The arts are unlike any other field of study. Creators are at the heart of thriving societies, and creativity has become the most important transferrable skill in a global culture of innovation—pushing us to reconsider entire industries, reshape our histories and invent entirely new art forms. There is no limit to the professions with which the arts can intersect, influence and transform. It’s a field of boundless potential, built on a 40,000-year portfolio. At the School of the Arts, daring ideas are cultivated and free to flourish, supported through access to vast resources and collaborative possibilities only available in an extraordinary public research university like VCU.

My first semester as dean has been inspiring and invigorating. I was drawn to VCUarts in no small part because of the passion our students bring to their work, and the excellence our faculty exhibit in their creative practice and scholarly research. This community shares my passion and creative ambition; I’ve spent my career in interdisciplinary arts research, exploring the spaces between the arts, media and engineering. I am confident that we can continue to advance our school as a vanguard of creative invention.

This year, we are deeply committed to local, regional and national projects. Our classrooms are increasingly distributed and mobile, with students and faculty traveling to New York, Havana and Morocco to challenge their sense of design. Our partnership with iCubed aims to redress social inequity in Richmond, and our preeminent symposium on Islamic art situates us at the center of a global conversation about arts and culture. Through endeavors that introduce the values of creative daring into communities near and far, VCUarts is shaping the frontiers of research and discovery at the boundaries of what the arts mean today and how they will be inspired, sustained and lived tomorrow.

I am honored to lead this pioneering arts institution toward the boldest of new horizons and continue to build our shared heritage as artists, designers, performers and scholars together.

Warmly,

Shawn Brixey
Dean, School of the Arts
Special Assistant to the Provost for the School of the Arts in Qatar
Professor, School of the Arts and Affiliate Professor, School of Engineering
Baltimore- and Seattle-based artist Paul Rucker doesn’t tiptoe around America’s uncomfortable history—he tackles it head-on. His boldness makes him the ideal addition to VCU’s Institute for Inclusion, Inquiry and Innovation—iCubed—where he is now a visiting arts fellow. In his work, Rucker combines historic artifacts, craft, music and performance to tear open the iconography and language of racism, and inspects the humanity in hate. In spring 2018, reinterpreted Ku Klux Klan robes from his project Birth of a Nation will be featured in the Institute for Contemporary Art’s inaugural exhibition “Declaration,” alongside more than 30 other artists who are contributing work about protest, social justice, connection and creative community.

For someone who has traced the fault-lines running through many institutions, Rucker is remarkably confident in the potency and integrity of iCubed as a vehicle for university-community partnerships. This fall, he joins two other fellows in launching iCubed’s new racial equity, arts and culture initiative to redress social disparities and inequities through various forms of creative expression and cultural production.

“A lot of diversity initiatives amount to an illusion of inclusion,” says Rucker. “But I feel like, by supporting this, iCubed, the ICA and VCU are walking the walk.”

Rucker will be working with students to utilize the arts for social change. In addition to providing workshops through the music department, Rucker will collaborate with students and former inmates to produce and distribute Harmony Food Sauce, a concoction packaged with labels detailing the consequences of mass incarceration in the U.S. The project, supported by a 2016 Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Artist as Activist Fellowship, will provide job training for first-timers entering the workforce.

Rucker believes there has to be a level of empathy and understanding between expanding universities and the community that shares space with them. To begin that work, he says, we need to confront Richmond’s history, which he hopes to achieve through iCubed. “It’s about relationship building,” he says, “and how dialogue can stamp out hate.”

“We’re a country that hasn’t done any healing when it comes to the legacy of slavery,” said Rucker in a 2015 Artnet interview. “The best analogy I can think of is that we have this festering wound, and what we try to do is cover up the wound with bandages. But it has to be cut open and cleaned out. That’s addressing history. Until we do that, there is no hope in moving forward. I have hope, but I know it is going to take a lot of work, and a lot of sincere soul-searching.”

Rucker joins dancer and choreographer Meghan K. Abadoo and author Onaje X. O. Woodbine in iCubed’s newest transdisciplinary core “Racial Equity, Arts and Culture,” a partnership between VCUarts, the Department of African American Studies and the ICA. Abadoo will expand upon new dance theater, support the advancement of African American women in Richmond and conduct research that reassesses pedagogy in the context of racial equity. Woodbine will build on his research focusing on urban African American communities and the spiritual dimensions of street basketball while continuing to write his second book.

Confronting Racial Inequity Through Art

Artist Paul Rucker with his REWIND exhibition, hosted by the Visual and Sound Studio at Creative Alliance in Baltimore. The featured robes were part of a yearlong project where Rucker created one new Ku Klux Klan robe a week. Photo by Mike Morgan.
Congratulations to Susanna Klein (BM ’93), assistant professor of violin and coordinator of strings, who has been honored with a VCU Presidential Research Quest Fund award. With the backing of the university, Klein plans to study musicians’ ability to regulate and monitor their practice habits by developing a mobile app for use during practice.

With 15 years of orchestral experience, Klein has been motivated to engage in research that leverages developments in health and digital technology. She aims to improve how musicians learn in order to lessen the rate of playing-related injuries. Klein believes a healthy practice regimen is not only key to being a better musician, but also key to better understanding the world.

“It’s really about self-efficacy,” she says, “and slowing down enough to analyze your behavior and form habits that you can be proud of.”

The PeRQ Fund, awarded by VCU, is granted to faculty seeking support for new, emerging or continuing research. For the mobile app project, Klein received $50,000 in funding to support her research. Her proposal, budget and partnership development was facilitated by the Arts Research Institute (page 9). She is collaborating with Assistant Professor of Music Education Sandy Goldie, Viola Instructor Molly Sharp and a partnering mobile company to bring the concept to fruition.

“Arts research is broad,” says Klein. “I think it’s creative output, whether it’s writing a piece of music, or performing. It’s bringing something abstract into the concrete. It’s seeing how the arts are connected to other industries. It’s also about pedagogy, and understanding how the arts fit into the human experience.”

Klein Developing App for Practicing Musicians

Photo by Terry Brown. Courtesy of VCUarts.

McKean Receives Harker Award

Michael Jones McKean is the recipient of the 2017 Harker Award for Interdisciplinary Studies. McKean, an associate professor in Sculpture + Extended Media, is in residence at the San Francisco Art Institute preparing for a large solo project in January. Administered by the San Francisco Foundation, the Harker Award supports artists-in-residence at the San Francisco Arts Institute and is granted to only one artist per year. At $100,000, it is one of the single largest grants given to an individual artist in the county.

Photo courtesy of Michael Jones McKean.
**Awards + Recognition**

**Ron Johnson Awarded Pollock-Krasner Grant**

Assistant Professor of Painting + Printmaking Ron Johnson has been awarded $27,000 from the Pollock-Krasner Foundation. The foundation supports working artists who stand to benefit from financial assistance in purchasing materials, paying studio rent and covering personal expenses.

**Toni-Leslie James Earns Tony Nomination**

The 2017 awards season has been noteworthy for Associate Professor of Theatre Toni-Leslie James. In May, she won a Lilly Award, which celebrates women in theatre. In June, she was nominated for two Drama Desk Awards in Outstanding Costume Design, one for *Jitney* and one for the musical *Come From Away*. She also received a Tony nomination for Best Costume Design in a Play for her work on *Jitney*. *Jitney*’s distinct setting—a Pittsburgh gypsy cab station in 1977—inspired James to draw from her youth in the Steel City to design the play’s period costumes.

*Jitney* and *Come From Away* were critics’ darlings at the 71st Annual Tony Awards, garnering six and seven nominations respectively. By the end of the night, *Jitney* took home the award for Best Revival of a Play, and *Come From Away* won Best Direction of a Musical. Though the award for Best Costume Design would go to Jane Greenwood for *The Little Foxes*, the nomination was nevertheless a watershed moment for James, who was first given a Tony nod in 1992 for her work on *Jelly’s Last Jam*.

Many former students have assisted James in bringing her characters to life. For *Jitney*, James worked with Assistant Costume Designer Michael Magaraci (BFA ’12) and Costume Illustrator Gloria Kim (BFA ’13). Matt Armentrout (BFA ’13) is the wig/hair supervisor on *Come From Away*.

“I’m a completely different designer because I teach,” James says. “My students have made me a better designer in every aspect of the work.”

**Sonya Clark**

Sonya Clark, distinguished research faculty, chair and professor in Craft/Material Studies, has received the Brandywine Workshop 2017 Lifetime Achievement Award. Brandywine Workshop and Archives is a Philadelphia-based organization committed to growing and preserving a heritage of multi-ethnic American fine art.

Recent graduate Anthony Iacono (MFA ’17) was awarded the Toby Devan Lewis Fellowship in April, a $10,000 stipend to be used at his discretion. The fellowship is given annually to MFA students poised to graduate from each of the 10 best art schools in the country.

**Director of Jazz Studies Antonio García** will serve a three-year term on the board at the University of the Pacific Brubeck Institute. Founded by celebrated jazz composer Dave Brubeck and wife Iola, the institute is dedicated to the advancement of musicianship, civil rights and social justice through performance, education and outreach.

**Farrah El Sharif (BFA ’17), Senior Thesis Project, Spring 2017. Courtesy of VCUarts Interior Design.**

The VCUarts Interior Design program was rated one of the top 10 graduate programs and one of the top 20 undergraduate programs by DesignIntelligence.

**The VCUarts Undergraduate Viewbook, with graphic design by Yaeyoung Emily Park (MFA ’15), won the Red Dot Award for Communication Design. The Viewbook also won the Public Relations Society of America Capital Award of Excellence.**

The program for the 2016 VCUarts Fashion show *Emerge* was recognized by PRSA with a Capital Award of Merit.

VCUarts’ sizzle reel, “Major in Amazing,” won a CASE Circle of Excellence Award and the Hermes Creative Platinum Award. The video was produced by Ost Haus, the Richmond film company led by Nathan Nunnelly (BS ’15) and Alexander Kreher (BFA ’16).
Fashion Students Run the Show

Fashion's annual runway show was staged in May by juniors and seniors from the department's Advanced Show Production Class. The annual event tasks Fashion Merchandising students with arranging a full runway production to showcase their fellow Design students' most ambitious work.

Merchandising student Mason Shuck (BA '17) assumed a leadership role in this spring's show, playing the part of “Operations Front of House.” One of three student leaders, Mason and his team were in charge of arranging a review of student-made outfits and the models to wear them. Designers submitted their work to faculty and a selected jury, who judged them and decided which outfits would hit the runway. That intense level of responsibility, he says, was the most significant aspect of the project:

“That VCU allows one of the Fashion Department’s biggest showcases to be orchestrated and put on by students really speaks to the confidence and trust the department has in us.”

Andrea Hernandez (BFA ’17), designed four outfits for the show, which included a knee-length tent dress and a high-waisted flared jumpsuit. She says the preparation was hectic, exciting—and swift. “Everyone's work progressed so quickly,” she recalls, “from sketch, to sample, to almost finished product.”

Students were tasked with every major aspect of carrying the show from concept to reality—from social media to ticketing. The pressure can be intense, but “when the last model walks off stage and the crowd cheers,” says Shuck, “knowing you, as a student, made this happen—that is something I will never forget in my life.”

Save the date: next year's fashion show is set for Thursday, May 10, 2018. Tickets go on sale in the spring and if you can't make the event, we'll be live-streaming it on the website.
Green Walls Cultivate Clean Air in RVA

Professors across VCU are teaming up to tackle air quality in Richmond.

Photography + Film Assistant Professor Jon-Phillip Sheridan (MFA ’11) and Engineering Associate Professor Stephen Fong teamed up with Christopher Gough, an assistant professor of biology and carbon cycle expert, to create the Green Walls Course for undergraduates.

Students developed detailed designs for green walls—vertical structures with living plants—to add aesthetics and carbon sequestration to urban settings. They used repurposed, recycled and donated materials to create planters and structures for the plants to grow and climb.

Their efforts inspired another group of VCU engineering researchers, also led by Fong and Sheridan, to partner with the Science Museum of Virginia, local nonprofits and a team from Portland State University to use a comprehensive mapping tool to identify urban heat islands. The tool overlays location-specific heat data with information about demographics, air pollution and features such as roads, buildings and trees. The results allowed the group to identify and analyze the city’s hot spots, providing officials with the critical information to focus first on the city’s most vulnerable areas and implement initiatives—such as green walls—in those areas.

Excerpted from the story by Jennifer Carmean for University Relations.

Sculptor Builds Surgical Simulation Model

Sculptor Morgan Yacoe (BFA ’11) integrates arts with medicine.

“In my mind, I don’t see any boundaries between [the two],” she says. “At the end of the day, it’s all about improving patient outcome and helping people.”

Yacoe is collaborating with Dr. Santosh Kale, assistant professor and associate director of the VCU Department of Surgery, and Peter Pidcoe, professor and assistant chair of the VCU Department of Physical Therapy. The three are developing an advanced microsurgical trainer in a multidisciplinary project that has received funding through the VCU Quest Commercialization Fund.

The trainer, an animated surgical simulation model that is all torso, gives surgical trainees the opportunity to practice breast reconstruction. The team hopes the trainer will enhance medical practice.

The concept has been in development for a couple of years, and this project is the first of its kind. The animated model will have realistic properties and blood flow to simulate a true environment. Prior to the breakthrough, practice surgeries would take place on a lab rat or a flimsy table-top model.

“Both sculpture and surgery demand an intimate knowledge of the human anatomy, keen observation and acute, hands-on technical skill,” Yacoe said. “And they are both practiced from a position of empathy.”

Excerpted from the story by Kenan Keranovic for VCU News.
Nonprofit organization CreatiVets collaborated with VCUarts and VCU Office of Military Student Services to help veterans use art to process their war experiences. Seven veterans participated in the partnership’s inaugural course, which took place last June in Richmond.

The participating veterans have struggled with post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury or amputation. During the course, the veterans used creative writing, woodworking, digital media and other art forms to foster self-expression and transform their stories of trauma and struggle. The classes were taught primarily by Craft/Material Studies Adjunct Faculty Alicia Dietz (MFA ’16), who is herself a veteran.

Founded by Marine veteran Richard Casper, CreatiVets began as a series of songwriting sessions in Nashville that helped him cope with PTSD and traumatic brain injury. Working with VCUarts Associate Dean Christina Lindholm and Director of Military Student Services Stephen Ross, Casper was able to successfully launch the program at VCU. The course culminated in an art exhibition at the Depot.

“We owe these veterans; they have put themselves on the line,” says Lindholm. “This program lets them know that they’re not alone. It gives them a whole new avenue to express things they couldn’t necessarily find the words for.”

For Lindholm, the most powerful experience she had with CreatiVets was during a printmaking class taught by Adjunct Instructor Brooke Inman (MFA ’08), when VCUarts students exchanged work with veterans.

“What they were producing had deep-rooted meaning and was really reflective of their experience,” says Lindholm. “And the generous spirit with which the students treated the veterans was affirming to me as someone associated with the School of the Arts.”

Excerpted from the story by Conor Lobb for VCUNews.

Excerpted from the story by Conor Lobb for VCUNews.

Veterans Engage the Healing Power of Art

VCUarts welcomes Chase Westfall as the new curator of Student Exhibitions and Programs at the Anderson, an inclusive exhibition space for student-centric artwork and programming. Westfall’s extensive directorial experience brings new ideas and energy to the Anderson, beginning this fall with three shows scheduled in conjunction with the 7th biennial Hamad bin Khalifa Symposium on Islamic Art.

The exhibitions, which open November 1, include:
- “The Things I Could Tell...,” a sensory installation by artist Wafaa Bilal
- “Mosque Manifesto,” a re-conceptualization of the mosque by artist and architectural historian Azra Akšamija
- “Global Perspectives on Contemporary Muslim Life,” an exhibition of student photography, presented in partnership with the VCU Muslim Student Association and juried by designer and VCUarts Qatar alumna Hadeer Omar (BFA ’10; MFA ’16)

A native of Albany, N.Y., Westfall received his MFA from the University of Georgia in 2011. From 2013 to 2017, he served as the director of Gallery Protocol—a contemporary art space in Gainesville, Fla.—overseeing and managing the Fermenter Residency Program, Superfun! Project Space and Waldo Road Artist Studios.

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Engineering and Arts Students Tackle Design Challenge in Cuba

Fifteen VCUarts and engineering students found themselves immersed in a challenging design environment last summer. It was the university’s first Designing Cuba intensive study abroad workshop, the brainchild of Russell D. Jamison, Alice T. and William H. Goodwin Jr. Chair of Engineering Education. Students explored the concept of design within constraint—using bamboo as an example and the location of newly reopened Cuba as the environment.

Sara Reed, adjunct professor of interior design, led the program with biomedical engineering doctoral student Anisa Kannan. Joining Reed and Kannan were Garreth Blackwell, instructor at the Center for the Creative Economy, and Camden Whitehead, associate professor of interior design.

Students could use the tools available at a bamboo workshop in Havana, owned by artist Gisela Vilaboy and her husband Carlos Martínez Romero, a furniture builder trained as a civil engineer.

“Living with great material scarcity has led them to some solutions that may never have been explored,” says Reed, citing how workers repurposed a car wheel into a tool for making bamboo dowels. “Examples like this illustrate how they have had to purposefully find alternate solutions to construction and building.”

Placed on teams and tasked with identifying design problems in residential and business spaces, students brainstormed possible solutions with the goal of producing a bamboo prototype. To help an ice cream vendor make better use of his small stall, one team designed and built a table with adjustable legs and a façade that held ice cream cones.

Kannan says, learning how to research and look at a problem in a different society “without bringing your assumptions in” is critical in any career that requires creative thinking.

Excerpted from the story by VCU School of Engineering.

Arts Research Institute Launches

Creators are at the heart of thriving societies and VCUarts is making a space for pioneering, arts-rich thinking with the opening of the Arts Research Institute.

“Within the broader context of a research university in an urban setting, the ARI will catalyze interdisciplinary collaborations with schools and departments across VCU,” says Dean Shawn Brixey. “Local, regional and national partners will align with existing efforts to improve well-being or develop artistic excellence. In this way, ARI facilitates public dialogue about the role of artists and designers in society.”

“The Institute is a place where faculty work can be supported and celebrated,” says Arts Research Institute Director Sarah Cunningham, “where surprising and important research outcomes are collected and shared with all of our communities, and where thoughtful coordination can propel innovation and reveal completely new research possibilities.”

The ARI supports faculty research efforts including iCubed (page 3) and Susanna Klein’s efforts to develop a mobile app for musicians (page 4).
In November, 12 of the leading scholars, artists and curators of Islamic art and architecture descend on Richmond as part of the Hamad bin Khalifa Symposium on Islamic Art. Presented by VCUarts, VCUarts Qatar and the Qatar Foundation, this event offers an opportunity for cross-cultural exchange between the campuses and with the public.

This year’s keynote will be delivered by artist Lalla Essaydi, whose work often combines Islamic calligraphy with representations of the female form to address the complex realities of Arab female identity from the perspective of intimate, personal experience. Essaydi’s work is held in a number of museums collections including the Louvre, the British Museum and the Harvard Art Museums.

Essaydi grew up in Morocco, lived in Saudi Arabia and now lives in the U.S. She is a product of Eastern and Western cultures and her work is meant to shed light for both audiences. We asked her a few questions about her work and ideas that she’ll be sharing at the symposium.

**Your work centers on Arab women and sexual stereotypes. What do you see as western misconceptions about Arab women and do you address them in your work?**

Women in the Middle East and the Muslim world in general are seen as oppressed and subjugated, within their own culture. This is why, in working in collaboration with female friends and family members, my photographs emphatically assert the Arab woman's right to self-expression and representation. But it is important for me that my work be undeniably beautiful. While it is received very differently in Western and Arab contexts, its aesthetic is appreciated in both. More critical for me, however, is that the photographs achieve a balance between their political, historical and aesthetic content, as well as make a statement on art. I hope my work will force the viewer to question the universality of their representations.

**Much of your work is a modern play on the odalisque figure of the naked woman reclining, which you’ve likened to a precursor to the veiling of women in the Arab world. What kind of comment are you making about the rights and roles of Arab women?**

My work reaches beyond Islamic culture to invoke the Western fascination, as expressed in painting, with the odalisque, the veil, and, of course, the harem. I want the viewer to become aware of Orientalism as a projection of the sexual fantasies of Western male artists, in other words as a voyeuristic tradition. I think art restores every female lost voice.

Women are presented as passive sexual slaves or as dangerous jezebels, in either case, generally nude, and Arab men as weak, swarthy procurers. I want not simply to expose such distortions, but also to provoke the viewer into a different kind of seeing, so that the projected space of Orientalism must vie with another space, one which shapes a new understanding.

**Your work often features Arabic writing on your subject’s skin, reminiscent of henna. Is it legible? If not, is it symbolic?**

Obviously, calligraphy is a vast subject, as it is the repository of centuries of Arab culture. So inscribed via henna, on the bodies and clothes of women, it becomes part of a very complex expression ... But I do want to stress that I am using calligraphy as an artist, as a medium for personal expression, and the text is written in an abstract, poetic style, one that can reach beyond cultural borders.

**As someone who has lived in both the East and West, you are in a unique position as an artist to reflect on both cultures. What do you think each needs to know about the other?**

As an Arab artist, living in the West, I have been granted an extraordinary perspective from which to observe both cultures, and I have also been imprinted by these cultures. In a sense, I feel I inhabit (and perhaps even embody) a “crossroads,” where the cultures come together—merge, interweave and sometimes clash. As an artist, I am inhabiting not only a geo-cultural terrain, but also an imaginative one. This space continues to define itself, to unfold and evolve, and as an artist, I feel it is my job (and my passion) to try and understand it, and to make work that flows from this continuing investigation.

*By Carrie Culpepper for VCUarts.*
Faculty News

Faculty Excellence Recognized

Each year, VCUarts faculty nominate and select an outstanding peer in the areas of teaching, research, diversity and service. The 2016–17 award recipients are:

Distinguished Achievement in Teaching
Judith Steel
Associate Professor, Dance + Choreography

Distinguished Achievement in Research
Semi Ryu
Associate Professor, Kinetic Imaging

Distinguished Achievement in Diversity
Courtnie Wolfgang
Assistant Professor, Art Education

Distinguished Achievement in Service
Holly Alford
Director of Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity, School of the Arts, and Associate Professor, Fashion Design + Merchandising

Left to Right: Judith Steel, Semi Ryu, Dean Shawn Brixey, Courtnie Wolfgang, Holly Alford and Associate Dean James Frazier. Courtesy of VCUarts.

VCUarts Welcomes New Faculty

Scott Bradley
Assistant Professor
Theatre
MFA, Yale School of Drama

Lap Le
Assistant Professor
Graphic Design
MFA, Cranbrook Academy of Arts

Noah Simblist
Chair and Associate Professor
Painting + Printmaking
MFA, University of Washington
PhD, University of Texas at Austin

Lily Cox-Richard
Assistant Professor
Art Foundation and Sculpture + Extended Media
MFA, Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts

Rudy Lopez
Assistant Professor
Fashion Design + Merchandising
BA, Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts

Lauren Thorson
Assistant Professor
Graphic Design
MFA, Minneapolis College of Art & Design

Nontsikelelo Mutiti
Assistant Professor
Graphic Design
MFA, Yale School of Art

Stephanie Thulin
Assistant Chair and Associate Professor
Kinetic Imaging
MFA, MA, Maryland Institute College of Art

Keith Kirk
Assistant Professor
Theatre
PhD, Northwestern University

Sharon Ott
Chair and Associate Professor
Theatre
MFA, Savannah College of Art and Design

Tobias Wofford
Assistant Professor
Art History
PhD, University of California, Los Angeles

Joshua Rodenberg
Instructor
Kinetic Imaging
MFA, Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts
Introducing Dean Shawn Brixey

Ahead of fall classes, Dean Shawn Brixey was interviewed by Style Weekly’s Brent Baldwin, who asked the new dean about his artistic philosophy and vision for VCUarts.

Brixey was born in Springfield, Mo., to a pair of classically-trained artists—his father, a Broadway actor; his mother, a symphony cellist—who had transitioned to the film and TV industry. As the dean puts it, he was raised on a soundstage. “My parents encoded people’s dreams, their mysteries, their imaginations, their voices, their agency,” he recalls, “into some sort of electromagnetic force that was decoded or reconstructed somewhere else. That really stuck with me.”

Inspired by the hybridization of art and science that fueled film and TV, Brixey decided to pursue an interdisciplinary—and unorthodox—education. In his undergraduate years, the Kansas City Art Institute bussed him and his classmates out to Western Kansas and told them they had 10–12 hours to create a “perfect line” or a “perfect moment.” Moments before the deadline, Brixey hastily made a pond out of a hole in the ground and magnetized a piece of wheat chaff with a darning needle: a rudimentary compass. “When they came back, everyone stared silently at the hole and didn’t say anything. But the professors knew that by building a compass, I had drawn an invisible line that circumscribed the globe 24,000 miles with unerring accuracy ... On top of that, if you understand the compass is interacting with the Earth’s field, it’s a field that in a concrete sense never really is, because it’s always becoming. So, it was also a perfect moment.”

This revelation would prove to be the genesis of Dean Brixey’s entire philosophy as an artist, one that he pursued further as a graduate student at MIT. Over the next 30 years, he blurred the lines between science experiment and art exhibition with mind-boggling sensory experiences. His project Altamira “used the Haystack Observatory radio telescope to send recordings of dying stars straight to people’s brains”—creating an experimental work of art in the “mind’s eye” of the viewer.

At VCUarts, Brixey wants to inspire students to think and act with his same degree of creative daring. He plans to do that by fostering an environment where students’ dreams aren’t just possible to be achieved, but likely.

“One thing we’re really sensitive about at VCU is thinking about students and their first big investment in themselves. Not just a degree, but a preparation for a world of dynamic change, a crucible of every kind of creative option. You want your students to become the world’s leading experts in their own area of practice.”

Read the full interview online: https://tinyurl.com/stylebrixey
Students Get a Boost from Internship Grants

Our students’ best learning experiences aren’t limited to the classroom—internships can often jump-start an entire career. This past summer, VCUarts helped 13 students participate in internships across the U.S., where they did everything from shadow freelance photographers to work in corporate style firms.

Craft/Material Studies senior Wing Hei Cheng headed to Colorado to intern with custom furniture maker Silver Thread Wood Works and Paul Orr Construction. Together, they built a 1,800-square-foot log home. Cheng was tasked with framing, roofing, painting, staining, deck building, flooring, and the installation of windows, doors, cabinets, drywall and trim work.

Fashion Merchandising major Kelly Martin interned with Mara Hoffman, joining the luxury designer’s wholesale team for the busy summer shopping season. Martin helped to set up the New York showroom for visiting buyers, handling sales, data entry and sample filing.

The VCUarts Internship Grant Program provides our students with the extra financial boost they need to say “yes” to their dream internship, helping them to expand their professional experience and grow their network.

MFA Alumni Exhibit in NYC

VCUarts graduates were the stars of two summer exhibitions in Brooklyn, N.Y. Present Company welcomed 15 recent graduates from the Painting + Printmaking MFA program, including Sarah Coote (MFA ’17), director of Richmond’s Bruce Martin Gallery; María Tinaut (MFA ’17), who last year exhibited a solo show in Mexico and a two-person exhibition in Spain; and Will Matheson (MFA ’16), the 2017 artist-in-residence at MASS MoCA. The August–September show “WHATEVERBEING” was curated by Owen Duffy (MA ’13, PhD ’16).

In June, 12 recent Sculpture + Extended Media MFA graduates were featured in “before the foot was purple” at David&Schweitzer Contemporary. Artists included John Orth (MFA ’17), 2017 Dedalus Foundation Fellow; Levester Williams (MFA ’16), 2016–17 U.S. Fulbright Fellow, Johannesburg, South Africa; and Savannah Knoop (MFA ’16), former public persona of author JT LeRoy. “before the foot was purple” was curated by Matt King, chair and associate professor of sculpture at VCUarts.

Says King, “The correspondences between these works, as well as their obvious differences, are reflective of the rigorous, sustained research practice and lively studio dialog that are hallmarks of the Sculpture program. In their variety they demonstrate the vitality of divergent strategies unique to each artist’s individual perspective, while collectively they stand as a timely argument for a rigorous, critical engagement with the physical world.”
Next year will mark a decade since launching the VCUarts Cinema program. As a part of the school’s diverse range of disciplines, Cinema has set itself apart with team projects that call on the individual talents of each student, faculty who work and learn alongside them and a thorough devotion to the craft of filmmaking. Over the years, students and faculty have worked with Steven Spielberg and Kathleen Kennedy, shot on location in Norway and expanded the scope of the program into screenwriting. This year, MovieMaker counted VCUarts Cinema among the top film schools in the U.S. and Canada for outstanding cinematography training.
Alumnus Finds Harmony in Business

A VCUarts degree can lead you to many unexpected and exciting destinations. Alumnus Emerson Hughes (BME '65), included among this year's Alumni Stars, transitioned from music education to owning a luxury pet boarding company.

Ancillary lessons learned through music education training helped prepare Hughes for starting a business and holding top civic leadership positions. After graduation, Hughes taught vocal music at Highland Springs and Henrico high schools in Virginia, served as a church musician and performed in numerous musical productions in Richmond. In 1972, Hughes and his wife, Kathy Hughes (BME '65), opened Holiday Barn Kennels, now known as Holiday Barn Pet Resorts, a venture based on their love for dogs and cats. RPI, and later VCU, was a major source of employees. "We hired [alumni] until they were able to get their music careers launched," he says.

Holiday Barn began simply as a boarding operation in Glen Allen and Midlothian, Virginia. Its facilities and offerings grew to meet an increasing demand for luxury pet services with amenities ranging from an in-ground swimming pool for pups to cat condominiums. In 2004, Emerson turned the day-to-day operations over to his son, Michael.

Hughes and his wife have supported the VCU music department as a singer and an accompanist, respectively, and with philanthropic support throughout their lives. Their daughter, Bekah Hughes Davis (BM '95), is a graduate of the department’s voice program. In addition, Hughes has served on the Essex Bank board of directors, is chairman emeritus of the Richmond SPCA, was president of the James River Opera Association and served as president of the Tappahannock Chamber of Commerce.

"Education and experience in music will lead to paths that you do not expect," he says. "Musicians never perform alone." Hughes has learned that you can apply harmony to any walk of life—even a pet resort: "If there is harmony, all employees and customers will be successful."

Virginia Commonwealth University confers the title of Alumni Star upon graduates who have attained notable achievements.

Teamwork Makes the Dream Work

Graduating from the Craft/Material Studies department in 2007, artists and now husband-and-wife team Erin and Grant Garmezy have collaborated in and out of the studio. Since establishing Gar mezey Glass in 2011, the couple has lectured, demonstrated and taught glassblowing in Turkey, South Korea, Japan, Scotland and throughout the United States.

In 2015, Grant was named one of the 10 most successful graduates of the last decade by VCU. In 2016, their collaborative piece Desert Blossom was featured on the cover of Glass Art Magazine. In 2018, the pair are scheduled to demonstrate in Valencia, Spain, teach at Pilchuck Glass School and debut a new series of work in Manhattan.

Says Erin, the director of admissions at VCUarts, "VCUarts not only taught us how to work with an incredibly difficult medium, but also how to express ideas confidently and thoughtfully. To us, the life of an artist means travel, adventure, excitement, and best of all—working with your best friend."
Maryam Yousuf Al-Homaid (BFA '10, MFA '14) is an interdisciplinary designer and assistant professor in Graphic Design at VCUarts Qatar. She is co-curator of the recent 20/20/20 alumni exhibition in the Gallery at VCUarts Qatar, pictured above, which celebrates two decades of art and design excellence since the branch campus was established.

Photos courtesy of VCUarts Qatar.

Disparity, pictured above, a 2016 work choreographed by Courtney Darlington (BFA '17), was selected to be performed at Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival in Becket, Mass. this summer. Darlington's piece was chosen as part of the American College Dance Association Performance Highlights program in the Pillow's Inside/Out series.

Photo courtesy of Jacob’s Pillow.

Ameorry Luo (BFA '16) is a concept artist at Skydance Interactive, a Los Angeles-based game developer and publisher known for its virtual reality title Archangel, released this year for Playstation 4 VR and PC. Luo first began working for Skydance as an intern in 2016, where she was responsible for the concept designs of characters and props, in-game illustrations, texture painting and assisting with interface design.

After graduating from the Kinetic Imaging program, Corey Grunewald (BFA '12) worked with Vimeo as an Application Engineer in New York for over a year. In 2014, he took on the role of Senior User Interface Engineer at Netflix, where his team has since won a Technology and Engineering Emmy award for innovations on image-based subtitle rendering for languages with complex characters.

After receiving her BFA from the VCUarts Graphic Design department, Stephanie O’Dell (BFA ’09, MAE ’16) worked as a Senior Designer at creative services company J H I, and also established a successful graphic design freelance business specializing in high-end invitations and branding. After five years in the field, she decided it was time to reimagine her future and returned to VCUarts for her master’s degree. O’Dell has taught summer youth classes at the VMFA since 2014, and, this fall, began teaching art full-time at Carver Elementary in Richmond.

Photo courtesy of Jampim Wolf Photography.

Becca Schwartz (BFA ’17) has been featured in eight exhibitions in 2017 at venues located in Richmond, Va.; Ventura, Ca.; South Korea; and Doha, Qatar. She was one of 15 recipients of the 2017 VSA Emerging Young Artists Program award, which includes a $2,000 prize. As a featured artist, Schwartz’s work Binghamton 2 will be included in a nationally travelling exhibition for up to two years.

Photo: Janpim Wolf Photography.
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 804-827-4676.

September 2017

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

Campaign Giving by Donor Group

Alumni
$8.7 million  
Friends
$6.1 million  
Corporations + Foundations
$1.3 million
Travel to Support Student Scholarships

Next spring, VCUarts students will again travel with Painting + Printmaking Professor Javier Tapia to his home country for a set of study abroad classes known as VCU in PERU—but this time, donors are invited to participate in the travel opportunity. Whether students, faculty or donors, Tapia says Peru offers a unique and rewarding experience for everyone. "Peru is great for experiencing life in a different way," he says. "That feeds something in me, and I think for other people it might too." A portion of donors' program fees will go directly toward VCUarts student travel scholarships. For more information about participating in the 2018 donor trip, please contact Julia Carr, Executive Director of Development at carrj@vcu.edu or 804-827-4676.

Donors Pledge Trombone Scholarship

Anonymous donors have left their estate to the VCU Foundation to fund Trombone Scholarships for the Jazz Studies program. The $700,000 gift is the third-largest ever pledged to Music’s Jazz program.

"The VCU Jazz community is fortunate to have such generous and kind folks as these," says Director of Jazz Studies Antonio García. "We are grateful to these donors for extending their love of the arts to become such tangible support for our VCU Jazz students."

The donation's potential benefit to VCUarts students is enormous: an endowment of this sum can cover a year's tuition for one music major or fund partial scholarships for even more students. As ardent lovers of jazz, the donors hope that their gift will encourage others to support the VCUarts Jazz program.

Alumnus Paves Way for Young Entrepreneurs

Two years after graduating from what was then the Department of Communication Arts + Design, Jim Gregory (BFA ’71) put his education toward founding his own company in New York. Over 40 years, what began as a small advertising agency became a renowned branding consultation firm, garnering heavyweight clients such as MasterCard, Toshiba, Cisco Systems and AT&T. Gregory’s company would go on to develop the CoreBrand Index™, a tool for measuring brand value watched closely by major corporations around the world.

Founding a company in the financial center of the world was a risky proposition for a 23-year-old. "I used to laugh and say I had more guts than brains to do something like that," he says. But Gregory believes it was the support of VCUarts that emboldened him as a young entrepreneur, and he’s returned to his alma mater to ensure that system of encouragement stays strong for students today.

Beginning next year, thanks to a generous gift from Gregory, students enrolled in the “Creative Disruption” class at the Center for the Creative Economy will be eligible for the James R. Gregory Prize for Creative Entrepreneurship. The $5,000 prize will be awarded annually to a winning student proposal at the end of the spring semester, judged by a panel of experienced entrepreneurs.

The “Creative Disruption” class begins in spring 2018 as part of the Creative Entrepreneurship certificate program, and will be taught by program director Matt Woolman (MFA ’95).

“We are honored to partner with Jim and the Gregory family to provide the James R. Gregory Prize for Creative Entrepreneurship,” says Woolman. “This will inspire countless students to follow their passions, raise the profile of the Center for the Creative Economy, and encourage our alumni entrepreneurs to become involved with the great work we are doing. We are most thankful to the Gregory family.”

Gregory wants to build excitement around the highly-ranked creative excellence of VCUarts, and believes that an opportunity for students to develop and shop business ideas with their peers is a great way to instill confidence in emerging artists.
Welcome Incoming Class of 2021

670 new undergraduate students joined us in fall 2017.

some cool things they’ve already accomplished:
• campaigned to raise money to fight breast cancer
• participated in community theater
• developed an illustrated comic booklet to help Kenyan girls avoid gender-based violence
• distributed food to the homeless in Granada, Spain
• won an outstanding performer award at the UNC Duke Ellington Jazz Festival
• supported their town’s Public Arts Commission
• created a short film for the TriBeCa Film Festival
• served as President of the National Art Honor Society
• won two gold medals in ice dance
• participated in Outside Leadership, which brings together girls from different socioeconomic backgrounds to break down racial barriers and promote cross-cultural understanding

Diversity of Students

41% of American students are people of color
5.7% of students are international

Female 71%  Male 29%

American students come from 26 states.
International students come from China, South Korea, Mexico, Poland, Cambodia and the Philippines.

Average SAT Score (for reading and math combined): 1170
Average ACT Score: 26
Average high school GPA: 3.68