARTISTS

A woman in the middle of a desert, inhaling through scuba gear. Two wind chimes side-by-side, one blessed, one cursed. Synthetic industrial foam combined with sand-casted salt. A Confederate flag, publicly disassembled thread by thread.

The works exhibited this summer at Chelsea’s Mixed Greens gallery represented eight Richmond artists, and each gestured a nod to dichotomies present in VCU’s new old city.

Lauren Ross, inaugural curator at the VCU Institute for Contemporary Art, was still a Virginia newcomer when she was approached by Mixed Greens to curate the exhibition, which ran June 11–July 17, 2015. “It doesn’t take long to see how much incredible talent there is here,” said Ross.

Ross approached the exhibition with hopes of generating a theme that went beyond the geographic. Ross landed on “New Dominion,” a take on Virginia’s roots as the Old Dominion that recognized the capital city’s sweeping sense of change. “There is a tension going on in Richmond, between the past and the future,” notes Ross. “It’s not a bad tension — it’s what gives the city its unique character. I began to see these themes emerge as I got to know the city and its artists: independence versus loyalty, individuality versus community, innovation versus tradition. I feel that this body of work touches on those tensions on various levels.”

“Unravelling” and “Unravelled”: Deconstructing a Powerful Symbol of the South

For Craft/Material Studies Chair Sonya Clark, Virginia’s past is the subject of a painstaking process of disassembly. In “Unravelled,” three piles of strings, one red, one white and one blue, are all that remain of a Confederate flag. “I wanted to understand how much power that symbol would hold if it were completely deconstructed,” says Clark.

Situated near “Unravelled,” Clark’s “Unravelling” showed a partially deconstructed Confederate flag. At the June opening, Clark and about 50 other participants carefully disassembled the symbol, thread by thread. “The process is supposed to be difficult,” said Clark.

A native of Washington, D.C., Clark moved to Richmond in 2006 to join the faculty of VCUarts. “Living in Richmond certainly has affected my work,” says Clark, “because the city has such a complex history, as the former seat of the Confederacy. In fact, the first Confederate flag piece I made was in 2010. It was in response to former governor Bob McDonnell’s proclamation naming April as Confederate History Month. McDonnell did not mention the injustice of enslaved Africans, nor did he mention all the contributions and wealth provided by their free labor.

“Another misstep is that people confuse our history and think racism is a Southern problem, which is ridiculous. The British, the Northerners, all were complicit in what was going on in the trade of slaves, making it deeply entrenched in the fabric of our country.

“The present is an accumulation of the past. We’ve made some missteps — a lot — in dealing with Confederate history head-on. That is why we’re still seeing so much racial injustice, because the past is still in our present.”

Several days after the opening, the nation’s dialogue on the Confederate flag gained new volume, a response to the tragedy of the Charleston shootings. Clark’s work was recognized in numerous articles, as, in the words of one author, “one Confederate flag that shouldn’t be taken down.”

Slave Routes, Recovery, Hauntings and Other Stories of the New Dominion

In her work “Triangle Trade,” associate professor Susie Ganch used found media to represent the movement of slaves between Africa and the free world. The piece is constructed of discarded coffee cup lids, which the artist collected from local coffee shops throughout the city. The result is a sculptural piece that is stained with coffee, milk, lipstick and other essences of the DNA of Richmond. “Triangle Trade” now hangs in its permanent space at Richmond’s new Quirk Hotel.

Richmond artist Ben Durham presented his handmade paper diptych “Michael” at the exhibition. The first half of the piece showed a highly abstracted portrait a friend from childhood, while the other half mapped where he was eventually arrested.

John Freyer’s “Free Ice Water” was a performance piece that generated in the artist’s experiences with recovery. He would sit and share a Mason jar filled with ice water with another participant, conversing without distraction on whatever the person would like. At the end of the conversation, a small object representative of the dialog was dropped in the jar, which was sealed and added to the collection. Freyer is an assistant professor of photography at VCUarts.

Associate Professor Hope Ginsburg’s “Breathing on Land” shows the artist and others in a number of environments, practicing meditative breathing in full scuba gear. Inspired by her recovery from a physical injury and interest in environmental issues, Ginsburg took her healing process to areas that also appeared in need of remediation.

Created from sand-casted salt forms and synthetic foam, Noa Glazer’s (M.F.A. ’15) “Fliers from Dry Season” is a material merging of past and present. The artist practiced the ancient process of melting salt and then casting it, and once completed, embedding the forms in reticulated foam.

In his 10-piece series “Rally,” Painting and Printmaking Chair Arnold Kemp created masklike forms from foil and painted them with artisanal paints he ground and mixed. His sculpture “Political Construct #1 and #2” paired two wind chimes together — one blessed by a local witch, and one cursed.

Richard Roth’s series of works merged painting and sculpture. Painting on panels with depth, he breaks the dimensional boundaries of traditional painting. Roth is recently retired from his position as professor of painting and printmaking.

To learn more about “New Dominion,” visit ica.vcu.edu.
CREATING A SOUNTRACK TO SERENDIPITY

It takes a particular offbeat sensibility to produce a CD of music for ice cream trucks, to play the glockenspiel in earnest, to be inspired by the sea pig, or, really, to venture to do any of the projects Michael Hearst (B.F.A. ’95), a VCUarts’ music composition graduate, has undertaken.

He chalks them up to serendipity.

“I like to roll with the punches. It’s so much harder to go after something you really want than to work with what you already have,” he says, referring to the community of creatives around him in Brooklyn, New York.

What Hearst thought he wanted when he graduated from VCU was to become a rockstar. What he’s achieved is more personal, and likely, satisfying: a multi-faceted career as a composer, multi-instrumentalist, author, kids-show host, and there’s no telling what else to come in the future. He’s created a universe of projects stemming from his own quirky interests.

He’ll perform at Carnegie Hall this fall; “Extraordinary People” his second in a three-book series with Chronicle Books was recently released; he hosted a PBS Digital series based on the first book, “Unusual Creatures;” he’s collaborated with well-known musicians, such as the Kronos Quartet, on the book’s accompanying soundtrack; he’s scored several independent films; and along with his band One Ring Zero, he’s released more than a dozen albums.

The serendipity comes in that many of these projects grew out of Hearst’s friendships in Richmond, and Brooklyn, where he’s lived for the last 15 years.

Hearst credits two faculty members in the music department who were particularly influential. “Huge credit to Dr. Sandra Guerard, [former] assistant chair of the music department, who took me under her wing and took that extra few minutes to say, ‘here’s a kid who doesn’t fit the cookie-cutter mold and needs a little extra help figuring out what he wants.’” Hearst also found a kindred spirit in the late professor Dika Newlan, a very eccentric woman, “a punk rocker at age 75” and a protégé of Arnold Schoenberg. “Dika encouraged me and said, yeah, do weird experimental stuff.”

Hearst’s advice for aspiring musicians: “Work with what’s in front of you.” If Michael’s career is any indication, it’s the best way to achieve a success that’s true to you.
A LEGACY IN DECORATIVE ARTS AND ARCHITECTURE

Art historian Emily Campbell (M.A. ‘15) has been able to turn her passion for decorative arts and architectural history into a career path due to the generosity and support of VCUarts art history professor Charles E. Brownell, Ph.D.

Campbell is the 2013 and 2014 recipient of the Bess T. Brownell Architectural History Scholarship, a fund established by Brownell. A dedicated teacher and mentor for over 20 years, Brownell, along with his sister Louise, endowed the fund 20 years ago in memory of their mother, Bess T. Brownell. Bess was an enthusiastic supporter and friend of many VCU art history students.

Campbell first became interested in architectural history as an undergraduate at James Madison University; she was on an eight-week trip to Florence, living with an Italian host family and taking art history classes on the Italian Renaissance. While immersing herself in the culture, Campbell realized that she was more interested in the buildings that housed the art collections than the paintings inside. This experience changed the way she looked at the world. It also ignited her interest in doing graduate work in art history. She soon learned that VCUarts was one of the few art schools that offered American architectural history programs.

Having read about Brownell, she contacted him. Campbell recalls, “When I told him about my study abroad and interest in architecture, he lit up. I then expressed my interest in decorative arts and we formed an instant connection. I had this genuine curiosity and love of learning that he appreciated.”

The scholarship allowed Campbell to write her thesis. She studied Victorian interiors and American pottery. Her thesis was titled “Félix Bracquemond, the Haviland-Hayes Service, and Rookwood: Japonisme and Permanence in American Art Pottery.”

Campbell spent her summer learning about Victorian architecture in Newport, Rhode Island. Selected ahead of more than 90 applicants, she is now the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Curatorial Intern at the DeWitt Wallace Decorative Arts Museum in Williamsburg, Virginia. She catalogues and researches British porcelain.

Brownell, who takes pride in all of his students, recently made a substantial planned gift to VCUarts to secure the legacy of the Bess T. Brownell Architectural History Scholarship. He considers Campbell his successor in the study of ceramics. He adds, “I predict a very bright future for her in the decorative arts.”

The generosity of the Brownell family has allowed students like Campbell to achieve their dreams. Campbell says, “I think one of the greatest benefits of the award was the fact that the art history department and Dr. Brownell invested in me and my future.”

Charles Brownell, Ph.D., a dedicated teacher and mentor for the past 20 years, understands today’s competitive job market and applauds Campbell’s success. Brownell’s substantial planned gift to VCUarts will provide opportunities for future art scholars. He says, “We kept our mother’s name alive by giving money to students. This was a good idea and the results are really satisfying.”

VCUarts Takes on Miami Art Basel

Heading to Art Basel Miami Beach 2015? Join VCUarts alumni and faculty at the Oceanfront Upper Cabana at the Surfcomber Hotel on Thursday, December 3. Call 804.828.9182 or email rsvparts@vcu.edu with questions or for more information.

April Is Alumni Month at VCU

The third annual VCUarts alumni gathering will take place at the VCUarts Depot building next April. Keep an eye out for more information early next year. In the meantime, we’d love to stay in touch!

facebook.com/vcuartsalumni
arts.vcu.edu/linkedin

Let us know what you’ve been up to, or read about what your fellow alumni are doing: arts.vcu.edu/alumni
VCU School of the Arts welcomes the incoming Class of 2019!

651 new students joined us this fall

The students are:
74% Female
26% Male

Data represents incoming Class of 2019

Diversity of American Students
37% are students of color

Average SAT Score
1119
1119

Average on the super scored ACT
25 14% above the national average!

Average high school GPA
3.68

Some cool things they’ve already accomplished:
- Started a gay-straight alliance club
- Danced with Alvin Alley and American Dance Festival
- Studied abroad in Costa Rica
- Volunteered with the Special Olympics, and an orphanage in Guatemala
- Played lacrosse and captained the Varsity Swim team
- Participated in artist residency programs
- Directed short films
- Worked on anime conventions, as designers, stage managers, and editors

These students come from 28 U.S. States and Territories

International students come from China, Korea & Vietnam

Number of Students
1-15
15-30

94 African Americans
59 Asian Americans
42 Latino Americans
1 Native American

Average high school GPA
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