Greetings from Interim Dean Frazier

When I perused this issue of Studio before it went to print, I had recently returned from Tasmeem, the biennial international design conference hosted by VCUarts Qatar. Something special happens when scholars, artists and designers convene. That something special is particular not only to the moment of coming together but also to the particular ideas, concerns and passions that people bring.

The significance of moments—of presentations, collaborations and cross-campus conversations—extends long after the convening. A sound designer might say that it reverberates, like a sound reflecting and extending beyond itself, generating more reflections that are deflected or absorbed by other surfaces.

Each story, each news brief, and each congratulatory note in Studio captures a fraction of a reverberation. The Inclusion Infusion Initiative (page 3) is a noteworthy example. Last year, we heard loud and clear from students: They were hungry for interactions with artists whose diverse and unique life experiences resonated variously with issues of race, class, gender, sexuality and culture. It wasn’t enough, according to students, to read or hear about diverse works of art. They wanted direct interactions; they asked for inclusion. The students’ request was like an initial sound reverberating. It was strongly reflected in the call for proposals sent to departments, even more strongly reflected in the response from faculty across all arts disciplines, and again equally strong, if not more so, as artists, curators, directors, dancers and musicians came to campus and described the catalysts for their creative work. We don’t yet know the multifarious reverberations we might see in curricular changes or in students’ research and creative practice that will resonate for who knows how long, as they complete their degrees and join our network of alumni.

A few weeks after Tasmeem, I attended graduation on both campuses. Each student who crossed the stage to accept a diploma marked the transition between a program of study completed and a future just beginning to unfold. Those moments of exhilaration and anticipation reverberated from their decision to come to VCUarts.

I often say that VCUarts is a place where people “become.” Some students arrive at our campuses in Richmond and Doha, Qatar, with a high level of talent, extraordinary skills, impressive professional experiences and a clear sense of what they’re setting out to become—as artists, designers, performers or educators. Other students choose VCUarts because it’s a place to expand their horizons, try new practices or travel and better understand themselves. Some are accepted because we see their potential, ultimately realized when they embark on all sorts of creative endeavors, both on our campuses and beyond—in studios, classrooms, galleries, performance halls, practice rooms, theaters and runways. Regardless of starting point, all students are transformed by unique faculty-guided experiences and extra-curricular collaborations that they initiate.

As students become who they are, they also contribute to the sounds, signals and shape of what VCUarts becomes. Their ideas, concerns, avenues of inquiry and creative production are made possible by our many supporters. You—our alumni, donors, parents, and friends—are valued partners in our ongoing success. We thank you for all you do, as role models for how art and design education feeds a rich and rewarding life, as avid audience members who applaud our students and faculty, and as benefactors who support research, expertise and the materials essential for conceptualizing, creating and staging exhibitions, performances and scholarly publications.

As you read Studio, I invite you to consider the ways that your contributions to VCUarts reverberate. You inspire our students and faculty to realize the possibilities of what we might become.

James Frazier, MFA, EdD
Interim Dean, VCU School of the Arts
Special Assistant to the Provost for VCU School of the Arts in Qatar
In Sable E. Smith's short film “How We Tell Stories to Children,” abrupt cuts and glacially slow audio obfuscate snapshots of a Black neighborhood. One after another, images of windows, storefronts and a running teenager flash by like scenes from five different movies.

“People have an expectation to consume a specific type of narrative,” says Smith. So she believes that a dose of familiarity dropped in with a disorientating experience can lure viewers into a world outside their own.

A New York artist and part-time faculty member at Parsons School of Design, Smith was invited to speak at VCUarts during the two-day Performing History event, which brought contemporary Black artists together to discuss art that alters and reshapes historical narratives. Sponsored by the VCUarts Inclusion Infusion Initiative and presented by the Department of Sculpture + Extended Media, the artist lectures and panel discussions were accompanied by an exhibition of student work and performances in the Fine Arts Building on March 23. Eight undergraduates were included in the show, among them sculpture student Lisa Park’s piece “How To Love, A Performance,” during which the artist intimately kissed a running photocopier and shared an apple with a stranger.

The $100,000 initiative is based on Interim Dean James Frazier’s primary objective to encourage diversity and inclusion to be “at the forefront of people’s minds rather than something at the margins.” The initiative has clearly resonated with students, who have participated both as contributing artists and audience members. Dance majors joined the non-profit organization Dance Exchange and fellow community members in presenting a performance of “Still Crossing,” Liz Lerman’s 1986 work on immigration. The music department layered students’ original music, visual art and poetry over the global tumult of the 1960s during an interpretation of Langston Hughes’ kaleidoscopic jazz poem suite “Ask Your Mama: 12 Moods for Jazz.”

The Inclusion Infusion Initiative offered students the opportunity to involve themselves in frank and public discussions about gender, race and art. The Shaping Bodies Symposium invited Los Angeles-based transgender artist Cassils—whose bodybuilding performances and extreme temperature endurance completely belie their soft-spoken demeanor. Joined by writer Chelsey Johnson, art historian Jenni Sorkin and Kara Thompson, a specialist in literature and queer theory, Cassils discussed the role of the artist’s flesh and the physical changes their body undergoes during marathon performances.

“A way of managing the role [of an artist],” said Cassils, “is to produce it through your experience and then offer it forth as a nugget for dialogue or a space of reflection.”

Inclusion Infusion Initiative events were a fixture at VCU this spring. In late March, New York-based transgender artists Cobi Moules and Cupid Ojala (BFA ’99) joined a visiting artist lecture in the Commons Theater, accompanying their show Rural Fantasies at Iridian Gallery. April featured the life of O.J. Simpson analyzed through the film O.J.: Made in America, followed by Q-and-A’s with Oscar-winning Director Ezra Edelman after the two-part, eight-hour screening. Also in April, the weeklong Queer Threads Symposium combined artist talks with a community-inclusive “crochet jam,” where San Francisco-based social-practice artist Ramekon O’Arwisters invited participants to physically connect while crocheting a giant textile.

For more information: arts.vcu.edu/inclusion-infusion. 
Anonymous Was…
Sonya Clark

One of Artsy’s “16 Women Pushing Design Forward in the United States,” Sonya Clark, professor and chair of craft/material studies, has earned multiple distinctions over the past year for her work. This year, she is among 10 artists to receive a 2016 Anonymous Was A Woman award, a $25,000 prize recognizing exceptional women artists over 40. Citing her contemplative 2015 work Unravelling (pictured above), in which she invited viewers to unravel a Confederate battle flag, Anonymous’ description of Clark praised her as an African-American artist whose craft has been “a means to honor her lineage and expand notions of both Americanness and art.” Clark’s work in textiles, hair and sound has been exhibited in hundreds of museums and galleries around the world, garnering her prestigious awards from the Pollock-Krasner Foundation and the Smithsonian. Her artwork has been accepted into many permanent collections, including the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the VMFA.

Also in 2016, Clark was awarded the VCU Distinguished Scholarship Award and was named a Distinguished Faculty Fellow at VCUarts. “Sonya Clark is a force to be reckoned with,” says Interim Dean James Frazier. “Gifted with brilliance and talent, she is a valued part of the VCUarts community and an important contributor to the visibility and success of the school and the university.” During the 2017-18 academic year, Clark will be a visiting professor at Amherst College in Massachusetts, where she earned her bachelor’s degree and was later awarded an honorary doctorate. VCUarts wishes her success next year and looks forward to her return in fall 2018.

VMFA Awards Fellowships to Students + Faculty

Twelve VCUarts faculty and students were among the winners of this year’s Virginia Museum of Fine Arts Fellowship Program.

Professional Awards: $8,000 each
Sonya Clark, Chair and Professor, Craft/Material Studies
Irvin Morazan, Assistant Professor, Sculpture + Extended Media
Bob Paris, Associate Professor, Kinetic Imaging
Jane Winefield, Adjunct Faculty, Art Foundation

Undergraduate Awards: $4,000 each
Abigail Collins, first-year student
Jessica Cruz, Painting + Printmaking
Jason Ly, Painting + Printmaking
Jacob Medley, Photography + Film
Mark Peyton, Photography + Film
Alexander Sausen, Fashion Design + Merchandising
Samantha Zephyr Sheedy, Photography + Film
Claudine Reyes, Kinetic Imaging

* Awarded $2,000 for final semester studying film/video

Now in its 75th year, the VMFA Fellowship Program supports visual arts and art history in the Commonwealth through the millions of dollars in funding it awards to Virginia-based studio artists, art historians and students who excel in their discipline.

Anonymous Was A Woman Award

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Darryl Harper Invited To Amherst College

Department of Music Chair Darryl Harper has been invited to a one-year guest professorship at his alma mater Amherst College. Beginning fall 2017, he will be the Joseph E. and Grace W. Valentine Visiting Professor, a position which calls on innovative thinkers to lend fresh perspectives to the college’s music department. Harper says this is a humbling privilege, as the inaugural holder was renowned musicologist Joseph Kerman, with whom he studied as an undergraduate.

Fashion Students Win Coveted YMA Scholarships

Ten students from the Department of Fashion Design + Merchandising were selected to receive scholarships by the Young Menswear Association Fashion Scholarship Fund, opening the doors to their futures in the industry. The winners attended a packed press event, with fashion and design icons Fern Mallis, Martha Stewart and Jonathan Adler in attendance.

The YMA FSF has sought out and encouraged promising students for more than 80 years with scholarships and programs in business and design. Each scholarship awards $5,000, and the winners are eligible to apply for the Geoffrey Beene National Scholarship Awards, worth $10,000 to $35,000.

Left to right: Molly Walters, Melanie Riley, Katherine Manson, Jacquelin Dwyer, Jessica Fatherly, Assistant Professor Deidra Arrington, Anya Rudolph, Bridgst Carpen, Justina Dambrauskaite, Yuin Jeon. (Not pictured: Amanda Data). Courtesy of YMA FSF.
VCUarts Recognizes Faculty Excellence

Each year, VCUarts faculty nominate and select an outstanding peer in the areas of research, teaching and service. The 2015–16 award recipients are:

**Distinguished Achievement in Research**
**Kendall Buster**  
Professor  
Sculpture + Extended Media

**Distinguished Achievement in Teaching**  
**Stephen Vitiello**  
Professor and Graduate Program Director  
Kinetic Imaging

**Distinguished Achievement in Service**  
**Debbie Quick** (MFA ’06)  
Assistant Chair and Assistant Professor  
Craft/Material Studies

Catherine Roach Accepts Huntington Fellowship

Assistant Professor of Art History **Catherine Roach** has been awarded a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship at the Huntington Library, Art Collections and Botanical Gardens in San Marino, California. The fellowship will allow Roach to conduct research and make progress on her book about the British Institution, a 19th-century private society that exhibited artworks from various time periods and countries. She will be on research leave for the 2017–18 academic year.

John Orth Wins Dedalus Prize

**John Orth**, a second-year graduate student in sculpture, has been awarded a 2017 Master of Fine Arts Fellowship in Painting and Sculpture from the Dedalus Foundation. The Dedalus Foundation supports artists and projects that advance the principles of modernism, continuing the mission of its founder, Abstract Expressionist Robert Motherwell. Winners receive a $25,000 stipend.

VCUarts Qatar Communications Team Wins International Design Awards

Issue No. 4 of the VCUarts Qatar annual magazine *Context* and the entire publication series for Tasmeem Doha 2015 (*3ajeeb!* have received 2016 Red Dot Awards. Red Dot, based in Essen, Germany, has been an international benchmark for excellence in design since 1955.

The Tasmeem 2015 post-event accompaniment *Take Me With You* won an Award of Excellence in the 2016 University & College Designers Association Design Competition for its use of speciality printing processes.

Congratulations to VCUarts Qatar Art Director **Sara Shaaban**, designers **Haya Daher** (BFA ’07) and **Moza Khalifa Al-Suwaidi** (BFA ’13), and VCUarts Qatar Assistant Professor **Nathan Davis** for their work on these publications.


The multiple cover options of *Take Me With You*. Photo by Markus Elblaus. Courtesy of VCUarts Qatar.
Kinetic Imaging Students + Alumni Use Tech to Help Youth Thrive

In a tiny studio near the Grace Street Theater, Kinetic Imaging students have found their own slice of Silicon Valley. Home to the nonprofit organization Think of Us, 913 West Grace has become a hive of activity where Kinetic Imaging majors and alumni are expanding their skills in app development, web design, data, communications and video production to give more agency to children in foster care and those entering adulthood. The software created by the organization helps teens transitioning out of foster care set personal, professional and educational goals with the support of adults in their lives. It’s an effort both to guide disenfranchised youth to success and to reform outdated models of child welfare in the United States.

“It’s our belief that all young people deserve to thrive,” says Sixto Cancel, founder and CEO of Think of Us and himself a child of foster care. “What we’re doing here is changing the way the system is supporting young people.”

Think of Us was founded in 2014, inspired by a commitment to action at the Clinton Global Initiative University. Now a member of Forbes’ “30 Under 30,” Cancel began shopping around the idea for Think of Us before receiving his BA in Political Science from VCU in 2015. He approached the School of the Arts, and Kinetic Imaging Chair Pam Turner (BFA ’84, MFA ’88) decided to help realize his vision. Since then, KI has partnered with Think of Us to arrange internships for class credit—which has also led to jobs after graduation. Junior Developer Joe King (BFA ’16) began working with Cancel as a voice actor. He recorded two videos for Think of Us, and six months later, Cancel invited him to be a developer. “I just came in and started learning coding and really liked it.”

The suite of tools engineered by Think of Us, bundled in an accessible and modern digital package, is robust and impressive. Loading animations feature swirling cartoons, and when users input a supporting adult’s contact information, that sponsor is immediately sent a text message. But KI students aren’t just there for the animations or sleek tech; they’re drawn to the organization because it allows them to apply the lessons they learn in class for social change. Working at Think of Us brings students and alumni of the arts together to build resources that benefit the wider community.

“I find that a lot of the skills from art are incredibly applicable to things that people consider ‘not-art,’” says KI student Meredith Brindley. As a junior developer and webmaster, she balances a 15-credit course load while working full-time at Think of Us. Brindley says, “Every project we have in KI is a hackathon. We’re given a problem and we have to solve it in a specific amount of time with no particular guidance on how we solve it. ... but then you come here and it’s the same thing.”

Nowhere is the organization’s leadership in child welfare more evident than at their hackathons—giant brainstorming conferences where teams tackle challenges in child welfare, such as preventing homelessness for youth who have aged out of care and increasing the number of families that open their homes to foster children. Think of Us hosted the first White House foster care and technology hackathon in 2016, alongside the Department of Health and Human Services, and have been the stars of hackathons in New York and Los Angeles. “We’re introducing and using hackathons as a platform to make change happen, which is not necessarily the platform that the [foster care] system currently adopts,” says Torian Ugworji (BFA ’14), director of photography. “Every event that we have is a fight to show that, ‘Hey, young people can make a difference.’”
Since 1890, Richmond's Monument Avenue has reflected the constant evolution of the capital city. Down the center of a five-mile stretch are statues of Confederate leaders, oceanographer Matthew Fontaine Maury and, a more contemporary hero, tennis star Arthur Ashe. It's a collection of cultural touchstones from across Richmond history, and now VCUarts is stepping in to twist the profile of Monument Avenue even further. In an effort to open a multifaceted dialogue about the avenue's place in the city, VCUarts will launch General Demotion/General Devotion, a new project that tasks designers around the country to consider ways to interpret the Historic Landmark District. Via the school's experimental design lab middle Of broad and local partner Storefront for Community Design, the project will begin with a call for proposals to redesign the row of statues for new or alternative purposes, followed by an exhibition of selected work.

The project has its roots in November of 2015, when mOb hosted a weeklong charrette with architect Burt Pinnock, co-founder and chairperson of Storefront, that collected 30"x48" digital alterations of the Robert E. Lee statue from VCUarts students and maquettes of new statues by students at Thomas Jefferson High. Those works, presented at First Friday, the city's monthly art walk, found artists burying General Lee in kudzu, lifting the statue with colorful balloons and even setting it on fire. “Design has an immense power to create dialogue about issues, our values and how we give form and presence to those values,” says Camden Whitehead, associate professor of interior design, who directed the project. “If we simply had a discussion about the Civil War or the role of Confederate statuary in the city (or probably even about race), two camps would rapidly form. ... If we ask designers to reconsider Monument Avenue, we get solutions that span the spectrum.” For General Demotion/General Devotion, Whitehead is accompanied by project liaisons Kristin Caskey, associate professor of fashion design, and Ryan Rinn, executive director of Storefront. Along with the exhibition, mOb and Storefront will host a competition for Richmond high school students to imagine future monuments, and community workshops and public forums led by designers, historians and educators.

The design competition and exhibition are planned for the spring and fall of 2018. With the support of a $30,000 Art Works grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, mOb and Storefront can keep their local and national discussion about public art and shared history open to the community.

middle Of broad is a partnership between the VCUarts departments of Fashion Design, Graphic Design and Interior Design.
Faculty Support Community Connections

Art of Nursing Comes to BMS

Teachers from Richmond’s Binford Middle School analyze works of art at the VMFA as part of the Art of Nursing research project. Photo by Dan Currier (MFA ’07).

This past year, thanks to support from a VCU Community Engagement Grant, Binford Middle School was the first organization outside of VCU to take part in the Art of Nursing. The project, which originally launched in 2011 as a museum-based interdisciplinary collaboration between Art Education and the School of Nursing, has demonstrated improved perception, communication and reflection skills for beginning nursing students. Translating this methodology to a public school context was a significant shift for the project. At Binford, Principal Melissa Rickey worked with VCUarts Art Education Chair Sara Wilson McKay and Art Education students to bring hundreds of middle schoolers, faculty and parents to museums and galleries to discuss their individual interpretations of works of art. The goal was to increase appreciation and value of diversity in staff, administration, parents and students.

“Trust building was a positive outcome for the parents and for the staff as well. They have been grateful for the opportunity to come together and talk as a team,” says McKay, who hopes to be able to bring the program to other public schools in the future.

Artstories Bridge Generation Gap

In one of Lawton’s previous intergenerational art projects, participants collaborate to create a woodcut in Washington, D.C. Photo by Olivia Davison.

Through collaborative visual arts projects like woodcuts and printmaking, Pam Lawton brings different generations together and helps them to teach each other. With a $48,000 award from the Presidential Research Quest Fund, Lawton will launch the summer program Artstories, where older adults, middle schoolers and VCU students can meet to discover new talents and pass their knowledge to each other. She believes that intergenerational communication has become less frequent, but that artmaking can renew waning connections. “The teacher-learner role is flexible,” Lawton says about previous similar projects. “The senior may be the person guiding or it may be the middle schooler.” An associate professor of art education, Lawton drew on her childhood experiences for Artstories—from her grandmother playing the organ to great uncles putting on Thanksgiving plays—and says that the project has existed in various forms since 2000. “It [began as] a combination of text and image related to my own growing up and the people that influenced me, mostly people in other generations.” She hopes that this next step in the long-running project will help pioneer new ways to teach art to youth and the elderly.

Rockabye Research

Raquel Naro records a song she created for her newborn. Photo by Diego Valdez (BFA ’14) for VCUarts.

In the heart of Shockoe Bottom, VCUarts musicians and local mothers have been recording original lullabies for the past year. The mothers cradle their newborns in front of a microphone, singing songs accompanied by the instruments of VCU Music faculty. But cutting these records is just one part of this research project. “We want to determine whether or not women who create these lullabies have better attachment with their babies,” says Tracy Leipold, arts research coordinator. The immediate response has been encouraging. The Lullaby Project, a collaboration between Carnegie Hall and VCU, targets parents from correctional facilities, group homes and hospitals who are at risk of a weakened bond between mother and child. In the workshop sessions, mothers meet with VCU Music faculty to write, record and share original lullabies or ones their own mothers once sang to them. Sarah Cunningham, executive director of research, collaborated with Carnegie Hall, the Department of Music, the VCU Institute for Women’s Health and the CenteringPregnancy® program to bring the Lullaby Project to Richmond. The research team—including Cunningham, Dr. Jennifer Hinesley, Kirsten Olsen and RaShel Charles—coordinated with Darryl Harper, Taylor Barnett and Carlos Chafin to guide women though the songwriting and recording process. While research is still ongoing, in the future the team hopes to engage with a community partner and possibly establish a regular program for new at-risk mothers. soundcloud.com/carnegiehalullaby

Fountainhead Fellows Wrap Up Residency

The 2016–17 VCUarts Fountainhead Fellows are reaching the close of their yearlong residencies. The Fellowship, an annual opportunity for artists to continue their studio practice immediately after graduating from an MFA program, allows recipients to teach and work at VCUarts and collaborate with Richmond’s community leaders. This year, the Fellowship program brought Teto Elsiddique, Ilana Harris-Babou and Jina Seo to Richmond. Fountainhead Properties has sponsored the Fountainhead Arts Fellowship since 2005. Tom Papa, co-founder and managing partner of the company, considers the fellowship an important part of Richmond’s growth as a cultural hub. “I do believe artists are underappreciated,” he says. “They are the people who imagine things we can’t. They imagine our future.” Fountainhead Arts Fellows study and work as part of a mixed-use artist community that provides artist studios, apartments, a café, and other amenities close to campus in order to foster post-graduate professional growth.

Jina Seo, Craft/Material Studies
MFA 2016, Metal
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign
BFA 2012, Metalwork and Jewelry Design
Kookmin University, Seoul

Teto Elsiddique, Painting + Printmaking
MFA 2016, Painting and Printmaking
Yale University
BFA 2013, Fine Arts
Nova Scotia College of Art and Design University, Halifax

Ilana Harris-Babou, Sculpture + Extended Media
MFA 2016, Visual Art, New Genres
Columbia University School of the Arts
BA 2013, Art
Yale University

Pam Lawton

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MFA 2016, Visual Art, New Genres
Columbia University School of the Arts
BA 2013, Art
Yale University
A group of students in Communication Arts are devising a solution for a new problem in computer animation. Undergraduates Dawn Carr, Morgan Colonna, Katelyn O’Leary, Virginia Stephenson and Katharine Thompson were working on an animation demo at The Depot’s soundstage when they realized there was no way to assign motion capture data to their original quadrupedal characters. The student artists would be forced to animate each leg of a four-legged creature individually. “There was no set-up in the motion capture lab for anything other than a human biped,” says the team. “When we talked about creating our own system for a quadruped, Matt [Wallin, associate professor of communication arts] had encouraged us to apply for a grant from VCUarts to do so.” They began planning in August by penning a proposal that explained how the project would tackle their dilemma.

The team plans to fabricate a specialized motion-capture suit for their dog Belle. Like a suit for a human actor, Belle’s suit will have nodes attached that allow a lab computer to record her movement. Then, that data will be assigned to a digital character in Maya, the software used for animation, modeling, simulation and rendering. The project, “Capturing the Quadruped in Motion Capture Systems,” is intended to unlock the potential of this influential technology and make their findings available for other students and professionals to use. As they work, they plan to make an instruction manual for The Depot’s Motion Capture Studio that outlines their methodology as a guide for modifications. They’ll also donate the dog’s digital skeleton and motion capture suit to the studio. On future possibilities for their research, the team says, “We plan on publishing our project online via Vimeo. We are very open to educational/technological conference opportunities like Siggraph and beyond to present our research, process and product.”

Students Team Up for Research

VCUarts Undergraduate Research Grants are awarded annually to student teams, across a variety of disciplines, who submit proposals to pursue subjects of personal interest through mediums as varied as animation, installation and performance. Since the program began in 2006, approximately $250,000 has been awarded. For a full list of this year’s Undergraduate Research Grant recipients, visit arts.vcu.edu/ugrg.
In a 2015 interview with C-SPAN’s Q&A, entrepreneur Andrew Keen said, “What the digital has done has commodified the copy; it’s made it worthless. Ironically, it’s made the physical experience a lot more valuable.” Keen, author of *The Internet Is Not the Answer*, was one of 11 speakers invited to the international design conference Tasmeem Doha 2017. Over two days in March, “Analogue Living in a Digital World” asked students, artists and thinkers to consider the future of our analogue heritage in the digital age. 

The thesis of this year’s conference informed its workshops, inviting visitors to engage with technologies ranging from tintype photography to a project that aimed to produce the largest piece of pixel art in the world. Over 800 people attended the conference, including 479 VCUarts Qatar students, faculty, staff and volunteers, and 37 students and faculty who traveled from VCUarts in Richmond, Virginia. Tasmeem Doha 2017 was an event that illuminated the vitality of the unique, the ephemeral and the hybrid.

At Tasmeem’s faculty and staff exhibition *form(force)*, artists responded to this abstract line of thought with work that investigated the dichotomy and similarity between these two technologies. Sarah Mizer, administrative director for art foundation, displayed an olive branch and lemons made with glass and 3D printing; and VCUarts Qatar professors Levi Hammett and Maryam Al-Homaid presented a tapestry woven in hand-dyed wool that depicts Doha’s construction workers and machinery.

In a statement for *form(force)*, curators Amber Esseiva and Karim Sultan declared that “these works evoke a perpetual dance, a circle of mimicry, in which organic forms are patterned after technological ones, and where technological forms emulate lived experiences in the natural world.”
A 'pOrtal' to Tasmeem

Doha may be 7,000 miles from Richmond, but during Tasmeem 2017 U.S.-based VCUarts students were able to meet their Qatari peers in an instant. This year, middle Of broad opened a virtual window via a continuous video chat between The Depot and VCUarts Qatar's Saffron Hall. Anyone could sit down and chat across campuses. The “live pOrtal” to Doha was decorated to conjure the feeling of a majlis—an Arabic term used to describe a special gathering space. The conference speakers in Doha were also live streamed, with lectures in the morning followed by afternoon “Majlis Making Sessions,” where visitors used colorful string to decorate the event space and could share conversation, tea and baklava.

To arrange the threads around the Majlis, “mOb Studio students working simultaneously in Richmond and Doha responded to prompts from a group of VCUarts faculty critics,” says mOb’s Kristin Caskey, associate professor of fashion design. “[String] was chosen because the medium required that forms be built collaboratively, like a large-scale weaving. Additionally the patterns created were prompted by studying traditional textile and decorative pattern found in Doha and other Gulf countries... The string creates a tension between planes, intersections and transparency.”

In 1998, VCUarts’ branch campus in Qatar was the first American college to open up a site in Doha’s Education City; today, it’s home to neighboring campuses from Cornell, Carnegie Mellon, Georgetown and others. Since 2004, Qatar has hosted Tasmeem Doha, a biennial international art and design conference jointly organized by VCUarts and VCUarts Qatar.
VCUarts Welcomes New Faculty

Kikau Alvaro
Assistant Professor, Theatre
BA San Jose State University
MFA San Diego State University

Leigh Cole
Instructor
Sculpture + Extended Media
BFA Virginia Commonwealth University
BFA Virginia Commonwealth University
MFA University of California, San Diego

Aaron McIntosh
Assistant Professor
Craft/Material Studies
BFA Appalachian Center for Craft
MFA Virginia Commonwealth University

Jason Bennett
Assistant Professor
Communication Arts
BFA Ringling College of Art & Design

Karen Kopyranksi
Assistant Professor, Theatre
BA State University of New York, Oswego
MLA American Repertory Theater Institute for Advanced Theater Training at Harvard University

Irvin Morazan
Assistant Professor
Sculpture + Extended Media
BFA School of Visual Arts
MFA Hunter College

Mark Boulos
Assistant Professor
Photography + Film
BA Swarthmore College
MA National Film & Television School

Massa Lemu
Assistant Professor
Sculpture + Extended Media
BEd University of Malawi
MA Savannah College of Art and Design
PhD candidate, Stellenbosch University

Wesley Taylor
Assistant Professor
Art Foundation and Graphic Design
BFA University of Michigan
MFA Cranbrook Academy of Art

Retiring Faculty: Thank you for Your Service

Noreen Barnes
Since 1999, Noreen Barnes has been the Director of Graduate Studies in the Department of Theatre, as well as a theatre historian and tenured associate professor. Barnes is a prolific arts critic; she co-edited the play anthology Tough Acts to Follow and has published numerous essays and reviews.

Martha Curtis
During her 10 years as chair of the dance department, Professor Curtis worked to open a “videodance” workshop at the school and elevate the dance program to national visibility. She is the winner of a 2007 VCUarts Distinguished Achievement in Service Award and Richmond Magazine’s 2015 Teresa Pollak Award for Excellence in the Arts.

Robert Hobbs
Hobbs retired from VCUarts after 25 years as professor of art history. As the Rhoda Thalhimer Endowed Chair in American Art, Hobbs conducted research on modern and contemporary art and mentored graduate students in art history and studio programs. He continues to be a busy author and curator, most recently co-curating the Bahamas National Pavilion at the 55th Venice Biennale.

Ronald Keller
Keller, the Department of Theatre’s resident scenic designer since 1984 and its current interim chair, has taken his professional practice to Shanghai, Beijing and Shakespeare festivals around the U.S. He serves as the Design, Technology and Management Chair for the southeastern region of the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival.

Carlton Newton
Newton, associate professor of sculpture, has taught courses in sculpture, contemporary art criticism, and video and computer technology. Through his professional work, he has garnered a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship, the American Academy in Rome Prize in Sculpture and a Virginia Commission for the Arts Fellowship.

Melanie Richards
Associate Professor of Dance and Choreography
Melanie Richards helped create a study abroad program in Sicily with the VCU School of World Studies. During her tenure at VCUarts, she continued to participate in professional dance and theater. She has been a guest artist and choreographer for the Richmond Ballet for more than 20 years, and her choreographic work has appeared in Mexico, Scotland, Qatar and across the U.S.

Pamela Taylor
Taylor, professor of art education, has applied data mining and visualization to the advancement of teaching. She is the co-founder of the grant-funded project Electronic Learning and Assessment Tool for Interdisciplinary Connections (eLASTIC), and has received six National Art Education Association honors. Taylor is the author of over 60 publications and served as department chair for six and half years.

Charles West
Professor West’s three decades as the coordinator of winds and percussion in the music department have influenced the lives of thousands of young musicians, earning him the 2011 VCUarts Award of Excellence. In addition to his professional pursuits, he served as president of the International Clarinet Association from 1988–90.
Toni-Leslie James, associate professor of theatre and 2017 Lilly Award winner, had a specific vision in mind when designing the Seventies-styled costumes for the Broadway debut of Jitney. After all, she'd lived it. "In '77, I was a sophomore in college," she says with a laugh. "So everything about it was authentic to me." And authenticity always takes center stage in an August Wilson play. His 1982 work Jitney is set in Pittsburgh, 1977, at an unlicensed taxi cab company (known as a jitney), where the drivers muddle through family tragedies. Toni-Leslie James grew up about an hour outside of Pittsburgh, and the Steel City's Seventies stylings still shimmer in her memory.

However, for the Manhattan Theatre Club's production of Jitney, the glitz and glamour of the era was hardly what James was after. Authenticity, she says, was central both to respecting the everyday vernacular of Wilson's play and to rendering a more grounded representation of the 1970s. "Even with Youngblood, and even with Rena," she says, "you don't see these huge bellbottoms." Anchoring her designs in a familiar reality is what has made Toni-Leslie James a sensation. As a costume designer, James dresses the actors for what suits their character's motives and values, not just what looks good. Alongside illustrator Gloria Kim (BFA '12), James' team bucked the trends that prior productions of Jitney had established. For Youngblood, they swapped out the 24-year-old's army jacket—a staple of the character—because nowhere in the play does he speak fondly of his military service. "Why is he in an army jacket?" says James. "I just don't see it. He's not holding on to that."

Committed to her vision, James and her assistant Michael Magracel (BFA '12) ordered much of the characters' wardrobes at Halcyon Vintage in Richmond, Virginia—and added four-inch collars to shirts they bought at Macy's. James says her only "indulgence" was the flashy costume for the character Shealy (Harvy Blanks, pictured right). "I'm more interested in men's clothing than women's clothing because I feel you can fake a dress but you just can't fake a custom-made suit."

Toni-Leslie James' newest costume designs can be seen in Come From Away, on Broadway at the Gerald Schoenfeld Theatre through 2017.

(Right) Harvy Blanks as Shealy in Jitney. Photo by Joan Marcus. Courtesy of Playbill.
Robert Hobbs: Between the Breaks

Art History professor Robert Hobbs, author of more than 40 books and major exhibition catalogues, has been conducting research that mines the spaces between established ideas. Though he retired from his position at VCUarts in December, Hobbs' legacy here is framed by his tenure as the school's Rhoda Thalhimer Endowed Chair in American Art, which allowed him to work directly with graduate students in the VCUarts Art History and studio arts programs. His focus on modern and contemporary art, with the support of the Thalhimers, has enabled him to personally survey the most ambitious art in the world today and pass that finger-on-the-pulse perspective to his students.

"My research has enabled me to focus on the most contemporary art being made, as well as the most recent literature on a given topic," says Hobbs, "so my students were eminently qualified to contribute to the most cutting-edge art and art history." In popular courses covering topics such as Marcel Duchamp, New York painting and the Hudson River School, his students participated in 12-hour weekends of intense critical analysis on each topic, followed by weeklong trips giving presentations at major museums from MoMA to the Whitney. "They would not know whether the museum visitors who joined the groups were art specialists or members of the general public," Hobbs explains. For his students, this prepared them for direct interaction with the diverse audiences frequenting large museums and institutes. A co-founder of the VCUarts Art History doctoral program, Hobbs encouraged his students to not merely learn history but contribute to it. Graduate students were encouraged to rethink the traditions of their respective fields, identify historical gaps and then "inscribe their work in these fissures or breaks." He believes that even if artists and historians consider themselves to be working outside of convention, it's impossible to dodge the past—it needs to be navigated. "In this way," he says, "their work becomes history because it extends and transforms some of the traditions preceding them.

Hobbs expresses that he's incredibly proud of his students' work, particularly the 15 PhD dissertations and many MA theses that he directed. The majority of those students have found success in careers as curators, gallerists, professors and academic administrators.

Reluctant to use the "R" word when looking forward to his career post-VCU, the former Thalhimer Chair has completed two essays, is in the middle of authoring eight books in different stages of completion, and has kept busy with presentations at two national conferences. He's also contributing to a BBC series on Surrealism set to premiere in the U.K. this spring and later in the U.S. Clearly, the gaps in Hobbs' future continue to be filled. Keep up with Robert Hobbs at roberthobbs.net.

Travel Grants Support Graduate Research and Exhibitions

During the course of completing their degrees, students in VCUarts graduate programs travel for professional opportunities—exhibiting their work, attending conferences or presenting their research. To support their scholarly and creative endeavors, VCUarts offers competitively awarded Graduate Student Travel Grants. This year, over 50 students received grants, totaling over $27,000.

Photography + Film MFA student Roxana Azar was granted $500 to support her solo exhibition at Skylab Gallery, an artist-run space in Columbus, Ohio. The June 2017 show includes recently created works, some of which were presented in her thesis exhibition. Her travel grant covered the costs of airfare and shipping her artwork. "I'm so grateful," she says, "that [VCUarts] offers travel grants every semester for graduate students since it directly supports and encourages seeking creative and professional opportunities outside of Richmond."

Amanda Adams (BFA '07), a PhD candidate in Art History, received a total of $1,800 in travel grants to participate in three conferences this academic year. In October she chaired the panel "Longing for Home" at the Southeastern College Art Conference in Roanoke, Virginia, as well as the panel "A Return to the Studio Through the Analogue" at the 2016 Mid-America College Art Association conference at the University of Cincinnati. This May, she's presenting a paper in the Voices of Dissent: Social Movements and Political Protest in Post-war America conference at the Rothermere American Institute in Oxford, England. Her paper discusses Ai Weiwei's November 2016 show Laundromat, which displayed clothing, shoes and blankets that the artist gathered from a refugee camp along the Greek-Macedonian border and then thoroughly cleaned. Adams, who teaches at the College of William & Mary, considers her conference participation a way to set an example for her students. "I want to get across to my students the value of art history as a different way of understanding language and culture," she says.

Media, Art + Text PhD student Byeongwon Ha received $1,000 to participate in the 23rd International Symposium on Electronic Art at the University of Caldas in Manizales, Colombia. This is the fourth year he's participating in the conference, where he'll present two papers on interactive art and exhibit two installations—Floating Painting and Diligent Operator. Floating Painting uses a webcam to capture a sitter's face which is then gradually projected, one colored square at time, onto an LED canvas to evoke the slow and deliberate process of painting. Diligent Operator invites users to make music collages by plugging Ethernet cables into a wall and triggering sound clips. "I am proud of participating in the conference—presenting theoretical papers and exhibiting practical installation," says Ha. "The grant from VCUarts allowed me to book a round flight ticket between Colombia and Richmond. It will help me focus on my projects in the conference."

This year, grants also supported graduate student travel to San Francisco, Chicago, Portland, Spain and Canada.
20 Years of 'VCU in PERU'

For 20 years, VCU in PERU has been one of the most spectacular study abroad programs at the School of the Arts, enabling globetrotting students to study Pre-Columbian and Columbian art history at ancient and modern Peruvian sites. In 1997, Javier Tapia, associate professor of painting and printmaking, teamed up with Associate Professor of Sculpture + Extended Media Carlton Newton to take the very first group of students to the South American country. From the start, the two professors endeavored to create a program that emphasized Peru’s little known locations; over the years, students have visited the salt mines of Maras, the city of Ica and the Ballestas Islands.

Two decades since he started the program, Tapia continues to travel with his students. “Peru has changed a great deal of lives,” he says. “It has become, in my view, the door to South America for our students.”

For participating students, every day is different. Around Lima, they experience the local food and visit museums, such as the Museo Larco in Pueblo Libre and the Museo Amano in Miraflores. Tapia says that they always go to the National Museum of Archaeology, Anthropology and History before visiting ancient and colonial sites. It’s a physically intense program that gets students hiking all over the Andes. This summer, VCU in PERU will offer a new course with Art History Instructor Michael Panbechli to immerse students in the artistic traditions of the South American country—“Art and Architecture of Peru: Pre-Columbian and Colonial to Contemporary.”

Javier Tapia, himself Peruvian, has worked to maintain an active partnership between VCU and Peru’s local artist community, one that has opened new opportunities for the program. In 2017, students will organize an art show in Cusco, meet with Contemporary Museum of Lima Director Clemencia Ferreyros and see a one-man show by artist Carlos Runcie Tanaka. And renowned fashion designer Chio Lecca has invited VCUArts travelers to join the opening of her new multidisciplinary locale based in the town of Yucay.

“Many [students] have stated [that] this trip changed their lives,” says Tapia. “The reward for me has been watching them change as we travel, their eyes watching things ‘different’ as if seeing for the first time.”

VCUArts Alumni Awarded Fulbrights

Vanessa Díaz completed her BFA in graphic design in 2015. Her award has taken her to Jordan, where she’s teaching English to secondary students as a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant. Looking beyond her Fulbright year, she plans to pursue a graduate degree in intercultural communication and then to work as a graphic designer at a nonprofit organization in the Middle East.

Dylan Halpern, who graduated in 2015 with a BFA in graphic design, is studying urban planning in São Paulo, Brazil, where a 2006 law has banned outdoor advertising—billboards, truck signs, posters and taxi ads. In his research project, Halpern will interview people living in the city to glean a sense of how the ban affects their perceptions as consumers.

Kaelne Koorn graduated in 2015 with two degrees—a BA in art history and a BFA in photography. She is studying the Asian marketplace in the Plaza Mayor in Mexico City, with interest in how it contributes to a unique and multicultural Mexican artistic style. Koorn plans to study colonial Latin American art at the graduate level, specializing in the history of multicultural motifs.

Shannon Laribó completed a BA in cinema and a BA in sociology in 2014. Her Fulbright grant will support her graduate studies at the University of Kent in the United Kingdom. Her professional goals include working for a non-profit organization that focuses on reducing racial prejudices in elementary schools, and she hopes to eventually develop a global anti-racism curriculum for secondary school students.

Levestor Williams earned an MFA in sculpture in 2016. He was awarded a Fulbright grant to critically explore relationships between identity, memory and community in Johannesburg, South Africa. His research will inform the creation of artworks that engage the politics and poetics of public space in a place that continues to transform into a post-apartheid city.

Hannah Standiford graduated with her BM in 2011. Since then, she has been studying and playing Indonesian keroncong, a blend of European, African and local folk music popular in Indonesia in the 1960s. The Fulbright will enable her to continue studying keroncong’s regional variations in Solo, Java, and on the island Belitung in Indonesia. She plans to publish her research and record an album with her band Rumput, which blends keroncong with traditional Appalachian music.

VCUArts Fulbright recipients worked with the National Scholarship Office at Virginia Commonwealth University to develop their proposals. The NSO serves all VCU alumni, graduate students and undergraduate students interested in competing for prestigious national and international scholarships.
Where Legends Are Made: Derek Coté at the North Pole

Derek Coté (MFA ’06) has been traveling to the extreme reaches of the northern hemispheres since 2012, when he was invited to join a group of researchers and artists on an expedition to Svalbard, an archipelago between Norway and the North Pole. While he’s returned several times since, crafting austere and meditative short films out of his travelogues, his first trip completely changed his attitude as an artist. “I started feeling this real sense of responsibility to, not necessarily tell a story, but to make a document.” As he returned to explore the frigid north again and again—to Iceland, Alaska, the Northwest Passage and Svalbard—stories began to unfurl before him. His mesmerizing 2015 film “Bardo” (winner of Best Experimental Film at New York Film Week) drifts through the abandoned Soviet village of Pyramiden, lying 800 miles from the North Pole. A 107-year-old coal-mining outpost closed since 1998, Pyramiden is a frozen artifact of the 20th century. It’s also home to the “world’s northernmost grand piano,” at which Coté plinked away to compose the film’s dissonant score. “The work became about documenting something as it is right now,” he says of “Bardo.” “And maybe in 10 years when you look at it again, there’ll be a record of what it was like 10 years ago. So, it’s sort of anthropological in nature.” Coté thinks his Canadian heritage is the source of his initial attraction to venturing into snow and ice, and his love for the rituals of preparation. Beyond the climate, he says, the exploratory process of looking for stories buried in the northern landscape is what continues calling him back.

Watch Coté’s films and learn more at derekcote.com.
Karla Mickens Cole: Coast to Coast

Graphic Design alumna Karla Mickens Cole (BFA ’09), a product designer at Facebook, has made huge strides in her career. Cole worked as a production artist at McKinney, an advertising agency in Durham, North Carolina, after graduating. She then moved to NYC to join Big Spaceship where she began developing web materials for clients such as Teleflora, Finish Line and Fiji Water. Two years ago, she joined The New York Times and became an award-winning product designer working on Times content across mobile and web platforms. There, she developed NYT Real Estate, an app and desktop experience designed to be the premier destination for anyone interested in searching for a home, learning about the process or connecting with an agent.

After two years at The New York Times, Cole was recruited to join Facebook as a product designer in spring 2016. Her move to the San Francisco Bay area has invigorated in her a sense of how technology is a vehicle for opportunity and change. With Facebook’s vast userbase—an average of 1.23 billion active users per day—the audience for her designs has grown exponentially, and she aims to reflect the wide spectrum of identities interacting with each other on the company’s platform. “I feel like the experience has added a new layer to how I see design,” she says.

Through such major transitions, Cole has carried her enthusiasm from one high profile company to another. Remarking on her success, Cole says, “I care deeply about diversity and inclusion especially within design, so I take tremendous pride and responsibility in sharing my story with students so they, too, know the opportunities available to them in tech.” Her advice for fellow designers? “Just remember why you got into design and have fun.”

Kristie Couser (MA ’13)
In March, Couser joined The Clark in Williamstown, Massachusetts, as their first dedicated Curatorial Assistant for Works on Paper. For four years she was the Curatorial Assistant for the Paul Mellon Collections at the VMFA in the Department of European Art.

Rafie Khoshbin (BFA ’16)
Khoshbin established Khoshbin, L.C., a luxury womenswear atelier, in 2016. His company specializes in made-to-measure services, blending his love for ancient architecture in his home country of Iran with Italian tailoring. In March, he was featured as an Emerging Designer at The Lexus 2017 Charleston Fashion Week.

Abigail Ingrid Larson (BFA ’10)
Larson, an artist and illustrator, has been gaining attention in recent years for her “charmingly spooky, gothic” aesthetic. Her work has been exhibited in galleries such as The Museum of American Illustrators in New York, and featured in publications including Spectrum Fantastic Art. She is the recipient of a 2016 Hugo Award for Best Professional Artist.

Jason Akira Somma (BFA ’02)
Somma is a practicing choreographer, director and photographer who has been dubbed a “glitch art” pioneer for his work. His multimedia art incorporates dance images and technology he has engineered using found computer parts. His creativity has made him an in-demand technology consultant for the likes of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Disney and artist Marina Abromovic.

Abigail Ingrid Larson (BFA ’10)
The Make It Real campaign launched in September 2016. With a goal of raising $750 million, the campaign is the largest in the university’s history and aims to fund initiatives that will be points of distinction long into the future. VCUarts is enthusiastically inviting alumni, friends, corporations and foundations to support student scholarships and faculty research.

How You Can Make It Real

Now is the time for you to support VCUarts students, faculty and programs. If you’re interested in giving to VCUarts, or learning more about the Make It Real campaign and our funding priorities, please contact the VCUarts development office.

Email givetovcuarts@vcu.edu or call 804-828-2787.

March 31, 2017

Campaign Goal  
$25 million  
Dollars Raised  
$16.1 million  
Remaining  
$8.9 million

Campaign Giving by Donor Group

Alumni  
$9.5 million  
Friends  
$5.4 million  
Corporations + Foundations  
$1.2 million

Professor Emerita Is Campaign Volunteer

Professor Emerita and former Chair of Art History Fredrika Jacobs volunteers on the VCUarts campaign leadership cabinet. Her gift to VCUarts funds a doctoral fellowship awarded each year to an art history student whose dissertation research requires travel to museums, galleries, artist archives or other sites. Jacobs’ ongoing international research and invitations to lecture are awe-inspiring for fellowship recipients. As a campaign volunteer, she hopes to drive others to make “an investment in future generations.” Jacobs’ is known for her extensive analyses of Italian art, captured in the books Defining the Renaissance ‘Virtuosa’: Women Artists and the Language of Art History and Criticism and Votive Panels and Popular Piety in Early Modern Italy.

Photo courtesy of Fredrika Jacobs.
Ways to Give and to Be Involved

Cash and Securities
Support the campaign directly with outright gifts of cash and appreciated securities (bonds, stocks and mutual funds.) These gifts can be earmarked to fund specific scholarships, departments and programs.

Annual Fund
Gifts to the annual fund are unrestricted and directly support students, faculty and programs at VCUarts; they are the crucial support that nurtures creativity in our arts education.

Planned and Lifetime Giving
Preserve VCUarts into the future with bequests made through testamentary devices, such as wills, retirement and life insurance plans, and revocable trusts. There are also options of charitable gift annuities, charitable remainder trusts and charitable lead trusts. We are here to help navigate these options.

Donato's connection to VCUarts alive for future generations of students.

Gerald Donato enjoyed a 38-year career in the Painting + Printmaking department before retiring in 2005. He was a beloved professor that played a key role in the elevation of VCUarts to the national and international stage. One of his paintings, Beach, is on public display in Cabell Library. It was gifted to VCU by Bill and Pam Royall, longtime friends and supporters of VCUarts. More of Donato’s work is on view at the Reynolds Gallery through May 26, 2017. Proceeds from the sale of his work, as well as gifts from other interested donors, will be added to the Donato Prize fund.

To make a donation to the Gerald Donato Endowed Scholarship fund, contact givetovcuarts@vcu.edu.

Connecting community learners to the resources of VCUarts, the Commonwealth Society provides access to short courses, lecture series and travel opportunities. Courses are held on and off campus in the fall and spring of each semester.

At Pop’s Market on East Grace Street, members participate in the class “Richmond Retail Resurrected” with Eddie Slipek. Photo by Dennis Lieberman.
Islamic Art: Past, Present and Future

7th Biennial Hamad bin Khalifa Symposium on Islamic Art
November 2–4, 2017 Richmond, Virginia

Save the date! This symposium on the changing world of Islamic art will feature a number of speakers, including Her Excellency Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, Collector and Chairperson of Qatar Museums, and artists Lalla Essaydi and Hassan Hajjaj.