Dear friends and colleagues:

Welcome to the 20th anniversary edition of Context magazine, Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts in Qatar’s annual report. This special edition covers the past two years and is bursting with evidence of the diversity and value of our impact on Qatar and the region.

This year, VCUArts Qatar is celebrating a fruitful 20-year alliance between VCU and Qatar Foundation, underscoring the commitment of each institution to excellence, inquiry, discovery and innovation in a global setting.

For two decades, the Qatar campus of VCUArts has been a regional leader in cultivating the arts, igniting imagination and shaping the future. In support of the global aims of VCU, the relationship between VCUArts and VCUArts Qatar has grown into an exciting, collaborative conversation focused around art, design, culture, identity and community.

Art and design have always been an important aspect of our culture, but the opportunities available to trained artists and designers today are unprecedented. Art and design training provides access to careers in visual arts and creative fields, heritage preservation, culture, digital design and media industries, sectors that contribute value to communities, economies and advancement of the human race. Today, creatives are crossing disciplines and turning things upside-down with the goal of solving problems affecting the human race.

At VCUArts Qatar, we are giving our students the skills they need to become the world’s leading experts in their own areas of practice, as we continue to expand those areas to include other disciplines. We are not just providing our students with a degree, we are preparing them for a world of dynamic changes and limitless possibilities.

None of our achievements would have been possible without the passion, partnership-building and loyal student service from our faculty and staff. VCUArts Qatar is an institution built on the ideas and service of many different people such as artists, designers, historians, mathematicians, scientists, writers and administrators, and it is thanks to their service that we have the important outcomes you will find in these pages.
In loving memory of Dina Bangdel, Ph.D.

VCUarts Qatar mourns the loss of our beloved Director of Art History, Dina Bangdel, Ph.D., who passed away on July 25, 2017.

Bangdel was an acclaimed Nepali artist, a loving wife, a mother and friend. Her dedicated and affectionate spirit was an inspiration to all of us. We will continue to hold her in our hearts and value her immense and varied contributions to the educational mission of VCU and VCUarts Qatar.

A valued member of the faculty of both campuses, Bangdel began her work at Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts – Richmond in 2006 as an assistant professor of Art History. After earning tenure and the rank of associate professor, she became director of the Art History program at VCUarts Qatar when it first opened in 2012. Her thoughtful and visionary leadership successfully launched the program, making it one of the most enrolled majors at VCUarts Qatar.

Bangdel taught courses on the art and architecture of South Asia, visual cultures of Tibet and Nepal, contemporary arts of South Asia and South Asian film. She was the daughter of Lain Singh Bangdel, a prominent Nepali artist, but her identity as an art historian was her own.

Widely recognized for her expertise as an historian of South Asian and Himalayan art, she also wrote and researched on the topic of gender and identity in South Asian contemporary art and film. Her interests in the early modern period focused on the ritual and ideological functions of Buddhist art in South Asia, including the theories of ritual performance and the politics of identity.

She curated several exhibitions such as “Circle of Bliss: Buddhist Meditational Art” at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 2005, which was recognized as a finalist for the Alfred Barr Award for best exhibition catalogue. She also curated “Pilgrimages and Path: Buddhist, Christianity and Islam” in 2010 at the Rubin Museum in New York and “Prakriti Speaks: Contemporary Nepali Art” in Mumbai in 2011. Bangdel was survived by her husband and two sons and will be sorely missed by all who knew her.

We extend our deepest sympathies, condolences and thoughts to all of her family members.
Shining out in the dead of winter from the beating heart of a historical city, works of art from 18 VCUarts Qatar faculty members, alumni and students dominated the imposing Kraftwerk Berlin building for the "Contemporary Art Qatar" exhibition which took place from December 2017 to January 2018.

Inside the cavernous 7,500 square meter exhibition space reclaimed from a power station, alumna Emelina Soares (’15) elaborate, full-size sand carpet laid the literal foundation for a vibrant exploration of contemporary art made in Qatar. Soares’ Qatar Museums-commissioned work “Shifting Identities” used naturally fermented dyes from India to color the sand used for intricate rug patterns, invoking her Indian and Portuguese heritage and her upbringing in the Middle East.

Collectively making up 25 percent of all the artwork displayed, the works by VCUarts Qatar’s artists were an integral part of this largest ever showcase of contemporary arts from Qatar. The exhibition was presented by Qatar Museums (QM) as the finale of the Qatar Germany 2017 Year of Culture program. The strong showing of VCUarts Qatar-affiliated work elevated the university’s brand and highlighted the pivotal role VCUarts Qatar is playing in cultural development in Qatar.

The exhibition aimed to allow artists living in Qatar to share their stories and reflect on their lives in Qatar’s ever-changing and growing environment. Aisha Al-Sowaidi (’13), whose work examines concepts of home and memory, was interviewed about her work in the exhibition by Wallpaper* magazine, where she explained how her work stems from her experience of Doha.

“Due to constant change in the city, the feeling of belonging might not be the easiest. I try to evoke the past, whether it’s via aesthetics or behavior, in our daily practices, by redesigning some objects.” She goes on to say, “The exhibition is a reflection of raising concepts in society. It’s about change, identity and culture. Maybe it’s because of the ongoing change in the city of Doha, or perhaps it’s the bigger impact of globalization.”
Al-Sowaidi was not the only artist given wide media coverage. The exhibition was featured in all local news outlets as well as international news outlets such as ArtNet News, The Art Newspaper, The Guardian (which featured Soares at work), Le Monde, The World Around Us, Art is About and German TV channel ZDF among others.

Faculty members’ work on display included: Rachel Leah Cohn’s “Searching for Fata Morgana,” Nathan Davis’ experimental print project “water with water,” Simone Muscolino’s “Moving Postcards,” Maryam Al-Homaidi’s “Replaced,” Zach Stensen’s “Picture Craft,” “Arrakis” and “Second Moon” and Richard Blackwell’s “Perforated Facade,” “MAF1” and “Compound.”

MFA in Design alumni Othman Khunji (’15) showed his work “Religious Vanity,” Neema Khodier (’16) displayed her MFA thesis outcome titled, “KANUD” and Aisha Al-Sowaidi (’13) exhibited “Domestic Midihian 03.” Painting + Printmaking alumni Hans Al-Stadl (’15) showcased a sculpture of a ballerina wearing an abaya, interrogating the viewer’s gaze. Rohina Al Nasser (’15) and Ahmed Al Jufairi (’14) also had their work on display.

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—Aisha Al-Sowaidi
MFA in Design ’13

أما أيضاً، الهيئة الدراسية والذين عرضت أعمالهم في المعرض: راتشل كوهي و نايثن ديفيس ومشروع الطباعة "Searching for Fata Morgana"، "Moving Postcards"، "Arrakis" و "Second Moon" و هيروما أميدا و "Perforated Facade"، "MAF1" و "Compound".

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Students currently enrolled in the MFA in Design program also had a chance to show their work. Nourbanu Hijazi (’18), Norah Al-Shammari (’18), Hanem Asif (’18), Noora Melhim (’19), and Hidra Zuhairi (’18) presented “Kalimat,” the outcome of the “Visual Communication” course led by Nathan Davis and Simone Muscolino. Qatar’s Year of Culture initiatives encourage the people of Qatar and partner countries to discover their cultural similarities as well as to explore their differences and engage in mutual dialogue. This exciting exhibition made it clear that when it comes to cultural ambassadorship, VCUarts Qatar is cultivating makers and thinkers that have an important impact on the perception of Qatar in the world.

Left to right
01 Richard Blackwell "MAF1"
02 Emelina Soares "Shifting Identities"
For two days in the spring of 2017, artists, university students, parents, children and community members filled VCUarts Qatar’s Safir Hall. Some chatted away while manually putting colored pegs in holes, contributing to one of the largest pegelated art installations in the world, while others had tintype photographs taken and a few watched clay 3D printing or played with virtual reality headsets.

Simultaneously, in the Atrium, famous artists, designers and thinkers from across the globe, took turns discussing topics around the theme of “Analogue Living in a Digital World.” Political cartoonist Khalid Albaih, “The Internet is not the Answer” author Andrew Keen, architect Carlo Ratti, University of Maryland art professor Hasan Kahn, fashion technology innovator Anouk Wipprecht, representatives from The Foundland art, design and research collective, Kuwaiti artist Monira Al Qadiri, designer entrepreneur Marquise Stillwell and Qatari American artist Sophia Al-Maria in conversation with Tina Kukielski, the director of the contemporary art and artist series Art21 took to the stage. Representatives from the Penumbra Foundation, The Constitute/Goethe Institute and MoB+Storefront also spoke.

This convivial atmosphere was part of VCUarts Qatar’s biennial Tasmeem Doha conference on the theme “Analogue Living in a Digital World.” Held in collaboration with the Richmond campus, the conference focuses on unique and contemporary themes in art and design, and, as the largest art and design conferences in the region, puts Qatar at the forefront of cutting-edge discussions and demonstrations in the field of art and design.

Tasmeem is a chance to celebrate our passion for art and design and to share our knowledge with each other, helping foster future partnerships and collaborations throughout Qatar, the region and beyond. —Michael Perrone
The continued success of the conference has led to far-reaching implications - both within the localized context and outside the region. According to VCUarts Qatar Assistant Professor Michael Perrone, who served as one of the co-chairs for the 2017 conference, “The biggest impact of Tasmeem is to bring the community together.” He went on to explain how community could be defined, “The community could be the VCUarts Qatar community, the Education City community, the larger Doha community or the international community of artists and designers.” According to Perrone, “Tasmeem is a chance to celebrate our passion for art and design and to share our knowledge with each other, helping to foster future partnerships and collaborations throughout Qatar, the region and beyond.”

Passing the torch: Alumni lead 10th Tasmeem Doha 2019

Since its inception in 2004, Tasmeem Doha has been planned and led by professors who developed the best theme proposal, but for the 10th conference in 2019, the winning conference proposal came from a VCUarts Qatar alumnae team comprising of Noha Fouad, Hadeer Omar, Wajiha Pervez and Yasmeen Suleiman. The alumni have taken over full control of planning and chairing the event, a testament to how VCUarts Qatar fosters the development of local capacity to support the art and design infrastructure.
“Hekayat” (or “Stories” in English) was introduced to the student body at VCUarts Qatar, recent graduates of the programs and their unique cultural upbringing spanning Egypt, Palestine, Jordan, Canada, Qatar and other countries, by a unique voice that speaks intimately to the future of contemporary art and design in the region.

Conference programs and activities
Since Tasmeem 2019 was awarded to the alumni team in February 2018, they have been consumed with the planning of the event, as well as the organization of various supporting activities. The theme “Hokayat” (or “Stories” in English) was introduced to the student body in a kick-off event in March 2018. This was followed by an introduction to the “Tasmeem in the Classroom” program where faculty were encouraged to embed the theme into their various projects and syllabi for the fall semester. The classroom projects outcomes will then be showcased at the event itself, giving students international exposure for their work.

Over the summer the co-chairs launched a Tasmeem Internship Program resulting in seven VCUarts Qatar students engaging in the planning and branding of the conference. The team of co-chairs is also devising a framework for a program they are debuting at the conference called “Next Joel” (or “Next Generation”). “The aim of the initiative is to extend the opportunity to students to be proactive by heading a workshop themselves and thus encouraging them to lead rather than follow,” says Co-chair Suleiman. “It’s an opportunity for them to value, develop and share their skills.”

“Tasmeem Doha 2019: Hokayat” will be a three-day event running from March 13-15, 2019. The first two days of the event will feature keynote speakers, a variety of talks, workshops and exhibitions, and installations including displays of student and faculty work, created in the semesters prior to the event, will be on view throughout the venue as well. The final day will be an Open Day and will allow workshop participants to show their work and to see the output of other sessions. The effort to connect to the local audience is a key feature of this conference iteration. As Co-chair Pervez points out, “There are many ways in which Tasmeem 2019 will differ from previous editions. Perhaps the most fundamental way is the theme, which offers diversity, inclusiveness and relatability.”

The conference, which will take place from March 13-15, 2019, aims to expand not only beyond the boundaries of design, but literally beyond the walls of VCUarts Qatar by utilizing various venues around Qatar.

Their leadership also heralds a more nuanced treatment of local content at the event. The co-chairs’ perspective as employees of VCUarts Qatar, recent graduates of the programs and their unique cultural upbringing spanning Egypt, Palestine, Jordan, Canada, Qatar and other countries, gives them a unique voice that speaks intimately to the future of contemporary art and design in the region.

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The opening address was given by Her Excellency Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad Al Thani, who told the attendees, “Contemporary Islamic art derives much of its power from its ability to give voice to a large section of the world population by being contemporaneous in form and Islamic in character.”

She said, “Some of its practitioners draw their inspiration from the past, referencing great Islamic civilizations through contemporary art ids not pertinent to any specific region or artistic practice, but relevant to their experiences and expressing their worldview.”

The keynote address titled “Gender, Power and Tradition” was given by Lalla Essaydi. Her work, which often combines Islamic calligraphy with representations of the female form, addresses the complex reality of the Arab female identity from a unique perspective of personal experience. In much of her work, she returns to her Moroccan girlhood, looking back on it as an adult woman caught somewhere between past and present, exploring the language in which to speak from this uncertain space.

Other speakers at the Symposium included Venetia Porter, assistant curator of Islamic and Contemporary Middle East Art at the British Museum; Pakistani-American artist Shahzia Sikander, who is best known for contemporizing the traditional Indo-Persian discipline of miniature painting; Linda Komaroff: curator of Islamic Art and Art of the Middle East department head at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Newsha Tavakolian, a photojournalist and documentary photographer from Iran who in 2015 was nominated to join the legendary photo agency Magnum Photos; and British-Moroccan photographer Hassan Hajjaj who hosted a conversation with Art Historian Alice Handel called “Huwa Wahad: On Finding Inspiration in a Community of Nomads.”

In an interview with Style Magazine, Co-chairs Sheila Blair, Ph.D., and Jonathan Bloom, Ph.D., pointed out that, “Many Americans today have come to associate Islam with terrorism and war, but the Hamad bin Khalifa symposia are designed to showcase the long traditions of art and culture in the Muslim world. The 2017 event focuses on the artistic relationships between the past, the present and the future, bringing together museum curators, collectors, artists and academics. As always, the symposia will make the latest research accessible to the broadest possible audience, ranging from specialized students and scholars to the general public.”

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Students from VCUarts Qatar attended the symposium while in Richmond for the Qatar Day event on the home campus. While at the symposium, they met with Her Excellency Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani.

Several VCUarts Qatar Art History students and alumni also had the honor of introducing symposium speakers such as Hajjaj, Porter, Sikander and Komaroff, as well as Stefano Carboni, the director and CEO of the Art Gallery of Western Australia. This opportunity highlights an aim of the conference to train the next generation of scholars in the field.

The Symposium traces its roots to 2004, and until 2017, was organized by Blair and Bloom, the shared holders of the Hamad bin Khalifa Endowed Chair in Islamic Art at VCU. The ninth biennial symposium will be held in Doha in November of 2019, and for the first time, is being planned collaboratively between the VCUarts Qatar and VCUarts Departments of Art History. The planning committee includes Margaret Lindauer from VCU, and Sean Roberts, Jochen Sokoly and Rafida Dalal from VCUarts Qatar. The central role that VCUarts Qatar is playing in the planning process represents a significant opportunity to increase the visibility of its students and faculty.

Over the years the symposia have attracted over 2,200 attendees from every continent and hosted over 70 speakers, including leading scholars, curators and practitioners of Islamic art. Through the Hamad bin Khalifa Islamic Art Fellowship Program offering paid travel expenses, over 60 Islamic art and culture emerging scholars and senior scholars of diverse backgrounds were able to attend these conferences.

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In early April 2018, leading experts in art history, archaeology, curatorial studies and museum education converged on VCUarts Qatar for a symposium on “Training Art Curators in the 21st Century.” Participants discussed innovations in bridging the academic and the practical when preparing a new generation of art curators.

“Given its rapidly growing museum culture, Qatar’s institutions require professionals with a general knowledge of art, in terms of both historical content and methods, as well as cutting-edge skills in museum practice,” said Assistant Professor Radha Dalal, Ph.D., from VCUarts Qatar’s Art History program. Speakers included Charlotte Klonk, Ph.D., professor of Art History and New Media at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Shaika Nasir Al-Nassr, deputy director of Curatorial Affairs at the Museum of Islamic Arts for Qatar Museums; Margaret A. Lindauer, Ph.D., chair of Art History at VCU; Craig Barker, Ph.D., manager of Education and Public Programs at Sydney Museums; Priya Maholay-Jaradi, assistant director at the Fire Station, amongst others.

Attendees and panelists discussed subjects such as why art history matters, museum fellowships, becoming an art curator, engaging students with archaeological collections in museums and institutional design perspectives.

NPRP-Funded research

The symposium was the final outcome of a National Priorities Research Program (NPRP) grant to conduct a comprehensive multi-national investigation of museums and their relationships with local colleges and universities to apply this information to develop new educational opportunities in Qatar.

Two themes underlay this research, first, that Qatar’s museums emphasize interconnectedness to the world from the perspective of the Gulf region, and second, that Qatar’s museums are well-positioned to assume prominence in the broader disciplines of art history and museum studies. In order for this to happen, it would be optimal if the Qataris who will staff those institutions in the future are at the forefront of art historical inquiry and museum pedagogy. This NPRP project therefore focused on art history and museology to support the building of human capital in Qatar through the design and implementation of related educational resources.
Best practices and benchmarking research

The project began in 2015 under the leadership of then Director of Art History, Dina Bangdel, Ph.D., with a massive multinational study of the best practices in professional training and education, which was used as a basis for a benchmarking study. The study aimed to identify strategies for training in art history and museum studies that could build upon existing resources in Education City – VCUarts Qatar and University College London Qatar (UCL Qatar) – to enhance Qatar’s human capacity in the cultural sector.

Open access learning platform

Informed by this benchmarking, the research team then moved into the development of open access learning resources for use in the continuing education of Qatar’s current museum professionals and art history students, interested members of the Qatar’s public, and by extension, to a larger global forum. The research led to a white paper in 2016, detailing recommendations for the development of a regional hub for museum studies and art history training in Qatar. In early 2017, Bangdel fell ill and passed away that summer. Under those unfortunate circumstances, Radha Dalal, Ph.D, also of the VCUarts Qatar art history program, accepted the leadership of the project and saw it through to its successful conclusion in the spring of 2018.

Within the larger context of the NPRP project, one of the goals was to develop and test a new website that could provide relevant and comprehensive information for students in art history and in museology. Dalal was successful in bringing the website set in motion by her predecessor to a state of completion ready for beta testing with a group of students.

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Faculty, students and alumni from VCUarts Qatar's interior design program used their skills and knowledge to help Syrian refugees at camps on the island of Lesvos in Greece.

The project began in 2016 when Assistant Professor Maja Kinnemark took her interior design students to Stockholm in Sweden to meet with the designers behind the award-winning refugee housing called Better Shelter that has been developed with the support of the IKEA Foundation, and is now being used all over the world in areas of crisis.

"Better Shelter is a cost-effective structure that provides more dignified housing than a tent," Kinnemark explained. "It’s not great because nothing is great about the situation for refugees, but at least it’s better than a tent and it’s cheaper and more sustainable than a cabin. There is, for example, a proper door which you can close behind you to give a sense of privacy in a busy camp, and good sturdy walls that provide a bit of safety."

The students and faculty began working with representatives from Better Shelter and a team of behavioral scientists, material engineers and local architects who were already on-site at the Kara Tepe refugee camp in Lesvos, Greece, to use innovative design ideas and new technologies to improve the housing situation for all those who were caught in limbo on their journey to Europe from war-torn parts of Syria. The island of Lesvos had at that point received more than 750,000 people in transit and many of them were stuck on the island.

After a careful field study on the use of space in the refugee camp, the team (which included faculty, staff and students from VCUarts Qatar) learned that there was a lack of privacy and shade for the people living there, and those fundamental human necessities were forcing people to build their own ad hoc shading and demarcation.
The team selected a new way to improve the functionality of the layout of the camp by designing a small device in effect a screw-mounted circular hook that fits firmly onto the existing bolts of the Better Shelter buildings and allows shading awnings and partitions to be mounted easily, both inside and outside. It helped to reduce the fire risk and with the use of certain materials (like tarpaulins or timber partitions), could create areas of privacy, an important consideration for families.

It may appear insignificant at first glance, but the team insists that even something as innocuous as a tiny, 3D-printed hook can make a significant difference to the lives of refugees who have experienced the trauma of war, having to leave home and embark on a dangerous journey in search of asylum, they admit that life in a refugee camp is tough. The problem now is that the temporary camps are becoming permanent. People shouldn’t have to live like that. Kids shouldn’t grow up there.
The opening reception was preceded by a panel discussion on humanitarian, social innovation and the empowerment of refugees with panelists Ameena A. Hussain, director of Programs and Community Development at the World Innovation Summit for Education; Marion Desmurger, the senior program assistant, Communication and Information Sector of UNESCO’s Regional Office in Doha and the UNESCO representative in the Arab States of the Gulf and Yemen; Mahmoud Elhoss from Qatar Red Crescent and Anwar Abdulbaki, ICT for Education manager at Reach Out To Asia. The panel was moderated by Papadopoulos, a humanitarian innovator and the founder of LATRA.

Kinnemark is grateful for the support for this work from VCUarts Qatar, saying “VCUarts Qatar has been very supportive of our engagement in Greece. In 2017, we exhibited at the Gallery at VCUarts Qatar on the theme of displacement and shelter in which we brought a Better Shelter structure to Doha for our students to study and learn from.” This latest exhibit and panel discussion built on the earlier work and cemented the position of VCUarts Qatar as a regional hub for dialogue and research on humanitarian design solutions.

To learn more about this innovative humanitarian project and its goals, please visit latra.gr and corerelief.org.

“It takes a passionate and committed team or individual to not only look at the big picture, which is usually the surface of the problem, but to regard the minor details. That’s how we went about designing solutions at the refugee camps. We decided to focus on the ‘insignificant’ elements which lead to a quite significant solution.”

–Theekshani Perera
BFA Interior Design ’16

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RESEARCH IN CONTEXT

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Associate Professor Nathan Ross Davis first moved to Doha to teach surface research at VCUarts Qatar’s Art Foundation Department in 2013. As a graphic designer by trade, Davis found himself in an unfamiliar environment with a different language, culture and traditions. He immediately noticed the differences between Doha’s design culture, and the one in which he was trained, and he spotted opportunities for new creative directions.

“Coming from the States, with a particular West Coast American design background and being confronted with a very different design ideology and a different frame of reference, I noticed right away that there’s an immediacy with the way design happens here.”

In response to his new surroundings, Davis decided to address the differences he saw between cultural contexts by finding ways to mesh his West Coast American design ideology into the local visual culture. “I was interested in exploring print publications as a way of cultivating graphic culture. I’m looking around, and there are some things that I want to see, and I don’t see, and so I decided that I should go ahead and try to make some of it,” he says.

Davis began his ongoing project ‘water with water’ (w/w/w) in 2016 as an experimental publishing project with support from VCUarts Qatar. By exploring a range of speculative visual forms, Davis’s work sits at the intersections of Gulf culture and contemporary art and design. The name “water with water” comes from the Arabic phrase ماء بالماء, which means “explaining water with water.” An Arabic colloquialism, the phrase is sometimes used when a person attempts to explain something with itself. The name implies that the project is both self-referential and acts as its own explanation.

"Life's too short to do the same thing twice," Davis says. "And I think it's important to try and be creative and explore new ideas."Davis’s work has been featured in numerous exhibitions and publications around the world, including the Venice Biennale, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Museum of Modern Art in New York. He is currently working on a new project that will be exhibited at the Louvre Abu Dhabi in 2021.

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Although w/w/w publications have been grant-funded by VCUarts Qatar and Qatar Foundation, Davis states that it is independent from any particular institution. For it to work as intended, it must remain that way. “w/w/w was designed to make a space for non-commercial, non-client driven design work that can contribute to an independent creative culture in Doha.”

Davis goes on to say that his work is “non-academic, in a traditional sense. It’s not necessarily about assessing the state of the literature and adding to the literature; it is about the state of the culture, specifically adding to the culture, and expanding the possibilities in cultural spaces that exist here in Doha.”

Seated on one of his first projects at VCUarts Qatar, a funky, purple-colored majlis couch, Davis’ point could not be clearer. As a self-described minimalist, his experiences in the Middle East, and expat life in Doha have clearly impacted his Western roots and neo-modern design ideology. Moving from the United States to Qatar has undoubtedly had an impact on Davis’ design ideology and the way he goes about making. Like many of the expat designers who work at VCUarts Qatar, working in a new context has influenced how he teaches, thinks and creates. However, making just for the sake of making is not the aim of this project. At its heart, w/w/w is a more personal, experiential view of a particular time and place in an evolving visual culture, with the goal of sharing that with others outside of the region.

Since its inception, Professor Davis and his student assistant, Sarah Elawad (a senior in the Graphic Design Department at VCUarts Qatar) have taken the w/w/w project to a number of curated book fairs around the world. Namely, the “I Never Read” artist book fair, during the Art Basel fair in Switzerland (2017), the “Artist Book in China” art book fair at the Minsheng 21st Century Art Museum in Shanghai (2017), the “Miss Read” Berlin art book fair in Berlin (2018), and the “Printed Matter” art fair in New York (2018). As Davis puts it, “This show has been a great learning experience, a gift from Qatar to the rest of the world.”
museum, can depict a scene in the form of a living album, and can be used to

In the future, Davis would like to bring the w/w/w project to more places to keep the dialogue going. “I like the idea that something so foreign and exotic and from far away can be brought to other places, including the States. It shows a totally different, more positive image of the culture that goes against the stereotypes in the media. I don’t know how they’ll react.” According to Davis, that’s exactly the point. It’s meant to be inspiring, but it’s also a catalyst, designed to further international dialogue about the region. He believes that getting recognition from Europe, China and the United States lends legitimacy to the project and its goals.
Egypt’s urban calligraphic culture explored in new book

Associate Professor of Graphic Design Basma Hamdy’s new book “Khatt: Egypt’s Calligraphic Landscape” (Saqi Books, 2018) delves into the public expressions of calligraphic script “khatt” ranging from casual scrawls and scribbles to the elaborately painted colorful murals that are found in Egypt’s cities. Hamdy’s extensive visual documentation of these records of human expressions of hope, fears, dreams and anxieties was made possible in part thanks to a faculty subvention grant received in 2017. Co-edited with Noha Zayed, this timely volume records the traditional craftsmanship of hand-painted calligraphy, in decline because of the digitization of the Arabic script.


MFA course encourages research on art and the environment in region

In fall 2016, second year MFA in Design students gathered for a newly offered seminar and studio course titled “ARTS 591: Eco-Arts in the MENASA Region.” Designed and taught by Fleming Jeffries, interim director of Painting + Printmaking (PAPR), the course explored environmental activism and discourse relevant to artists and designers living and working in the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia (MENASA) region.

The course drew parallels from a concurrent exhibition at the Sursock Museum in Beirut, “Let’s Talk About the Weather: Art and Ecology in a Time of Crisis,” curated by Natasˇa Petresˇin-Bachelez and Nora Razan. This exhibition featured work by 17 local and international artists including Qatari artist Sophia Al-Maria and Kuwaiti artist Monira Al Adim, and provided a platform for artists to explore provocative environmental topics such as corruption, neoliberalism and resources, waste and pollution, extinction and the rights of nature. An accompanying collection of essays, “Elements for a World,” edited by Berlin-based artist, writer and curator Ashkan Sepahvand, provided a reader for the course.

The course began with micro-assignments to introduce a range of topics. “Shop Drop” invited participants to break up routine through public interventions. Wajiha Pervez offered a free workshop on making shoes from discarded packaging and trash at VCUarts Qatar’s Atrium, and Mona Makhlouf installed a chandelier of key tags in the front entrance of the university, exploiting subtle wind-blown sounds to recall memories of place and time. In another micro-assignment, students re-framed an existing key word chart to include topics that were regionally important.

In November, Sepahvand visited Doha and led a two day Anthropocene workshop, “Post-Human Forays in the Neo-Desert.” MFA students, along with the PAPR junior class moved from the classroom to the desert to create and perform acts of speculative fiction, in which the desert emerged as a character.

The MFA students each produced a final project focusing on topics integral to their MFA theses, incorporating human, social, political and industrial ecologies. Pervez further developed her eco-footwear concept to incorporate recycled denim and paper pulp, aimed at reducing waste in the hospitality sector. Elizabeth Ju focused on the disruption of local rituals, re-imagining wedding rings to deconstruct into divorce rings, while Noora Melhem wrote and performed a speculative fiction piece, describing a post-apocalyptic Khaleeji wedding.
Qatar Foundation collaborations offer real world design projects

MFA in Design students design bespoke meeting stationery and dishware

In a pilot initiative between Qatar Foundation’s Headquarters and the MFA in Design program, students were asked to create bespoke “meeting ware” to be used during Qatar Foundation Headquarters’ board meetings and other high-profile business meetings. Meeting ware included tea and coffee service dishware and coordinating stationery. Embedded in “Design Studio 2,” taught by MFA faculty members Diane Derr and Marco Bruno, the work included the total design of the individual service items including the shape, functionality, color selections and imprint, as well as the overall design of the coordinating stationery items.

Education City Running Series Medal design

The “Advanced Digital Visualization” course taught by Assistant Professor of Interior Design Li Han collaborated with Qatar Foundation Community Development to design unique running event medals. Students designed and produced three medals for the Education City Running Series. The designs are based on the three running routes that surround Qatar National Library, Al Shaqab, and Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra. Students received a certificate signed by the President of Community Development, Machaille Al-Naimi, in recognition of their contribution to the development and success of Qatar Foundation.

Qatar Foundation Research and Development seeks to commercialize 3D printing research

It is thought that 3D printing will revolutionize the manufacturing of every possible product in the near future. The race to discover materials which can be used for 3D printing that are also compatible with a variety of biomedical uses is currently being played out in research departments across the world. It may be right here in Doha, however, that a true breakthrough is accomplished. Assistant Professor of Physics, Khaled Saoud, Ph.D., was awarded a Technology Development Fund grant from Qatar Foundation Research and Development for his proposal entitled: “3D Printing of Polymer - Aerogel Composites for Energy and Biomedical Applications.” Saoud received $118,131 to provide gap funding for his early-stage, promising technology in order to increase its commercialization potential. The materials he is developing have both medical applications such as for prosthetics, orthotics, dentistry, bone cement, surgical masks and hearing aids, and electronic applications such as energy storage and sensing.

Undergraduate students get research grant to explore graphic translation

Art Foundation faculty member Nathan Ross Davis, along with students Sara Al-Afifi, Latifa Al-Kuwari, Rahman Ahmed and Sarah Elawad, received an undergraduate research grant from the Dean’s Office in 2017-2018 for their project entitled “Graphic Speculation: One Thousand and One Fantasy Pop Nights.” The proposed research is aimed at engaging student researchers in developing and applying graphic translation skills while learning to define and apply independent and collaborative research methods. The research entails translating historical artifacts and collections into contemporary visual culture and analyzing cultural values and presuppositions through the production of visual work.

In addition to this research, Saoud published co-authored articles in the Journal of Porous Materials, 2017; the Journal of Material and Environmental Sciences, Volume 9; Bioresources Journal 2018; Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews 2018; and published a chapter “Nanocatalyst for Biofuel Production: A Review” in Biofuel Bionanotechnology, Vol. 5, edited by Neha Srivastava et al. In 2017, Saoud obtained a patent with Shaukat Saeed on “Methods of forming aerogels.” Saoud’s professional and community service also sets him apart. He has given several keynote speeches in Pakistan, Jordan and Qatar, and serves as a judge on the 2018 National Scientific Research Competition and the Supreme Council Research Competition of Elementary Schools in Qatar. He served as an expert and shared knowledge and resources to validate the first place winner of the TV program “Stars of Science” Season 9. His activities were noted by Qatar Foundation Vice Chairperson and CEO, Her Excellency Sheikha Hind bint Hamad Al Thani, who congratulated him for his service work.
The students also focused on how to use non-verbal communication for the hands-on learning activity encouraged student collaboration while outside the box in telling their chosen stories. The Art Foundation students was given about 10-15 minutes to set up for their one-minute performance on stage. The students spent the next six weeks in the studio designing and creating props and environments setup, the lab opens up an array of creative directions to VCUs Qatar departments. Art History students will be able to step into old historical ruins, for example, while Painting + Printmaking students will be able to create virtual, airbrushed, 360-degree paintings. Once fully established, this lab will become a platform to conduct Education City-wide faculty and student workshops, tutorial sessions and exhibitions.

The students traveled to the Inland Sea to develop their own performance art. Under the guidance of assistant professors Rachel Cohn and Maysaa Al-Mumin, the students explored how to use their own unique talents and interests to tell their stories. The students spent a day in February 2017, interacting with their surroundings and working in groups to develop their interpretation of the experience. As first year students this was their first introduction to studio classes. Cohn and Al-Mumin designed the activity as a cohesive experience that emphasized learning through creative exploration of their environment.

Inspired by the Japanese game show “Kasu Taisho,” a live performance competition using handmade props, costumes and sets, 70 Art Foundation students traveled to the Inland Sea to develop their own performance art. Under the guidance of assistant professors Rachel Cohn and Maysaa Al-Mumin, the students explored how to use their own unique talents and interests to tell their stories. The students spent a day in February 2017, interacting with their surroundings and working in groups to develop their interpretation of the experience. As first year students this was their first introduction to studio classes. Cohn and Al-Mumin designed the activity as a cohesive experience that emphasized learning through creative exploration of their environment.

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The department is seeking to expand the facility and make the Darkroom a collaborative pedagogic effort that exploited Building Information Modeling using virtual reality. Virtual reality allows students to explore new tools of design authoring through environmental interaction and exploration, which will better prepare them for dealing with the interdisciplinary nature of building systems, design and construction in actual scenarios. In addition, the department acquired a virtual reality platform. This emergent technology was incorporated into the teaching and learning experience of the Tech Studio, the result of a Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) experiment to explore the lessons learned from a collaborative pedagogic effort that exploited Building Information Modeling using virtual reality.

Virtual reality and fractals now part of Interior Design curriculum.

The Department of Interior Design, under the supervision of faculty members Mohammad Sulaiman and Hasham El-Hammeli, continues to inject modules of innovative emerging design trends into its curriculum. In the fall of 2017, junior students explored two trends in design: fractal geometry and virtual reality. The Tech Studio (a combination of Advanced Interior Graphics II and Buildings Systems) held a fractals workshop taught by Tahkim Fatima, the principal of the award-winning practice DesignAware, which is based in Hyderabad, India. This generative design workshop combined logic, geometry, natural systems and structure and is an adaptation of the teaching methods practiced at the Design Research Lab at the Architectural Association School of Architecture in London. The method is inspired by the organic growth of natural systems, parametric architecture, structural systems, mathematics, geometry and algorithms.

New Labs open doors to new methods and materials

Virtual Reality Lab

A new Virtual Reality Lab is now part of the Innovative Media Studio, allowing students, faculty, staff and artists-in-residence to explore one of the world’s leading creative markets. Fully equipped with a virtual environment setup, the lab opens up an array of creative directions to VCUs Qatar departments. Art History students will be able to step into old historical ruins, for example, while Painting + Printmaking students will be able to create virtual, airbrushed, 360-degree paintings. Once fully established, this lab will become a platform to conduct Education City-wide faculty and student workshops, tutorial sessions and exhibitions.

Photography Darkroom

Painting + Printmaking (PAPR) faculty member George Aweid has designed, built and installed a new darkroom for the course with five photographic enlargers. Based on the success of the course, the department is seeking to expand the facility and make the Darkroom a permanent fixture in the curriculum. Using this new facility, PAPR is now offering Darkroom, a photography course that introduces students to analog photographic processes using 35mm, medium format and large format film processing and black and white photograph development.

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Interdisciplinary collaboration brings artistic aesthetic to wearable solar devices

Students from the MFA in Design program are collaborating with engineering students from Texas A&M University at Qatar (TAMUQ) to produce solar-powered, interactive, wearable devices as part of Shaams Generation, an initiative of Qatar Museums (QM) and Qatar Solar Technologies (QSTec). This project places our design students on teams alongside engineering students and provides a structured context for working with cutting-edge solar technology.

The objective of Shaams Generation is to provide an education platform for solar energy, intersecting art, design, science and technology. Now in its third year, the program has expanded to include student participation at the university level. VCUarts Qatar and TAMUQ students participated in a series of three workshops conducted by US-based solar artist Anthony Castronovo, and two workshops conducted by a QSTec intern, Selq Hashem. The workshops provided an overview of existing solar-powered interactive projects within urban environments and introduced a range of technical skills associated with designing armatures, programming and working with solar technology. Following the workshop series, students continued working in teams to produce solar-powered, interactive, wearable devices. The resulting projects were exhibited at the Fire Station in April 2017 at the QSTec Solar Art Festival and the Web Information Systems Engineering (WISE) conference in Russia in October 2017.


Faculty develop cross-university interdisciplinary course in Education City

Interim Director of Liberal Arts & Sciences, Byrd Yaylaoğlu, and Interim Chair of Graphic Design, Peter Martin, collaborated with colleagues from Texas A&M University at Qatar and Weill Cornell Medicine-Qatar, to develop the first cross-university interdisciplinary course in Education City called “Wellbeing and Happiness for Self and Society.” The course considers various determinants and definitions of wellbeing and happiness and aims to encourage students to develop interdisciplinary collaborative projects aimed at promoting wellness. This course was initiated by Her Excellency Sheikha Shajaa bint Hamad Al Thani, Vice Chairperson and CEO of Qatar Foundation. The team designed the course throughout the fall of 2017. Yaylaoğlu and Martin collaboratively taught the course to graphic and fashion design students in the spring of 2018 as a prototype of the course as it is currently being taught to students from VCUarts Qatar, Weill Cornell Medicine-Qatar, Northwestern University in Qatar, and Hamad Bin Khalifa University. This course is expected to be offered again in the fall of 2019 to all Education City students.

MFA in Design students exhibit new take on local design at Design Days Dubai

Eleven MFA in Design students exhibited their work at the international design festival Design Days Dubai in March 2017. The artworks exhibited highlighted the results from a recent field study, and annual component of the MFA program where students and faculty travel together to engage in a shared, and immersive design experience. The year’s field study included a five-day workshop in Turin, Italy, where students designed ceramic incense burners using Grasshopper visual programming software and a Weap 3D clay printer.

By using forward-looking design and fabrication tools to re-examine the form and utility of the incense burner, the project sought to simultaneously celebrate cultural heritage and technological progress, which are interdependent and mutually supportive. The March exhibit was featured online in the international design journal Dhimas.

In addition to their partnership with Vibrant and Katara, the Department of Graphic Design created other partnerships to spark their students’ creativity. During the spring 2018 semester, associate professors Danielle Emaan and Lea Hammattel led a six-week collaboration between junior Graphic Design students at VCUarts Qatar and the University of Michigan. Working in collaboration with partners studying Interaction Design, seven cross-cultural teams responded to a prompt to reimagine public spaces in order to foster dialogue, encourage play between strangers, promote cultural awareness or celebrate cultural diversity in a positive atmosphere.

During the fall 2017 semester, four junior students in the Print 1 course engaged in a collaboration with an engineering team from Texas A&M at Qatar. The team’s goal was to design and fabricate a car to enter in the Shell Eco-Marathon Challenge, an international student engineering competition. The team of VCUarts Qatar students were Sarah Elawad, Faheem Khan, Yeon Hwang and Reham Mohammed Fadl Hossaiin Ahmed. The class was led by professors Levi Hammattel and Lakand Hill.

Sophomore student work shown in Richmond and Doha

In a cross-continental classroom collaboration, sophomore students in Doha joined VCU students in the production of an exhibition titled “Strange Lives/Studio News” in January 2018. Students from Print Media I classes in Doha under the mentorship and leadership of Fleming Jelfees, along with Print Media I students in Richmond, under the supervision of Richmond faculty members Jill Zieverdenbergen and Brooke Inman, submitted work for the show. The parameter for each print was a line running across the page, but otherwise, students were free to choose the theme, media and format. The result is a unique collection of hand-pulled prints (using intaglio, screen-printing and lithography), that explore continuity, place, scale and movements, variably arranged along a strong line. The resulting body of work from 33 students and faculty was exhibited at both the Saffron Hall in Doha and the Anderson Gallery in the home campus.
International Interior Design Association Student Competition shortlists student proposals

Students from the Department of Interior Design participated in the International Interior Design Association’s Student Design Competition. The competition celebrates the talent and fresh design ideas of interior design students who are currently enrolled in an interior design program or institution and provides emerging professionals with the opportunity to showcase their work and gain exposure in the interior design industry. The competition challenge was to design a new marketing and sales support office at OFS Brands headquarters in Huntingburg, Indiana. Three groups from the Senior Design Studio, under the supervision of faculty members Johan Granberg and Haithem El-Hammali, were shortlisted to submit their proposals.

Collaborative cross-disciplinary studio course drives applied learning, wins teaching scholarship awards

For the second consecutive year, the Department of Interior Design combined Introductory Interior Design Studio II with the theory-based course “Interior Materials and Textiles” and a computer graphics course “Interior Graphics II” to enable learning from one course to better inform solutions in another course. The intra-disciplinary work is supported by the Writing Center, the Materials Library and the Fabrication Lab and Woodshop. The pedagogic experiment led to faculty research publications that were the recipients of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning awards.

Swedish Embassy collaboration

In the fall semester of 2016, the Swedish Embassy and VCUarts Qatar’s Department of Interior Design collaborated on a project that combined the embassy and culture house. The project site is theoretically located in Doha’s Lusail area, the newly established cultural zone. The project aims to promote Sweden’s economic interests and the image of Sweden abroad, facilitate exports and imports and encourage trade with Qatar and the region. This collaboration lead to the successful exhibition “House of Sweden” which was held in conjunction with Swedish National Day celebrations at The St. Regis Hotel, Doha, on April 25, 2017. The event was well-attended, with over 1,500 visitors.

Kaltham Al-Kuwari wins Qatar Education Excellence Award

Class of 2017 Interior Design graduate Kaltham Al-Kuwari was the recipient of “The Education Excellence Award” held under the patronage of His Highness Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani, Amir of the State of Qatar, to honor Qataris who excel in science and several other fields to disseminate the culture of creativeness and excellence in the society of Qatar. The award was conferred on distinguished Qatari students in different fields and had eight categories. Winners were honored under the auspices of the Amir in a widely publicized ceremony. The award is organized annually by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education. Al-Kuwari graduated from VCUarts Qatar with a BA in Interior Design in May 2017. She was the recipient of the gold medal in the 11th edition of the Education Excellence Awards.

14 Exhibition at Art 29 gallery, W Doha Hotel

A group exhibition featuring artworks by Painting + Printmaking junior and senior students from VCUarts Qatar was shown at the W Doha Hotel’s Art 29 gallery in November 2017. Students who exhibited their work included Aisha Al-Ziani, Amena Al-Yousef, Kaltham Al-Thani, Laila Al-Rogier, Maryam Al-Akhoon, Maryam Al-Thani, MS Alkhayarin, Noof Al-Thani, Noor Alshebani, Noor Elbasuni, Lolwa Alsulaiti, Roda Al-Khori, Sara Al-Fadaaq and Sonia Limberis.

As junior and senior students from the Painting + Printmaking department at VCUarts Qatar develop as artists, they learn and explore the different ways in which they can present their work as a part of their broad and versatile curriculum. The show was the outcome of an all-student effort in realizing and putting together the students’ personal investigations thus far.
Doha Film Institute collaboration
In spring 2017, the VCUarts Qatar Interior Design Department engaged in a collaborative effort to bridge the gap between industry trends and academia guidelines. The partnership with Doha Film Institute (DFI) offered a design studio in film design. The course was structured in three different phases: workshops, production, and post-production. After the class, four students secured jobs with DFI productions. The objective of the elective course was to meet the Council for Interior Design Accreditation standards, which require programs to pave the way for students before graduation to collaborate with allied disciplines. Likewise, the intent was to support a budding Qatari film industry as well as utilize filmmaking tools to explore space. The course contained elements of theory and analysis, as well as real-life experiences where the students worked to execute projects together with professionals from the film industry. The course outcome helped the students to
1) Gain a deeper understanding of interior design concepts through the camera perspective
2) Develop a portfolio to pursue careers within filmmaking, and garner process-based, hands-on learning experiences, from ideation to full execution.

CULTIVATING CREATIVE THINKING

MFA in Design students win Arab Innovation Academy award to develop their innovative idea
Rabia Albudulis and Mariam Rafieh (MFA ’19) participated in the Arab Innovation Academy, a global event that guides students through the process of turning an idea to a tech startup in 10 days. Their project “Sukari,” which empowers diabetics by remotely connecting them to their doctors, won fast track acceptance into Qatar Science & Technology Park’s XLR8 program in 2018. Their win means they were able to benefit from a three-month mentorship to help bring their idea to life.

Design charrette encourages faculty and student participation in cultural event in Doha
The Graphic Design program spring 2018 semester began with a two-and-a-half-day design charrette in which nine teams of faculty and students collaborated with the organizers of the “Light Me Doha 2018” festival and the lighting design firm Vibrant, to design concept proposals for light-based installations in Katara. This charrette provided a chance for sophomores, juniors, seniors and faculty to work and play creatively with each other as an invigorating and inspiring start to the semester. The installation of winning student work was shown at Doha’s first light festival, “Light Me Doha 2018,” which was held at Katara in November 2018.
Thailand service-learning trips

Every December, students have a chance to participate in a transformative service-learning trip to Thailand to live and work with the Karen people of Muan Paem. The trip is offered in collaboration with the Interior Design and Student Affairs departments and youth experiential service-learning company, Into the Wild. Every year students learn weaving and looming, cooking, wood and bamboo carving, farming and living off the land. In exchange, the students offer a project. In 2015, students helped to build a house for the village school teacher. In 2016, nine students participated, with a trip goal of developing ethnographies for the village to help attract tourism as a living museum. In 2017, six students and three faculty members aimed to create a display case, website and cookbook for the village. Student participant Eman Makki’s design and model was used to build the display case in the village. On their return, the students presented their experiences to faculty and staff. One student commented, “It was one of the most humbling experiences I’ve ever had. Every year, I would say to myself that I should experience more, but never do. This year, however, I challenged myself by doing this service trip and I have learned a lot during a short period.”

Cross-campus interdisciplinary fashion trip to Morocco

The Departments of Fashion Design from Richmond and Qatar led an interdisciplinary design program in May 2017 with a group of nine undergraduate students and alumni. The program explored the rich textile, leather and craft industries in Morocco, and afforded participants the opportunity to spend time at the prestigious École National d’Architecture in Rabat. The participants explored topics on sustainability and ethical design, Moroccan culture, calligraphy, henna painting and more. The 10-day spring trip was led by Richmond Department Chair, Patricia Brown, and faculty member Hawa Stowdah along with former VCUarts Qatar Department Chair Sandra Wilkins.
Modern felted prayer rugs: MFA-On-The-Go Field Study trip to The Netherlands

Collaborating with fiber artists Harm Harms and Saar Snoek, MFA in Design students and faculty participated in a five-day immersive workshop at the Hawar Textile Institute in Oldeberkoop, the Netherlands. The workshop was part of a longer trip that included a visit to Amsterdam, and three days in Eindhoven during Dutch Design Week.

During the Hawar Textile Institute workshop, students and faculty each made a unique full-size prayer rug. Reinventing this ancient archetype, each student and faculty member explored a uniquely expressive idea that began with the craft of felting natural fibers, and then added modern laser cut templates, laser cut polyether foam padding for comfort, foam resists for layering color and pattern, and integrating other fabrics to achieve design effects.

By the end of the workshop each participant had produced a tangible outcome, which was then exhibited in the project space gallery at VCUarts Qatar and in the group exhibition “Pray: Modern Prayer Rugs Felted in the Netherlands,” at The Anderson gallery in Richmond. The exhibition was collaboratively curated with Chase Westfall, gallery manager at The Anderson. Participants in the field study and gallery shows included: Nourbanu Hijazi (’18), Norah Al-Shammari (’18), Hazem Asif (‘18), Sidra Zubairi (’18), Rabab Abdulla (’19), Ashra Dankis (’19), Mohammad Jawad Jaffari (’19), Se Hee Jang (’19), Rabeya Khatoon (’19), Majdulin Nasr Allah (’19), Mariam Rafeki (’19) and Alisha Saiyed (’19). The faculty trip leaders who also produced rugs displayed in the exhibitions were Richard Blackwell, Marco Bruno, Diane Dem, Rab McClure, Thomas Modern and Yasmeen Suleiman.

VCU Globe trip to Greece 2017–18

In partnership with the VCU Global Education Office and VCUarts Qatar International Education division of Student Affairs, a unique opportunity for service learning was offered to 22 VCU GLOBE and four VCUarts Qatar students to travel to Athens, Greece, to learn about Greek culture, the refugee crisis in Greece and the local community’s response to refugees. The hope for this collaborative project was for student participants to share their knowledge and experiences from this trip with the VCU Richmond and VCUarts Qatar communities to throw light on the refugee crisis.

Annual fashion field study to Istanbul, Turkey

On Oct. 19, 2017, 25 VCUarts Qatar faculty members and students traveled to Istanbul, Turkey, for the annual field study trip. This is an annual trip designed to introduce various international fashion centers to students. Students attended Premiere Vision 2017, the world’s most important textile exhibit, and had a chance to tour the Grand Bazaar and The International Fashion Academy where they engaged with students and checked out the curriculum and facilities.
To further extend the opportunity to her students, Emans organized a five-day field study to Abu Dhabi with six students to learn about community outreach from a professional and regional standpoint. The trip was co-chaperoned with Assistant Professor Maryam Al-Homaid and involved attending the Riwak al Fikr event, visiting Amirates Palace, Sheikh Zayed Mosque and Alserkal Avenue in Dubai.

GL OBAL EXPERIENCE

Abu Dhabi Festival 2017
In March 2017, graphic design Assistant Professor Denielle Emans was invited by the assistant dean of the College of Arts and Creative Enterprises at Zayed University to take part in the “Abu Dhabi Festival 2017: Culture and Tolerance,” entitled Riwak Al Fikr. As an invited panel member, Emans was asked to engage in an educational debate about how to utilize design to bring about positive change to our societies with keynote guest speaker, Jessica Walsh, partner at Sagmeister & Walsh, New York.
Emans took the opportunity to invite junior graphic design student and the president of the Chit Chat Chai Club, Amira Natsheh, to join her on the panel. The debate portion of the event was moderated by Ahmed Atanir, manager of Dubai Design and Fashion Council. The event was sponsored by the Abu Dhabi Music & Arts Foundation and held at Zayed University (Abu Dhabi).

Graphic Design program field study in Iceland 2016–17
For seven days in May 2017, 13 graphic design students traveled around Iceland, engaged in a diverse set of activities ranging from visiting the studies of Icelandic designers and artists and the Island Academy of the Arts, to exploring the geography and natural wonders of the volcanic island. Under the guidance of Graphic Design Interim Chair, Peter Martin, and faculty member Michael Hersrud, the students engaged in various reflective and creative activities. To help capture some of their reflections and discoveries, everyone traveling participated in a postcard project that involved sending self-made postcards from Qatar to Iceland, and while in Iceland, sending their daily experiences and observations back to Qatar. These postcards were displayed in the VCJarts Qatar’s hallways to share some comparative insights from the trip with the students and faculty who did not travel.

Senior theses shown at the Qatar Pavilion of IDF Oman Exhibition
Three interior design alumnae from the Class of 2017, Bashayer Al-Naimi, Sahar Al-Ansari and Kaltham Al-Kuwari, secured an exhibition of their senior project outcomes at the IDF Oman exhibition that was held in Oman on Feb. 27, 2017. This effort was sponsored by Qatar Development Bank (QDB) for commitment to community service through supporting and motivating recent graduates. The exhibition was oriented towards interior design and furniture, gearing the way for young talents to flourish. About the experience, one alumna commented, “The exhibition gave us a lot of encouragement to start our own businesses and projects. Many architects, interior designers and businessmen encouraged us to keep moving forward towards the completion of our projects and to make our goals possible.” Another added that “it was a great opportunity for us to network and find people interested in investing in our projects or even people willing to work with us and combine our skills to create something spectacular. It also allowed us to take on freelance clients for future projects.”
Introducing Dean Shawn Brixey

In July 2017, VCUarts welcomed a new dean to replace Joe Seipel who retired in 2016. Interim Dean James Frazier, Ed.D returned to his role as tenured professor in the Department of Dance and Choreography. 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, Missouri, to a pair of classically trained artists – his father, a Broadway actor and 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 by 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 experiments and art exhibitions 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 VCUarts 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.”

Inside the Anderson

The Anderson building might be the same, but inside the historic gallery, a new space has taken shape—one that’s a vibrant platform for student programming, experimentation and leadership.

In the last year alone, Chase Westfall, curator of student exhibitions and programs, organized exhibitions of undergraduate and graduate student work, live music shows and performances and installations by a number of visiting artists.

At the 2018 MFA Thesis Exhibition, graduate students took over every corner of the Anderson with pieces extending deep into the basement.

“These projects,” Westfall says, “reflect a rich, ambitious and even optimistic intellectual life that is grounded in the practical demands of the historical and political.”

This year, Westfall wants to refine the processes that bring student collaborators into the Anderson, and strengthen the relationships he’s built with local artists and the school’s departments. A special Open Call invites VCUarts alumni working in all disciplines and media to submit proposals for two-week installations, performances, screenings or events. Submissions are open until Feb. 13, 2019, at arts.vcu.edu/theanderson.
When John Freyer went to his first recovery meeting five years ago, all he could think about was how terrible the coffee tasted. So, he came to the next meeting with an expensive bag of his favorite coffee—that everyone hated.

Two years later, Freyer tried again—but with a different approach. He partnered with Richmond’s Lamplighter Roasting Company and invited people in recovery to sample different roasts and develop a community flavor profile.

“The idea was, instead of telling them what’s good, why don’t we let them tell us what they like?” Freyer says.

Freyer’s coffee mission has since evolved into a multifaceted social art practice, Fifty/Fifty, aimed at changing the conversation around addiction and recovery. He built a custom cherry-red bike, equipped with a pour-over coffee maker. Every week, Freyer and students from VCU’s Department of Photography + Film roast and develop a community flavor profile.

“The coffee bike outside the Tate Modern says Recovery Connections CEO Dot Turton. “We were making on-the-spot decisions that created a unique roast profile—much akin to the wider project,” says Head of Coffee Tom Haigh about the Tate’s Recovery Roast.

Rucker’s work was a provocative component of the institute’s inaugural exhibition. “Storm in the Time of Shelter” featured rows of mannequins donning Ku Klux Klan robes made of kente cloth, camouflage, satin and more. The work was accompanied by objects from Rucker’s own collection of KKK memorabilia, pro-slavery books, artifacts related to slavery, and a 20-page newspaper offering historical context.

At the same time Rucker’s work was going up in the ICA, another (and related) project was also taking shape. MK Abadoo, was embedded in the VCUarts Department of Dance + Choreography. She explores race and racism in her own collection of KKK memorabilia, pro-slavery books, artifacts related to slavery, and a 20-page newspaper offering historical context.

“LOCS is guided by the community,” she says. “That’s really a result of me deepening partnerships with folks here, both in the dance community and in the larger community justice groups.”

She’ll also be teaching her students how to incorporate social justice and community engagement in their own creative work, particularly through a spring 2019 course that will challenge students to explore what it means to make art in a community practice.

And back in the ICA, as an assistant professor, Paul Rucker will extend his own creative experiences to empower other artists with career-oriented workshops. He’ll also spend the coming year writing a book and leading a series of workshops aimed at nurturing artists’ authenticity and dealing with psychological barriers that many creative faces.

Rucker hopes participants will learn how to celebrate small victories, rather than focus on the negatives. “We all have voices in our head that tell us that we’re good or we’re bad, or we’re worthless or we’re brilliant,” he says. “We can easily paralyze ourselves with the negative voices.”

“Nurturing that aspect of risk-taking is a really important part of being creative. Because there are no real failures—just a documentation of attempts.”
Qatar Day
Food, fashion, falcons and fun—that’s just a brief summary of the amazing time to be had at the annual VCUarts Qatar Day on the home campus in Richmond.

VCUarts Qatar Day is a yearly event that brings our faculty and students to the home campus in Richmond. Hundreds of students, faculty and staff from VCU attend the event, which features art and design projects from VCUarts Qatar, as well as traditional aspects of Qatari and Arab culture such as henna, Arabic calligraphy and traditional Qatari clothing.

The event also features a fashion show by the previous year’s recipient of the W Designer of the Future award, which is often new graduates’ first solo fashion shows. In 2017–18, the fashion show featured Ghalya Al-Neemah, and in 2016–17, Saadia Khabab. Khabab’s designs for the fashion show comprised seven pieces from her collection, from which she took inspiration from the W Doha Hotel and used colors according to its theme, alongside seven pieces from her senior collection.

“The W Doha Hotel has adopted her for a whole year and they promote her as a young emerging designer throughout their chain of hotels and internationally,” said Sandra Bell Wilkins, former chair of the fashion department at VCUarts Qatar. “It was an amazing experience.”

The collaborative student developed event is an important cultural exchange for both campuses, and students from the home campus also travel to Qatar for a similar event.

The aim of this exchange is to strengthen the relationship between the Richmond and Qatar campuses while also providing Richmond students, faculty and staff the opportunity to learn more about the VCUarts Qatar campus, and vice versa.

The visits are part of VCU’s Qatar Leadership Exchange Program, and the students tour the host campuses and meet with various student groups and faculty, while learning about the surrounding city and culture.

In fall 2017, a preview event called “Majlis Day” was held on the Medical College of Virginia (MCV) Campus the day before the Qatar Day celebration. Majlis is an Arabic word that means “lounge,” and the event was held to allow students from the medical program at MCV to meet with students from VCUarts Qatar and find out more about student life in Qatar, including the Qatar Leadership Exchange Program. Students from VCUarts Qatar have worked on a number of exhibitions that featured art and medicine in recent years.

The 2017–18 Qatar Day was hosted by 17 students from VCUarts Qatar. During their trip they visited the African American Museum, were given tours of School of the Arts campus, VCU’s medical campus, the Anderson Gallery, met with Student Government Association members, visited the Da Vinci Center at VCU and had lunch with VCU’s provost and associate provosts.

They also attended the 7th Biennial Hamad bin Khalifa Symposium on Islamic Art, titled “Islamic Art: Past, Present and Future?” which took place from November 2-4, 2017, at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond. While attending the conference, they met with Her Excellency Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, Chairperson of Qatar Museums, Doha Film Institute and Reach Out to Asia, who gave the opening address at the symposium.

While at the symposium, several of the Art History students had the honor of introducing the symposium speakers who included Hassan Hajjaj, Venetia Porter, Shahzia Sikander, Stefano Carboni and Linda Komaroff.

Hayak (Welcome) vinyl mural installation at the VCUarts Qatar House
Qatar Day also saw the launch of an exhibit of a student-designed mural at the public gallery at the VCUarts Qatar House in Richmond. The mural explored aspects of life in Qatar, juxtaposing both traditional and contemporary themes to form large-scale patterns that were applied to the windows to filter sunlight, mimicking the effects of traditional mashrabiya screens. The project was a collaboration orchestrated at VCUarts Qatar by Isabelle St-Louis, manager of Exhibitions and Lectures, and at VCU by Matthew Charboneau, Design Technology and Program coordinator and GoLab manager. First-year MFA in Design students designed and prototyped the murals in the “Digital Design and Fabrication” course taught by Department of Painting + Printmaking faculty member and Digital Fabrication Lab and Woodshop Coordinator, Ric Blackwell.
**2016–2017**

**260 BFA / 56 BA / 12 MFA STUDENTS ENROLLED IN THE INCOMING FALL CLASSES**

**16TH GRADUATING CLASS**

**58 BFA / 8 BA / 4 MFA STUDENTS GRADUATED IN DEC 2016–AUG 2017**

**584 ALUMNI**

**BASED ON MOST RECENT CALCULATIONS**

**STUDENTS ENROLLED**

**328 STUDENTS**

**BREAKDOWN BY MAJOR**

**BFA**

- ART FOUNDATION 87
- FASHION 27
- GRAPHIC 60
- INTERIOR 62
- PAINTING + PRINTMAKING 24

**BA**

- ART HISTORY 56

**MFA**

- 12 STUDENTS

**CROSS REGISTRATION**

**FALL SEMESTER 2016**

- EDUCATION CITY UNIVERSITIES: 32

**SPRING SEMESTER 2017**

- EDUCATION CITY UNIVERSITIES: 4

**RECRUITMENT**

**FALL 2016**

- 207 COMPLETED APPLICATIONS
- 135 ACCEPTED STUDENTS
- 91 ENROLLED STUDENTS

**2017–2018**

**260 BFA / 65 BA / 14 MFA STUDENTS ENROLLED IN THE INCOMING FALL CLASSES**

**17TH GRADUATING CLASS**

**47 BFA / 5 BA / 6 MFA STUDENTS GRADUATED IN DEC 2017–NOV 2018**

**642 ALUMNI**

**BASED ON MOST RECENT CALCULATIONS**

**STUDENTS ENROLLED**

**339 STUDENTS**

**BREAKDOWN BY MAJOR**

**BFA**

- ART FOUNDATION 80
- FASHION 24
- GRAPHIC 71
- INTERIOR 61
- PAINTING + PRINTMAKING 24

**BA**

- ART HISTORY 65

**MFA**

- 14 STUDENTS

**CROSS REGISTRATION**

**FALL SEMESTER 2017**

- EDUCATION CITY UNIVERSITIES: 18

**SPRING SEMESTER 2018**

- EDUCATION CITY UNIVERSITIES: 13

**RECRUITMENT**

**FALL 2017**

- 235 COMPLETED APPLICATIONS
- 106 ACCEPTED STUDENTS
- 88 ENROLLED STUDENTS

**ALUMNI 2016–2018**

- 128 GRADUATES
- 64 QATARI, 64 NON-QATARI
- 119 FEMALE, 9 MALE (STARTING 2011)

**BY MAJOR 2016–2018**

- FASHION 19
- GRAPHIC 28
- INTERIOR 41
- PAINTING + PRINTMAKING 17
- ART HISTORY 9
- MFA 10
Othman Khunji is a Bahraini artist who graduated in 2015 from the MFA in Design program. His master thesis artwork collection, “The Five Pillars of Islam,” caught the immediate attention of Qatar Foundation’s art director, who wanted to procure one of the five interactive pieces as a permanent installation in the Education City Mosque building. However, when Her Excellency Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, Chairperson of Qatar Museums, viewed the collection, she acquired it immediately, thereby launching Khunji’s career. Currently, he is the student recruitment and admissions counselor at VCUarts Qatar, and continues to pursue his career as an artist, engaging in independent, interdisciplinary design projects and exhibitions. In this interview, Khunji talks about his path to becoming an artist and reflects on the development of the art and design community in Qatar.

You’ve traveled quite a circuitous path to becoming a successful established artist while holding a full-time job as a student recruitment and admissions counselor at VCUarts Qatar. Describe your transition from computer programming and interior design to the interdisciplinary artist you are today.

I always knew that I liked creative fields—art, design and interactive installations—but I didn’t have the necessary parental support to pursue those fields of study, so I went into computer programming. At that time, the creative sector was not perceived as a field where you could gain a steady income in the Gulf region. It actually wasn’t until the rise of the wedding planning industry and customized event parties that people began to see that there were entrepreneurial business opportunities in developing creative spaces.

After working for years in fields such as marketing and banking, I decided it was time to do something creative. The only avenue available to me at the time was a degree in interior design, and it was quite difficult to convince my parents to allow me to pursue it. They, and society in general, seemed to trivially equate interior design with interior decorating. The career options for interior designers at that time were quite limited, as it was considered an exclusive domain for architects.

While I did work at a few interior design firms, I still felt a lack of stimulation, so I moved to Dubai, United Arab Emirates, and then to Bogota, Colombia, to gain some international experience, both personally and professionally. A few years later, a friend of mine who was a student at Weill Cornell Medicine-Qatar suggested that I check out the educational opportunities at Qatar Foundation, particularly the VCUarts Qatar master’s program. I applied and was awarded a full scholarship and was soon on my way.

The MFA program was a revelation, an odyssey of sorts, in which I learned to find my creative voice—telling a story, expressing a message or designing a simulation—using art to discuss social justice issues we live in and through, today. My MFA thesis explored those fields of study, so I went into computer programming.

What do you like about being a student recruitment and admissions counselor?

At that time, the creative sector was not perceived as a field where you could gain a steady income in the Gulf region. It actually wasn’t until the rise of the wedding planning industry and customized event parties that people began to see that there were entrepreneurial business opportunities in developing creative spaces.

In the dedication I wrote that the thesis is “a sentiment validated by doing certain acts reconnects you to your essential best self. I guess my path to where I am now brought me to the point of finding my creative voice and having the confidence to speak my truth.”

What do you like about being a student recruitment and admissions counselor?

This role really brings me around in a full circle. I see myself in most of the prospective applicants, I was also once a lost prospective student trying to find a path to express myself through education. I didn’t have anyone to believe in my dreams and talent, or even any
As I was describing our programs, I distinctly remember one boy I recently went recruiting at an all-boys school in Qatar. Many boys.

In 2015, I was accepted into Qatar Museum’s Fire Station Artist in Residence Program, and it was there that I saw how VCUarts Qatar prepared its graduates to really benefit from critiques. VCUarts Qatar's proposal was a one-of-a-kind, bespoke handcrafted product, capturing the essence of the Arabic Gulf's culture, history, and religion. I blended the cultural elements of pottery and natural Arabian camel skin to serve the product aesthetically and functionally as they both were traditional methods of water regulation and cooling. I wanted to decorate a vessel with the quote from a Arabic poem that embodied the importance of water in our lives which complemented the product: 

"If you go away from me, you are not my love."

What is your creative process?

Other than literally having a second chance at exploring, experiencing because of VCUarts Qatar's programs.

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“I draw my inspiration from talking to people and the ideas I encounter in my daily life and surroundings, with a special focus on giving voice to taboo issues in the Gulf region. Every project is a learning experience in new techniques and sourcing new materials… part of what I feel when my artwork receives recognition, or I sell a piece is, “I am good enough,” and my work matters. All these years of actualizing my passions and dreams are coming to fruition.”
Also, the West is seeing Arab artists in a new light. My work, for instance, has been shown in Paris, London, Berlin, St. Petersburg, and Milan, Richmond and all over the Middle East. VCUarts Qatar alum-

that Qatar Museums was going to exhibit it at the Museum of Islamic Arts, my first question was, “For how long?” I just couldn’t wrap my brain around the fact that it was going into their permanent collection.

As I said before, it was extremely personal to me given that I dedicated it to my mom. I was in shock in accepting and comprehending that my collection would be exhibited and stored alongside artworks by creative legends such as Picasso, René, Dali, Van Gogh, Hirst and Dia Azzawi. Fortunately, I was able to get advice from the then director of Painting + Printmaking, Khyo Himsworth, who sat me down, helped me price the work and walked me through the process of selling my artwork. He helped me gain the skills I now use every time I sell a piece.

Your work has caught the attention of a number of important people including Her Excellency Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, Her Excellency Sheikha Inshaat Al Sabah, Sheikh Khalifa bin Al Khalifa, and places such as The Triennale Museum, Qatar Museums, Bahrain Museums, Sharjah-Le Hotel and the Hilton Hotel. What does it feel like when your work is bought or added to a collection?

A sense of pure validation for the long hours of hard work. It really helped me to continue. Being part of an encompassing art world is a privilege, not just for artists — but for the community in general. The future looks promising for Qatar's art and design industry. So, keep an eye out for my work in the future!

Development at Qatar Foundation.

Way to Milan, and then had a good laugh, because the first place this travelling exhibit will be shown is at Msheireb Enrichment Center's gallery here in Qatar!

So that is a glimpse into my creative process. It requires a lot of problem solving, risk taking, determination and thinking outside the box to get to what I need to bring my idea to life through art. With every new artwork I learn more, and that is part of why I love what I do.

In your experience of working in Qatar's art and design industry, where would it be if it was not for art and design school at QF?

It certainly would not be as advanced as it is today. People from the region, including Her Excellency Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, have a keen appreciation for the arts. Qatar Museums, Bahrain Museums, Sharjah-Le Hotel and the Hilton Hotel.

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Dhika Khaira (IDS, ’15) is an interior designer who currently works with INC. Technologies in Qatar as a CAD coordinator. Her most recent projects have included working on the design for Northwestern University in Qatar’s Media Majlis Museum. Her work was on display at the “20/20/20” Exhibition at the Gallery at VCUarts Qatar in 2017. In the spring of 2018, Khaira sat down to discuss the impact of VCUarts Qatar on her career trajectory and her memories of the VCU Summer Program in Richmond.

What made you choose VCUarts Qatar?

VCUarts Qatar was not quite my first choice when I was in high school because I always had the mentality of going back to Indonesia for my undergraduate studies. I vividly remember the Annual Design Competition being introduced to our high school back in 2011. My art teacher insisted that I apply to the competition and incorporate it into my Art-Level coursework. So, in an attempt to kill two birds with one stone, I submitted a component of my art coursework for the design competition. The next thing I knew, I was announced as one of the winners of the full scholarship, and without even thinking twice, I knew VCUarts Qatar was meant for me.

What is your most memorable experience while at VCUarts Qatar and what makes it stand out?

At the end of freshman year, I had the opportunity to enroll in the Summer Program at the main campus in Richmond, Virginia. It was my first experience of being away from home and it was for a whole six weeks. At the beginning, I was extremely nervous about it. However, the chaperones and other participating students became a kind of family who helped make the trip so memorable. Having a taste of the main campus, which is ranked first among public art schools in the States, made me feel incredibly grateful to be a part of the VCUarts family.

Two things have stayed with me over the years. We were tasked to create an exhibition as our final project in the pottery class. As a freshman back then, it was a challenging task, because not only did we have to present our work verbally, we also had to exhibit our pieces the way a gallery would display them. The other really powerful experience was when we spent a day cooking for the homeless. I have never cooked that much before. At the end of the day, we went to a park and handed the food to a large number of homeless people. It was unbelievable to see how the food that we cooked could feed so many people.

Looking back, the biggest takeaway was that being away from my comfort zone and being exposed to numerous new
things required that I develop a combination of patience, endurance and acceptance. As a freshman, I considered myself a shy person, but at the end of the trip, I became a much more independent and courageous individual. I highly recommend this program to current and future students to give them a complete experience of what it takes to be a true RAM!

What advice would you give to current and future students of VCUarts Qatar?

For the current and future students of VCUarts Qatar, the rule is so simple. Always go the extra mile, and seek out every opportunity that will nourish you into becoming a better person. If you feel that there's no opportunity, then be the reason for that opportunity to come to you.

What are you doing now?

I am currently a full time artist and I am working from my own space at home. The freedom of being able to express and translate my thoughts on a plain surface has allowed me to grow in many ways. The studio is, and always will be, a place where I can be myself.

What made you choose VCUarts Qatar?

The decision to attend VCUarts Qatar happened naturally. I had been interested in the field of art and design, and I felt as though VCUarts Qatar was the perfect environment for me to develop and learn in ways that I knew I would need in this field.

Bouthayna Al-Muftah, (GDES '09) is a Qatari artist whose most recent exhibition "Kehose" was shown at Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha from July to September 2018. Al-Muftah's work has also been shown at the "Contemporary Art Qatar" exhibition in Berlin (2017-18), "20/20/20" at the Gallery at VCUarts Qatar (2017), and "Currents" at EMERGEAST Gallery (2017). Her work investigates stories and practices from Qatari cultural heritage by archiving collective memories and personal encounters using various artistic media including drawing, printmaking and installation. Here she talks about how her time at VCUarts Qatar informs her practice today.

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that best fit my cultural context and surroundings. At art school, mistakes were regarded as a good thing. I learned through trial and error. I found that at VCUarts Qatar, the doors were open to experimentation, which I enjoyed the most. I experienced not what to think, but how to think, which allowed me to take risks and imagine creatively. While a student, I felt that this was the place I needed to be; this was the environment that would allow me to thrive and give me the freedom to express myself.

What is your most memorable experience while at VCUarts Qatar?
During my sophomore year I worked on a typography project that was quite challenging for me. When this project was introduced, I honestly did not believe I would be able to complete it as per the expected standard. I had difficulty digesting the concept and understanding the technical parts of it. I kept starting over and over again until I was able to finally produce work I believed to be going in the right direction.

Surprisingly at the end of it, I was informed that it would be one of the pieces chosen to be exhibited at the student show held at VCUarts’ Anderson gallery. The experience was quite memorable, as it taught me that knowledge is best learned through experience. Experimentation, research and exploration are big parts of my projects. This is precisely why I feel that it is vital to reveal my thinking process as my work evolves. It shows the depth in the thought process as well as the roots from which my work grows.

How do you feel that VCUarts Qatar prepared you for life after graduation?
It taught me how to look at everything from a different point of view. To ignore conventional criteria, while at the same time encouraging innovative ways of thinking can result in a loss of creative confidence – a mental block. Rod Judkins once wrote, “Constantly search for new ways of doing the same things and do not repeat what you already know. Don’t do things in the usual way; do them the unusual way.” I feel that VCUarts Qatar has really taught me to think in this manner. As I matured, I was able to embark upon a new chapter of my life feeling confident and prepared to use my skills, knowledge and understanding of my own artistic aesthetic.

What advice would you give to current and future students of VCUarts Qatar?
It may be tough at times, and you may feel like you want to give up, but keep pushing yourself.
Hana Al-Saadi
DESIGNER, MINISTRY OF DEVELOPMENT PLANNING & STATISTICS

What made you choose VCUarts Qatar?
I always wanted to go to art school and I made the decision when I was in elementary school. Qatar University had a fine art major and VCUarts Qatar only had design majors. I didn’t want to go to Qatar University and my art teachers explained that it would not suit my ambitions. Since my family preferred I study in Doha, I made up my mind to enroll in a design major. VCUarts Qatar added a Painting + Printmaking fine arts major before I enrolled there. Fortunately in freshman year, when I tried a bit of everything, I knew a design major was not for me and a fine arts major better suited my abilities.

What is your most memorable experience while at VCUarts Qatar?
Winning the Damien Hirst Challenge is definitely one of my most memorable experiences. It helped me a lot after graduation. Winning a competition as big as that while I was still studying at the university opened a lot of doors for me.

How do you feel VCUarts Qatar prepared you for life after graduation?
VCUarts Qatar helped me a lot with multitasking, managing work with different projects at the same time and setting deadlines for myself. But there is still so much more I want to learn, and I keep learning about art and my chosen career every single day.

What advice would you give to current and future students of VCUarts Qatar?
Respect your teachers and don’t cut relationships with them after graduation. They care about your future more than your friends do and you will definitely need their help even after graduation.

Qatari alumna Hana Al-Saadi is a humble graphic designer at the Ministry of Development Planning and Statistics by day and prolific sculptor by night. Al-Saadi’s work has received a lot of international attention. Aside from winning the Damien Hirst Challenge in 2014, she also won residencies at the Doha Fire Station in 2016 and 2017. Her iconic “Hmmm” sculpture of a ballerina in a niqab to install on the Corniche. The sculpture has also been made into a keepsake keychain.

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Sumam Ismail Azzam
MFA STUDENT, SAVANNAH COLLEGE OF ART & DESIGN
BFA PAINTING + PRINTMAKING '15
ALUMNI PROFILES

What is your most memorable experience while at VCUarts Qatar?

My most memorable experience was working with such talented and hardworking professors. Their guidance and support made my VCUarts Qatar experience unforgettable, and most importantly, enjoyable. I looked forward to working each day at the university because I never knew what to expect. Every day was a surprise.

How do you feel that VCUarts Qatar prepared you for life after graduation?

After graduating, it was difficult finding a job, so I worked as a freelance illustrator for various companies, and then eventually I managed to work at VCUarts Qatar. The university prepared me to be patient with my goals, and to continue to pursue my ambitions regardless of the circumstances. This gave me confidence in my abilities and skills as a young emerging artist in this community.

What are you doing now?

I am currently studying at Savannah College of Art and Design, and I am also still doing freelance work in illustration. Whenever I have the opportunity, I continue working on my art, developing my skills and concept development as a painter and illustrator.

What projects are you looking forward to being on?

I am looking forward to having my work featured in upcoming exhibitions, both locally and internationally. The project I’m currently working on is a series of paintings that are still in their early stages.

What advice would you give to current and future students of VCUarts Qatar?

The only advice I have for current and future students is to listen, more than talk. Absorb all the benefits from your professors, and use that knowledge to improve in any major or path you choose to take.

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Fatima Taleb Almot (GDES '14) has been working as a graphic designer for Doha In- stitute for Graduate Studies for the past two years. Prior to that she worked as a freelancer for several years while she took additional courses in calligraphy and art. A memorable postgraduate experience was a course she took on Contemporary Arabic Calligraphy with Loni Kechouk at the Maqas de L’Art Contemporain in Asilah in Morocco. “It was honore because I stayed in this camp with well-known artists and professors from China, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Qatar. I learned a lot from the artists who took the course with, and the other artists who were there as residence artists for one week.”

Nada M. Yaser Hamad (IDES '09) Since her graduation in 2009, Hamad worked first as a project manager for AESCOM Middle East managing fit out work for The Gate Mall and office towers, and the City Center Hotel expansion project which included five hotels—the two Marriott towers, the Shangri-La, the Rotana and the Mercure. Following that she joined Salam Bounaian, a Qatari company that was also working on fitting out The Gate Mall. After five years as a project manager, she decided to start her own interior design company, Nada’s Interiors. For the past three years she has been designing private residences and beauty salons and is currently working on designing a yacht. But that is not all Nada has accomplished. She is married with two children. You can find her work at @nadasinteriors on Instagram and Snapchat, and Nada’s Sketchbook on Facebook and Blogger.

Aamina Karim Malik (MFA '14) is married and lives in Qatar where she runs a jewelry business, House of AKM (instagram: @houseofakm). She also presented a paper on “Generative Design” at the 2016 Conference on Generative Art in Milan, which was published in the conference proceedings. Moza Khalifa Al-Suwaidi (IDES '13) works as a graphic designer in the Communications department at VCUarts Qatar. She is married and had her first baby in mid 2016. In 2018, she won the Graphics Award Honorary Mention for her design of the VCUarts Qatar “20/20/20” exhibition branding, and in 2017 she won the Graphis Award Silver for her design of the “Strange Wonders” exhibition branding for Mihrab Museums. After graduating in 2009 from VCUarts Qatar, Cynthia Bariri (IDES '09) went on to get her M.A. in Interior and Product Design from Accademia Italiana in 2010. She then successfully took the LEED AP exam, and now works as an interior designer for the Civil Aviation Authority in Qatar. Lubna Mohamed Al Eiss (Communication Arts and Design ‘05) received her MA in Strategic Business Unity Management from HEC in 2016. She is currently the director of brand for beIN Media Group having worked her way up from animator, to head of section, and then to manager. Gayed Waleed Ataalla (IDES '17) is a teaching assistant at the Art Foundation department at VCUarts Qatar. She was an interior designer and art director at Elegante Technical Solutions and Services. Before that, Ataalla worked first as an interior designer at a consulting company, and then as an art director/interior designer with Porsche, Al Fardan, Katara etc. Ataalla also is a member of the Qatar Rugby Team, which won the gold medal at the 2018 West Asian Games.

Dana Seros Rohani (IDES '06, MFA '15) is deputy director of facilities at VCUarts Qatar. She is married with two children and has had a long and storied career at VCUarts Qatar. In 2006, Rohani started as a design researcher and then became the facilities assistant in 2008. She continually improved her skills and was promoted to her current role. In 2017, she became an IFMA Certified Facilities Manager. Sahar Marj (IDES/FDES '10) is currently working as a program coordinator at Texas A&M University at Qatar. She was recently accepted into Savannah College of Art and Design’s MFA in Graphic Design and Visual Experience class of 2020. Meriem Aiouna (IDES ‘15) is currently attending Rhode Island School of Art and Design’s MFA in Graphic Design and Visual Experience at the San Francisco Public Library in 2018. Her team’s prayer rug design was a finalist in the Modern Prayer Rug competition, her work was showcased at the Qatar National Museum, which will open in March 2019. Maryam Al-Homaid (IDES ‘10, MFA ‘14) is an assistant professor at VCUarts Qatar. In 2018, four of her handmade carpets, “Patterns of Human Behaviors,” were exhibited at the Qatar Museum; (QM) intense museum leadership program “Shekorn Generation” which gave her a certificate from QM as well as one from the Center for Creative Leadership in Brussels. She also runs an online handmade jewelry business. You can see her work on Instagram at @anawana_by_alba.

Aisha Nasser Al-Suwaidi (Communication Arts and Design ‘05, MFA ‘13) had her work featured at the London Design Biennale in September 2018. Her work was selected by Qatar Museums to represent Qatar at the prestigious event. In early 2018, her work was shown at the “Contemporary Art Qatar” exhibition in Berlin, and in 2016, she won an artist residency at the Doha Fire Station. Melina Gama De Moura (FDES ‘09) works as an art educator at the Museum of Islamic Art. Since graduation, she has earned a certificate in Museum Studies from Harvard Extension School. De Moura also runs a freelance writing and artist business Malimoura. Her recent accomplishments include speaking at the Definitely Able Conference at Qatar University, which was armed at training master-level art educators on teaching art to children with mental challenges. She also had her work exhibited at Katara in the Algerian Exhibition by 157 Latin American Artists in Qatar, and published an paper on academia.com about the Natural History Museum of Qatar. Emam Abdulla Abdullah (FDES ‘09) works as a school program specialist for the forthcoming Qatar Children’s Museum. Abdullah was given the honor of being selected to participate in the Qatar Museums (QM) intensive museum leadership program “Shekorn Generation” which gave her a certificate from QM as well as one from the Center for Creative Leadership in Brussels. She also runs an online handmade jewelry business. You can see her work on Instagram at @anawana_by_alba.

Sali Nabil Gubraisi (IDES ‘09) received his MA in Interior and Product Design from Academia Italiana in Firenze, Italy in 2013. He currently works as a senior interior designer at Artline R+I Associates in Qatar.

Hissa Yousef Fakhroo (IDES ‘17) works as a graphic designer at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and runs a gift making business (hadeya.qa). Fatma Elzahra Marouf Sayed, (PAPR ‘16) works as a graphic designer at Qatar University.

Fatma Mohammed Al Huwairan (IDES ‘13) is currently working at Qatar University. Abdulla was selected to co-chair the 2019 Tasmeem Doha Conference. Together, they are planning a culturally relevant, engaging Tasmeem on the theme “Halalay.”
After the exhibition, “Still Departures” was on display at Awde was also invited to exhibit at the show Al Thani and participated in a Doha Film Institute Series Lab in collaboration with US-Lawrence Abu Hamdan, singled out Awde’s project, “Teaching Mathematics through Storytelling.” This project is a children’s book and Virtual Reality Simulations: Presence in the Gulf States,” received positive reviews in the Journal of Arab Studies, the Middle East Journal, and Middle East Media. Assistant Professor of Fashion Donald Earlery had two solo shows in West Virginia and an artist talk and exhibition at the Eric Shindler Gallery in Richmond in 2016–17. Assistant Professor of Interior Design Maysaa Al-mumini was promoted to full professor. She had co-authored work with Christine Holten and Patrice Boyle in “Re-thinking Design: A Model that Has Been Developed and Used by Researchers at NASA, the University of California, Berkeley, and the University of Leicester. Derr’s ability to offer reframing of the Arabic Language as Creative Resistance,” was published in “Street Art of Resistance.” The book, edited by Sarah Awad and Brady Wegner, was published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2017. Professor Maysaa Al-Mumin won the Distinguished Achievement in Research Award while Emans won the Distinguished Achievement in Teaching Excellence for his co-authored work with Ben Robins and Faisal Al-Kowari, “Exploring Space Through the Lens Production Design.” Granberg presented his co-authored research, “De-pair the art of Re-pair and De-sign – To- wards an Interdisciplinary Understanding of Future Design,” was published in the proceedings of the 4th Annual Conference of the Psychology of Mathematics Education. The late Director of Art History, Dina Bangdel, Ph.D., presented her research, “Teaching Global Art History to Non-Majors: Narratives from the ‘Periphery’,” at the College Art Association (CAA) conference in New York City in 2016. Ad-junct Professor of Liberal Arts & Sciences Rola Al-Souabili won second prize in the Innovative Materials Poster Competition in the Materials Science and Engineering Symposium 2018 at Qatar University, and she also presented a poster at their 2018 Annual Research Conference. Her work on nano-dye, a new technology of a material with driedness revealed to be published in Khalid Saadat was published: In 2017-18, Cheryl Amor, Ph.D., professor and chair of Interior Design, presented at several conferences in Doha, reviewed the University of Florida’s Interior Design program for CIDA accreditation, and reviewed manuscripts for the 2018 Environmental Design Research Association and Interior Design Educators confer- ence. In collaboration with Mountains University, Houtho El-Hammadi, Ph.D., and Mohamed Sulaiman, Amor received a QAR 20,000 grant from Molding for Design Co., Qatar, for his research proposal “The Use of Faro Focus Laser Scanner and Virtual Reality Simulations: Pres- ervation of Qatar Traditional Heritage Project.” In 2016-17, Amor’s collaborative research with Michael O’Byrne and Debbi Gutiérrez Patti of Texas Tech University was presented at the Academy of Neuroscience for Architecture Conference in California, and his research with Wesam- shaham of Appalachian State University was published in the Journal of Sociology and Anthropology. Summer Bateiha, Ph.D., was promoted from assistant professor to associate professor of mathematics in 2018. Along with Assistant Professor Sadiq Mr. Botia received a Faculty Research Exploratory Grant for their collaborative project, “Teaching Mathematics through Storytelling.” This project is a children’s book focusing on place-value, with a goal of exploring storytelling as a pedagogical tool to teach math in a non-traditional way. In 2016-17, Botia presented her research in Louisiana and Berlin, and she was a peer-reviewed research paper published in the proceedings of the 4th Annual Conference of the Psychology of Mathematics Education. The late Director of Art History, Dina Bangdel, Ph.D., presented her research, “Teaching Global Art History to Non-Majors: Narratives from the ‘Periphery’,” at the College Art Association (CAA) conference in New York City in 2016.
Assistance Professor of Graphic Design Leland Hill’s interdisciplinary and international service learning research, “Exposing the Walls of Design Education,” was presented and published at the 2017 DAKAM International Conference on Design Studies, Fields and Method Studies in Istanbul, Turkey.

Former Chair of Painting + Printmaking Rhys Himsworth received a Faculty Research Grant to produce a new body of hybrid works investi- gating the ideology of visual languages sur- rounding digital media interfaces. Himsworth’s piece “Independent Music Video and Sound Art” was shown at the CICA Museum, Seoul, South Korea in 2016.

Interim Director of Painting + Printmaking Fleming Jeffries’ work was part of the “Shangri-Landers” exhibit at Michelle Doms Mews in Dubai in 2016. He also participated in an international invitation exchange for the “Bell and Road International Printmaking Exchange Exhibition 2018” on the theme of the Silk Road in Dunhuang International Convention and Exhibition Center, Dunhuang, China, in September 2018. Fleming exhibited “1991–2019: Open Air to Dye Kitchen” in a small exhibition in VCUarts Qatar’s Project Space in 2018.

Yang Soon Ju, adjunct professor at the Fashion Design department, presented a talk, “Fashion Design in the Digital Era” at the 13th Havana Fashion Exhibition in April 2018, while Assistant Professor of Fashion Federica Visoni presented, “How to Become a Footwear Designer.”


In the 2016–17 recruiting season, awareness of VCUarts Qatar expanded regionally through two presentations given at industry confer- ences and recruitment fairs. Student Recruit- ment and Admissions Counselor Fatima Al-Kharrazi and Assistant Dean of Enrollment and Registration: Services Orient Provost presented VCUarts Qatar to a wide regional audience at the Jadyns Conference in Amman, Jordan. Provost also presented on “U.S. Higher Education Rankings and Segmenta- tion” in recruitment fairs throughout Egypt.

Library System Support Specialist Liyu Louis presented a paper on “ALMA Analytics/Evidence-Based Planning and Decision-Making” at the 11th International Group of Ex Libris Users Conference (IGELU) at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim, Norway in 2017.

Assistant Professor of English Sadia Mir won the 2017 Faculty Award for Distinguished Teaching. She shared some of her techniques on teaching critical and creative writing in English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher- es in Qatar at TESOL International’s annual conference in March 2017 in Seattle. She also contributed to the paper, “Qatari Women Engagement and Empowerment: Policy Recommendations,” which was presented at the “Setting the Stage for a Knowledge-Based Economy in the Gulf” conference hosted by HEC Paris in Dubai in 2016.

Associate Professor Thomas Modern was the 2017 Galletly-Dirking VIsccher Scholar at the University of Bath, UK, where he presented his research, “From Sensuous Voxels to Sensory Materials. The Use of Bulkblok in the Making of Tangible Design,” Modern and his collaborators Ben Barbour and Michael Perone received a Faculty Research Grant for their project Perceptive Excavations, which accomplishes technological advances to store carving.

Assistant Professor of Art History Professor John Frier, received a post -Tasmeem research grant. Building on the successful Metaps Conversations Portal project created for Tasmeem Qatar in 2017, the team built a multi- channel digital portal between Tasmeem Qatar and VCU. During the reporting period, Saoud published co-authored articles in the Journal of Parous Materials and the Journal of Material- istics and Environmental Sciences. In addition, Saoud was awarded a Technology Develop- ment Fund grant for his proposed entitled “3D Printing of Polymers-Aerogel Composites for Energy and Environmental Applications.” Saoud received $18,131 to provide gap funding for his early-stage, promising technology, in order to increase its commercialization potential.

Associate Professor of Art History Jochen Sokoly, Ph.D., conducted funded research for a book project on early Islamic textiles thanks to a grant from the Max von Berchem Founda- tion. Sokoly’s article “Textiles and identity” appeared in the edited volume “The Blackwell Comparison to Islamic Art” edited by Barry Flood and Giulio Niccolini (Wiley Blackwell, 2017).

Assistant Professor Zachary Shenshen had a solo show at the University of Kentucky as part of his art collective, The Four Footed Correspondence Club. Over the last nine years, the collective has developed a visual language through drawing, installation, photography and object-making, which, at its root, serves as an ongoing dialogue between members while chronicling the group’s history. In 2016–17, his work was displayed at the High- point Center for Printmaking in Minneapolis.

Jesse Ulmer, Ph.D., assistant professor of En- glish, recently published an article titled “Just Like a Fly on the Wall: The Maltese in the Midwest in Hamlin Garland’s Main-Travelling Roads” in the spring 2017 issue of The Midwest Quarterly: A Journal of Contemporary Thought, a peer-reviewed academic journal published by Pittsburgh State University.

Assistant Professor Michael Wirtz, head of the Department of Liberal Arts & Sciences faculty member Khaled Saoud received a patent with his collaborator S. Saeed called “Methods of forming aerogels,” US 7,912,439. He also closed out two research projects, one as principal investigator in partnership with Texas A&M University at Qatar, and another as lead principal investigator with Massimo Bertino from VCU. During the reporting period, Saoud published co-authored articles in the Journal of Parous Materials and the Journal of Material- istics and Environmental Sciences. In addition, Saoud was awarded a Technology Develop- ment Fund grant for his proposed entitled “3D Printing of Polymers-Aerogel Composites for Energy and Environmental Applications.” Saoud received $18,131 to provide gap funding for his early-stage, promising technology, in order to increase its commercialization potential.

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Every year, VCUArts Qatar hosts a variety of public lectures and exhibitions. These events attract an estimated 1,000 visitors every year to the campus, foster public dialogue on contemporary art and design practice and serve as a link between internationally acclaimed visiting artists and lecturers, and the region.

**Materials Library collaborates with Qatar Foundation for Modern Prayer Rug Competition**

In support of the creative vision of Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, Chairperson of Qatar Foundation, in 2017, the Materials Library at VCUArts Qatar hosted a Modern Prayer Rug Design Competition. The competition challenged students from across Qatar to reimagine the Islamic prayer rug using traditional or unconventional materials.

**Strange Wonders Volume 2**

“Strange Wonders Volume 2,” a collaboration between Mheireb Properties and VCUArts Qatar, was inspired by past innovation and the inspiring transformation of Qatar and hosted by The Company House at Mheireb Museums.

**Developing better communities**

The International Education division of VCUArts Qatar Student Affairs develops programming that focuses on diversity, inclusion, social justice and intercultural competence. In September 2017, students had a chance to learn about the political power of art. Artists Ahmed bin Majed Almaadheed, the artist behind the viral image of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani and Khalid Albaih, the artist who created the “I’m with Kap, Just Us!” T-shirt, were featured speakers for a panel discussion titled “Art as a Political Act.” This event was moderated by students Aisha Al-Ziani and Jawaher Almesnad.

**Exhibitions at VCUArts Qatar**

Each year VCUArts Qatar hosts a variety of public lectures and exhibitions. The Gallery at VCUArts Qatar is also now a part of Qatar Foundation’s Art Trail program.

**2016-18 exhibitions**

In October 2016, Indonesian graffiti artists Vendy Methodos and Ismu Ismoyo displayed their art and did two live mural projects at the Gallery at VCUArts Qatar. The “ISSUE ISME” exhibition featured a series of works by each artist in several mediums, combining fine art, stencil, and traditional batik techniques. Zineb Sedira, a London-based multimedia artist, had a solo show titled “Now You See Me - Now You See Me” that included a multi-channel video installation “Gardeennes d’image (Image Keepers)” (2010), focusing on the archive of Algerian photographer Mohammed Kouaci, as well as selected works from her series on the routes and origins of sugar. “form (force)” and “In Transit” were two exhibitions by faculty and students from VCUArts Qatar and the home campus. The exhibitions were an extension of Tasmeem Doha 2017. In celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Week, VCUArts Qatar held a series of events educating students about the Civil Rights movement. The week included the “Diversity, Inclusion and Social Justice” art exhibition featuring works by VCUArts Qatar faculty, staff and students based around the exhibition title theme. The exhibition was curated by MFA in Design student Aisha Jemila Daniels.

Other prominent exhibitions included “City Limits” by emerging Iraqi artists Sajjad Abbas and Laith K. Daer; and the “Mari Evans: Carl Pope” exhibition featuring a commissioned text-based piece by artist Carl Pope related to Evans’s book of essays, photographs and videos. Musicians and artists Jakari Ail Bauman, Phelena Napper, and Teslim Sani, paid tribute to Evans at the opening reception with a series of recitals, readings and recitations. One of the founders of the Black Arts Movement, Marie Evans published her first work “Where Is All the Music” in 1968 followed by “I Am a Black Woman” in 1970. An initiative from the Manager of Exhibitions and Lectures, Isabelle St-Louis, opened up three new exhibition spaces for faculty, staff and students to display their works in the building. The spaces in the glass display cases on ground and first floors were renovated and upgraded to allow them to be used for exhibitions, while a new space was created on one side of the Saffron Hall. All three exhibition spaces featured a variety of artworks ranging from artistic experimentation, to paintings, sculptures, photographs and fashion designs from when they opened in September 2017. The exhibitions included works by Interior Design student Nada Abbarah, Assistant Professor of Painting + Printmaking Michael Perrone and the Painting + Printmaking students from Richmond and Qatar.
“Muhawwil (Transformer),” an exhibition on Islamic figurative murals, by Kuwaiti artist Monira Al Qadiri, took place at the Gallery from Jan. 18 to Feb. 18, 2017. The exhibition was a four-channel video installation based on the Islamic figurative murals which can be found on electric power stations throughout Kuwait. She turned those paintings into animations to highlight the dilemma of representation that exists between the ancient and the modern. Al Qadiri, who is part of the internationally renowned artist collective GCC, was one of 21 artists who were nominated for the Future Generation Art Prize in 2014. Her research focused on the aesthetics of sadness in the Middle-East stemming from poetry, music, art and religious practices. She was also one of the speakers Tasmeem Doha 2017, which ran from March 15-16, 2017.

Artists in Residence program
Each year the Painting + Printmaking program selects two emerging artists at varying stages of their careers to become artists in residence at VCULarts Qatar, and offers them a chance to exhibit their works in Doha’s gallery scene.

The “Common Ground” exhibition was a culmination of nine months of work by two VCULarts Qatar artists in residence, Carolina Aranibar-Fernandez and David Withers, as they documented their experiences as artists working in the Gulf region.


Lectures at VCULarts Qatar
The annual “Crossing Boundaries” lecture series features globally recognized artists, designers and scholars, and intends to highlight the cross-disciplinary nature of art and design practice and research.

2016-18 lectures
Some of the prominent lectures conducted at VCULarts Qatar included UAE-based writer and art collector Sultan Sooud Al Qassemi’s discussion on the political undertones of iconic artworks of the 20th century in the Arab world; Mohamed Elshahed’s examination of Egyptian exhibition architecture between 1926 and 1964; architecture curator, critic, educator, author and consultant, Dr. Hassan Radoine’s exploration of architectural frontiers, and artist Alia Farid’s discussion on two projects that portray the arrival of, and fallout with, modernity in the Arab world.

Rana Salam spoke about how Middle Eastern pop culture transcends social hierarchy, age and gender in her lecture titled, “Shaabi to Chic: Pop Culture is Consumer Culture.” Beirut-based US artist Marwa Araniss gave a talk on “Ways of Reading.” Giulio Iacchetti talked about concepts and drawings and the relationship between artisans and inclusive projects to describe a very Italian way of making industrial design. Journeying through the profession of design, Giovanni Invalle met and collaborated with craftsmen, designers, artists and a variety of other people. Award-winning fashion designers Ece and Ayse Ege spoke at length about their professional journeys in the fashion industry.

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Graphic Design associate professors Bisma Hamdy and Denielle Emans initiated a teaching and learning platform titled “Design Co-Lab,” connecting teaching to service with the community. Their shared laboratory is founded on synergistic teaching, research, writing and extensive discussions on the political, social and cultural implications of design.

As part of Design Co-Lab, professors Hamdy and Emans brought together their two senior electives “Design for Social Innovation,” taught by Emans, and “Arabic Type Design,” taught by Hamdy, to participate in the “Wajha” project in fall 2016. Wajha is an independent social initiative that uses design and branding knowledge to help local communities in the MENA region that cannot afford design expenses. The Wajha competition was announced in December 2016 and invited designers from the Middle East to find a shop in need of a new brand design.

Hamdy and Emans identified a number of small businesses along Al Shagab Street in the Old Al Rayyan area to participate in the Wajha social initiative and enlisted the help of alumni Abdul Rahman Anwar and Hazem Asif to make the initial introductions to the shop owners. These two graphic design alumni were pivotal in helping to clarify the intentions of the project as a community-driven endeavor focused on promoting the small shops in the neighborhoods adjacent to Education City.
This process helped provide students with a closer look at the places we so often see but never notice. They are nevertheless an integral part of the community and its history.

— Basma Hamdy & Daniella Emans

The photographs and videos that emerged from the research contributed to the Wajha project competition, the first regional competition of its kind. They hope this rebrand will cater not only to Honey Queen’s existing clientele but will also attract new business. Colloquially known as a cafeteria, Honey Queen is a small-hole-in-the-wall restaurant that offers simple, wholesome Bengali cuisine. Serving food from the home, just like at home, the restaurant is well known for its Nihari, a special meat stew, as well as its more homely dishes. Fresh ingredients and affordable prices ensure a daily crowd.

The outcomes of the Wajha project showcase how students imagined they would use their graphic design skills to reinvigorate the small businesses by redesigning the shop fronts to make them more eye-catching and appealing. “We’re trying to teach students to work closely with the community through a human-centered approach, emphasizing bilingual typographic treatments that consider the significance of regional and contextual representation,” Emans says.

Thanks to the classroom initiative, “Honey Queen,” a little Bengali restaurant in Doha, is in the process of making a makeover. Senior graphic design students Ebeysah Khater (17), Aisha Saiyed (17), Aisha AlSaud (17) and Muneera Al-Obaidan (18) won second place in the Wajha project competition, the first regional competition of its kind. Serving food from the kitchen, just like at home, the restaurant is well known for its Nihari, a special meat stew, as well as its more homely dishes. Fresh ingredients and affordable prices ensure a daily crowd.

Al Shagab Street lies just outside Qatar Foundation and is home to Al Rayyan Area. Opposite page and overleaf

Second Place Wajha Competition Winners

01 Students conducting field research
02 Works by students at the “Shifting Spaces & Forgotten Walls” exhibition at Art 29 gallery at the W Doha Hotel

Opposite page and overleaf
03 Final branding for Honey Queen
04 Works by students at the “Shifting Spaces & Forgotten Walls” exhibition at Art 29 gallery at the W Doha Hotel
05 Final branding for Honey Queen
“Honey Queen”

Amman, Jordan, is where Wajha founders Ali AlMasri and Hussein Khatoon say, “The intention behind this project was to give the shop owner a long-term design plan that would bring them profit.”

Eight students came together to examine the blockade from multiple angles including Ebtesam M. Al-Hothi, Hessa Al Hitmi, Eman AlMansouri, Maha AlSoboh, Hana AlBakary, Alveem Vassier, Noor Bahman, and Shaiika Al-Muarrab. These students investigated all sides of the issue, focusing on micro-topics ranging from economic impacts to historical influences. “To further unravel the complexities of these topics, students examined news articles, researched political players and interviewed local authorities. This initial deep-dive into understanding the topic through primary and secondary research is critical to the success of projects such as these,” notes Hamdy.

Emans goes on to describe the importance of structured interviews as part of the shared curriculum in Design Co-Lab, explaining how it expands students thinking and allows them to unpack complex issues. For example, the eight students involved in the “The Spirit of the Loyals” campaign broke into pairs of two (one student from each class) to better understand the opinions of family members, friends and residents. One pair interviewed an uncle who had been involved in the Gulf War nearly 30 years ago, to examine how GCC relationships have shifted over the years. Another group of students talked to mixed Gulfheritage to understand the impact of the blockade.

“Five Pillars of Islam” project

“The Spirit of the Loyals,” a campaign that highlighted the impact of the Gulf Blockade on Qatari citizens and residents. Students examined news articles, researched political players and interviewed local authorities. This initial deep-dive into understanding the topic through primary and secondary research is critical to the success of projects such as these,” notes Hamdy.

Aisha Khaled Al-Saad, Alisha Rehamuddin Saiyed, Huma AlShimmari, Maha AlSoboh, Hana AlBakary, Alveem Vassier, Noor Bahman, and Shaiika Al-Muarrab. These students investigated all sides of the issue, focusing on micro-topics ranging from economic impacts to historical influences. “To further unravel the complexities of these topics, students examined news articles, researched political players and interviewed local authorities. This initial deep-dive into understanding the topic through primary and secondary research is critical to the success of projects such as these,” notes Hamdy.

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“My project,” Ali AlMasri, a graphic designer and Wajha founder, concluded, “was about the cultural side of design. The idea was to give the shop owners a design plan that would bring in profit.”

Hamdy advocates for structured interviews as part of the shared curriculum in Design Co-Lab, explaining how it is critical to the success of projects such as these. “The students need to think through the process of designing a product for shop owners,” he notes. “They need to consider all aspects of the design, including the materials, the color, and the target audience. They need to make sure that the product will be effective and will have a positive impact on the shop owners.”

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and Sarah Awida, created a campaign called “Bayan,” a weekly YouTube and Instagram series, to help viewers research, verify and learn about common misconceptions about Islam. In this project, illustration and Arabic typography were seamlessly blended together to encourage viewers to stop the cycle of false information.

Other outstanding projects created in this iteration of Design Co-Lab included the work of Carlotta Bernardi and Faheem Khan who looked at the negative effects of cultural appropriation using an experiential and spatial intervention. In another project, Yoon Geung Heung combined Korean typography with Gajin Chung’s illustrations in a video about suicide prevention for South Korean youth. A campaign created by Noof Al-Heidous, Aysha W. Alsayed, and Maryam Almalki educated children about water sustainability in Qatar, while Wadh Alhassan and Maryam Al-Mudaika’s project focused on feminism in Qatar. “Within each of our projects, we want students to think critically about their worldviews, but also see themselves as storytellers and change-makers of the future,” Emans says. “We believe that young designers must learn multiple perspectives and this can happen through collaboration and participatory practices,” Handy adds.

Handy and Emans have taken on the challenge of developing an advanced version of Co-Lab by linking two new senior electives together, “Design Activism,” taught by Emans, and “Language + Context,” taught by Handy. During the 2018–19 learning laboratory, the graphic design students explore how design propositions can trace the path to alternative worlds by raising awareness on collective futures as a form of design activism. This cutting-edge version of Co-Lab sheds light on past and present ideas of social justice, oppression and revolt through a fascinating survey of history, literature, art, film and television. To accomplish this, the pair brings together various fields involved in the interface between activism and the contradictions of power in relation to social change.

Speaking about this most recent Co-Lab, Handy explains how the work produced during the course investigated contextual and regional components of language systems to understand how culture

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–Denielle Emans

severing of political ties between Qatar and other Gulf states. Others reached out to local artists for interviews in an effort to highlight the role of design in political awareness.

Artist Ahmed Bin Majed Al-Maadheed, the creator of the iconic image of His Highness Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani, the Amir of the State of Qatar, titled “Tamim the Glorious,” is one example of the generosity of the community in Doha towards supporting the student research produced in the course. He not only provided insight into his work, but also participated in an online interview that was shared with the wider community. The result of this collective work promoted locally-made Qatari products, and celebrated messages of unity and shared unspoken history. The campaign launched on social media through a series of images and videos and was very well received. It was also presented in a series of installations at VCUarts Qatar. The project captured media attention with local newspapers reporting on the significance of the work and the role of art and design in national awareness.

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can play a significant role in the dynamics of power structures and their resistance. It challenged students to analyze, design and reinterpret the past (and present) to inform a fictional or speculative future. Emans says, “This course is for everyone who believes that design, especially when we design together, is an essential human expression that will help us all to move towards more sustainable futures.”

A central aspect of design Co-Lab is its focus on collaboration and the integration of students’ diverse skills and abilities. Classes like Co-Lab challenge design students to reframe their negative assumptions about teamwork in preparation for working with future colleagues and communities. To address some of the negative assumptions that students initially hold towards group work, Hamdy and Emans developed a model to guide young designers towards self-discovery based on observable personality traits which they have chosen to refer to as Design Powers.

Inspired by existing theories of personality and the cognitive tendency of categorization, Design Powers was originally developed to dispel the myth of the one-size-fits-all designer and celebrate the value of individual talent by promoting personal and professional growth. This ongoing research examines a methodological framework comprised of four design competencies—Dreamer, Tinkerer, Storyteller, Conductor. A series of complementary activities were created by the duo to engage students in celebrating their unique skills and, in doing so, prepare them for 21st century design practices. These activities progressively increase in complexity and structure, offering students the flexibility to identify their talents and take ownership of their individualized design powers.

In October 2016, Hamdy and Emans were invited to present the Design Powers System at the AIGA (American Institute of Graphic Art) National Conferences in Las Vegas where they gave a talk and workshop introducing the audience to the system. By sharing their research at this conference and other venues such as the 2018 Vested Summit in El Gouna, the pair has been able to continually refine their collaborative strategies. For this dynamic duo, international exposure is also an opportunity to spread a message about the importance of celebrating diversity as part of creative innovation, particularly regarding design research for social justice.

Hamdy and Emans explain that their collaborative research helps empower students to contribute meaningfully to projects by identifying their individual personality traits but also seeing the creative potential of others. “Not only do students learn to value meaningful input from diverse personalities, they see these traits mirrored by our own collaboration in the classroom,” explain the pair. Further details about this groundbreaking research is detailed in their recent journal article “The Design Powers System: Cultivating Design Competencies in Collaborative Endeavors” published in the third issue of the prominent design journal Dialectic in September 2018.
The YWP has had successful outcomes over its short existence. This innovative program aims to connect and support all levels of these educators is Liberal Arts & Sciences Assistant Professor Sadia Mir, a writing specialist in the Young Writers Program. Mir believes that helping to prepare students for the annual YWP competition.

The Young Writers Program Professor Mr. joined the Young Writers Program (YWP) in 2014, the program's founding year. Designed as a collaboration between the U.S. Embassy in Qatar and the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MHE), the YWP is an annual program which aims to further a critical and creative English writing culture in Qatar. Currently, in its fifth year, the program has 108 students and recent graduates to get involved, as well as collaborated with VCUarts Qatar faculty members. VCUarts Qatar has increased its support for the program throughout the years.

Self-expression and writing Acting in her capacity as writing specialist, Mr. leads writing workshops for students in grades 8 and 10 in selected government schools. She helps to prepare students for the annual YWP competition. The goal is to position English writing as a creative art and to encourage positive perceptions of English as a valuable tool in many fields.

In keeping with the aims of the MEHE, the approach has begun to change the culture of learning among students involved with the project. Mr. Ali Remahi, the head of the English Curriculum Team at MHE explains: "Student attitudes are beginning to change after the second year of the Young Writers Program. Over the past few award ceremonies, we have noticed that students came to support their peers and there was less animosity about not winning. Students were in it for the experience."

Mir says that by bringing students from different schools together, a community of young writers is being created within the public school system. "This takes students out of their classroom environments and allows them to exchange ideas and learn from students in other schools. It can be viewed as an internal student exchange program— which is a scenario that currently doesn't exist in their usual academic experiences," she explains.

New to fall 2017 was her work in partnership with the U.S. Embassy in Qatar, and the Social and Economic Survey Research Institute at Qatar University, to deliver a survey to assess the impact of the program on students and teachers. In November 2017, the assisted the U.S. Embassy, the planning and implementation of the first "Young Writers Open Mic" arts and literary community event in partnership with the MEHE and World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE), as part of Doha Learning Week. All ages from primary to university students— attended to read original poetry, recite favorite pieces of literature and perform music and song. Notably was the contingent of university students from Education City who expressed their enjoyment and requested more open mic events in the future.

In April 2018, VCUarts Qatar hosted the fourth competition award ceremony for the program. VCUarts Qatar's sponsorship of this event bears witness to the importance of the program in developing successful university students in Qatar, and is committed to creative development in many fields.

The winning students' work is published in the Young Writers Journal. In November 2016, the English Writing Program at VCUarts Qatar was launched. The program, which is a collaboration between the MEHE and World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE), is part of Doha Learning Week. All ages from primary to university students— attended to read original poetry, recite favorite pieces of literature and perform music and song. Notably was the contingent of university students from Education City who expressed their enjoyment and requested more open mic events in the future.

According to Mr., another positive aspect of the program is the development of a writing culture in Qatar. "Students are reaching out to us for more chances to write; they have expressed a want for writing groups and ways to engage with each other, as well as ways to express through creative and critical modes," she notes.

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In April 2018, VCUarts Qatar hosted the fourth competition award ceremony for the program. VCUarts Qatar's sponsorship of this event bears witness to the importance of the program in developing successful university students in Qatar, and is committed to creative development in many fields.

The winning students' work is published in the Young Writers Journal. In November 2016, the English Writing Program at VCUarts Qatar was launched. The program, which is a collaboration between the MEHE and World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE), is part of Doha Learning Week. All ages from primary to university students— attended to read original poetry, recite favorite pieces of literature and perform music and song. Notably was the contingent of university students from Education City who expressed their enjoyment and requested more open mic events in the future.

According to Mr., another positive aspect of the program is the development of a writing culture in Qatar. "Students are reaching out to us for more chances to write; they have expressed a want for writing groups and ways to engage with each other, as well as ways to express through creative and critical modes," she notes.

"In keeping with the aims of the MEHE, the approach has begun to change the culture of learning among students involved with the project. Mr. Ali Remahi, the head of the English Curriculum Team at MHE explains: "Student attitudes are beginning to change after the second year of the Young Writers Program. Over the past few award ceremonies, we have noticed that students came to support their peers and there was less animosity about not winning. Students were in it for the experience."

Mir says that by bringing students from different schools together, a community of young writers is being created within the public school system. "This takes students out of their classroom environments and allows them to exchange ideas and learn from students in other schools. It can be viewed as an internal student exchange program—which is a scenario that currently doesn't exist in their usual academic experiences," she explains.

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Community art classes changed my life: How one woman found her joy and created a life of passion through art

Splendor. Joy. Spirituality. Astonishment. These are the words Fatima Azzahrae Chaabani uses to describe her first experience with art through VCUarts Qatar’s community classes. Chaabani first discovered an interest in her calligraphy class and that led to finishing a master’s program at Prince’s School of Traditional Arts in London. In keeping with the transformative journey, Chaabani’s first project in June revolved around illuminating the opening chapter of the Holy Quran using illumination traditions from Morocco, China, Persia and the Ottoman Empire.

Chaabani had a more conventional dream: getting an excellent post-graduate education and ultimately, a good job doing meaningful work. She achieved more than just that—she mastered the art of illumination.

After receiving two bachelor’s degrees in Political Science and Islamic Studies from her home country’s Mohamed V University, Chaabani obtained a Master’s in Cultural Policy and Management from Sheffield Hallam University in the U.K. before going on to be a visiting fellow at Yale University. She first worked for the Islamic Scientific Educational and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) and then as a senior communication specialist for the Center for Islamic Legislation and Ethics (CILE) at Hamad Bin Khalifa University’s Faculty of Islamic Studies in Qatar.

While coming to terms with the reality of her career trajectory, struggling with the over 60-hour work weeks of her demanding job and in the process of beginning a Ph.D. in her field, Chaabani had an awakening. Looking for something to bring more fulfillment to her busy life, she turned to art. Luckily, she stumbled upon VCUarts Qatar’s calligraphy classes.

“Since day one, I realized that calligraphy is a deeply spiritual activity that requires full presence of the heart and mind, a direct connection between the action of my hand and the awareness of my soul,” she says. “Before long I was taking so many classes, I had one every day, seven days a week. It felt very natural to quit my previous job in communications and pursue my passion for arts after that.”

Four years later, Chaabani spends her days joyfully making natural pigments, creating harmonious color palettes and applying Islamic and medieval manuscript gold-gilding techniques to decorate verses of the Holy Quran. This process is called illumination, an art she learned from prominent illuminator and calligrapher Ayten Tiryaki in Turkey.

Chaabani has been on a long journey to reach the brink of a new career that she genuinely loves. She says, “Learning and practicing arts is profoundly fulfilling both spiritually and visually, and there is no downside to it. Like many people, I felt imprisoned by social conformity.

It took a lot of courage to step out of my comfort zone and acknowledge what my soul was craving.”

Looking back, she wishes she had the chance to discover her passion as a child. “Taking the community art classes at VCUarts Qatar resulted in a major breakthrough for my life and I am eternally grateful for this opportunity. I want to thank my teachers Emad Omran and Aziza Iqbal for their precious guidance and continuous support.”

Her first solo exhibition “Eclosion” was held in Rabat, Morocco, in 2017. It was a major breakthrough for her lifelong passion. Chaabani shared her work in a spectacular fashion. Find her work on her Instagram account @fatimaz_art.

Irrespective of age, VCUarts Qatar has a variety of unique, diverse and exciting vocational classes for anyone to sign up to. Some of the classes offered during spring 2018 included freehand speed sketching, observational drawing, acrylic painting, fashion design portfolio and contemporary interiors design discovery, fashion design portfolio and contemporary interiors among others. New classes were added throughout the year.
Artistic couple’s renovation aims to create a new artist residency program

Painting + Printmaking Assistant Professor Michael Perrone and his wife, Mariah Dekkenga—also a painter—recently purchased a decommissioned church in the town of Randolph, Vermont. The 1906 structure has roughly 6,000 square feet of usable space, and is just a short walk from the downtown business district. The artistic couple hopes to spend the next year or two renovating the building, and have set a goal of starting an artist residency by the summer of 2019. The space is currently in use by Dekkenga as a studio and makeshift living space.

In the 2017–18 year, the club continued its efforts of community building by organizing fall and spring games events by inviting workers, staff, faculty and students to engage in playful activities as one community. Musical chairs, ring pass, creative blocks, blind drawing, and a range of board games were all part of the fun. As always, there was plenty of delicious food and chai to enjoy as people spent time getting to know each other. These activities show a sustained effort from every individual to celebrate community development at VCUarts Qatar and beyond.

Want to learn more and become involved? Join students at their next event and follow their Facebook group: facebook.com/chitchatchai.VCUarts.Qatar/
Harness the creative, daring to make the world a more verdant, imaginative and vibrant communities and diversified economies.

The Class of 2018 co-valedictorians, Asma Hasan and Dimitri Salomão, contributed to the evening with a well-received speech in which they thanked their families, friends, faculty and staff joined together to celebrate the accomplishments of the 57 graduates, and to applaud each other’s collective efforts in helping the graduates reach their goals.

Reflecting on the current graduates, and the history of VCUarts Qatar, Executive Dean Donald Baker, Ph.D., says: “VCUarts Qatar has been a steady source of innovation and alternative ways of looking at the world and at ourselves. As we end our 20th year, we continue to be excited about the opportunities to cultivate a dynamic intercultural environment of research, learning and community engagement that provides the context for the holistic development of exemplary artists, designers and scholars to build vibrant communities and diversified economies.”

The Class of 2018 co-valedictorians, Ama Hasan and Dimitri Salomão, contributed to the evening with a well-received speech in which they thanked their families, faculty and staff.

To graduate with the distinction of University Honors, students are expected to complete a number of honors-level courses in a diverse range of disciplines that will help prepare them for careers or graduate-level learning. The context and mission of the program represents a synthesis of the many institutions and cultures that surround and support it. As part of the Honors Program at VCUarts Qatar, students are expected to complete a total of 24 honors course credits in a variety of different academic and creative fields, as well as undertaking an Experiential Learning Project. Honors students must maintain a 3.5 grade point average, and they are required to submit a dossier that details and reflects on their undergraduate education prior to graduation.

In 2018, University Honors were conferred upon Al Jazi Khalid Al-Thani, Amira Natsheh, Ama Hasan, Dimitri Y. Salomão, and Eman Makki. The Arab Engineering Bureau Award for Creative Achievement in Interior Design was presented to Interior Design junior Naurin Parambil. Jaidah is recognized as a pioneer of a new architectural movement that combines the far-reaching influences of Islamic art with modern styles to create memorable landmark structures that are shaping Qatar.

The awards were instituted by Jasid as a way to encourage and assist graduating students as they start their careers as designers in Qatar and the region. Jasid is recognized as a pioneer of a new architectural movement that combines the far-reaching influences of Islamic art with modern styles to create memorable landmark structures that are shaping Qatar.

"VCUarts Qatar has achieved such milestone celebrating its 20th anniversary in Qatar. Personally, and as a firm, we are honored to be a part of such an achievement with the Arab Engineering Bureau Award for Design Excellence in Graphic Design to graduating student Amira Natsheh, and for Design Excellence in Interior Design to graduating student Zainab Elbasman.

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The University conferred 52 Bachelor of Fine Arts degrees in Fashion Design, Graphic Design, Interior Design, Painting + Printmaking and Art History, and six Master of Fine Arts degrees in Design. The 17th Commencement brought the number of VCUarts Qatar alumni to 642.

University Honors Program

The Honors Program at VCUarts Qatar is designed to fulfill the needs of talented and academically high-achieving undergraduate students. The program offers an advanced liberal education that cultivates interdisciplinary research, creativity, multicultural literacy, self-development, experiential learning, and community-building. Students are expected to complete a number of honors-level courses in a diverse range of disciplines that will help prepare them for careers or graduate-level learning.

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VCUarts Qatar’s students have also shown remarkable academic achievement. Of the undergraduate students who graduated in May 2018, 11 graduated Cum Laude, 10 graduated Magna Cum Laude and six graduated Summa Cum Laude, which amounts to 48 percent of the class graduating with Latin Honors.

Latin Honors

VCUarts Qatar’s students have also shown remarkable academic achievement. Of the undergraduate students who graduated in May 2018, 11 graduated Cum Laude, 10 graduated Magna Cum Laude and six graduated Summa Cum Laude, which amounts to 48 percent of the class graduating with Latin Honors.
Character design, techno retro, motherhood and privacy were just a few of the fascinating subjects tackled at the 2018 VCUarts Qatar BFA + MFA Exhibition.

The exhibition, which ran until May 19 highlighted the impressive efforts of VCUarts Qatar’s graduating students from the BFA and MFA degree programs. The works on display covered the graphic, interior, fashion design and Painting + Printmaking disciplines.

It took place at the same time as the Council of Interior Design Accreditation (CIDA) exhibition which contained a large number of works by VCUarts Qatar’s Interior Design students, past and present.
Pendulum Fashion Show

The 19th edition of the show titled “Pendulum” was held on May 3, 2018, at The Westin Doha Hotel & Spa in partnership with Nasser Bin Khaled and Mercedes-Benz. More than 800 people attended the show, which saw 40 models showcase 100 garments during the hour-long event. Her Excellency Sheikha Hind bint Hamad Al Thani, Vice Chairperson and CEO of Qatar Foundation, who attended the event said: “I was delighted to attend the annual fashion show for Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts in Qatar. VCUarts Qatar was the first QF partner university to be established at Education City and, over the past 20 years, it has established itself as a center of excellence for education and research in art and design. Its success represents a significant milestone in our journey at QF to empowering our future generations to thrive in a global environment.”
VCUarts Qatar held its 2017 Commencement Ceremony on May 1 at HBKU Student Center, and it was by all accounts a resounding success. It was made memorable by inspiring and touching speeches that were given by faculty, graduates, and the keynote speaker at the event that brought together families, friends, faculty and staff to celebrate the accomplishments of VCUarts Qatar’s graduates.

The university conferred 66 Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) degrees in Fashion Design, Graphic Design, Interior Design, Painting + Printmaking, and art history, and four Master of Fine Arts (MFA) degrees in Design. The 16th Commencement brought the number of VCUarts Qatar alumni to 584.

Her Excellency Sheikha Hind bint Hamad Al Thani, the Vice Chairman and CEO of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development (QF), was the keynote speaker at the ceremony.

“VCU-Q has established a homegrown ecosystem right here in Doha — an ecosystem that promotes, develops and rewards innovation in art and design. The success of this mission is embodied in each member of the Class of 2017.” Her Excellency said.

Each year at Commencement, special recognition is given to individuals whose careers and values have done much to enhance the quality of life of communities around the world. In 2017, VCUarts Qatar presented the Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters to Dana Shell Smith, the then United States Ambassador to the State of Qatar, for her ongoing commitment and support to VCUarts Qatar, and for her overall dedication to being an advocate for Arts and Humanities.

The Class of 2017 Valedictorian Alisha Rehan Saiyed, and Salutatorian Radheya A. Vipersas gave a well-received and speech in which they thanked their families, fellow graduates, friends, faculty and staff.

“Remember that this is not the end, just the beginning: And if you work really hard and are lucky, you might find success. If you’re really lucky, you’ll find purpose. And when you have a purpose to pursue, your failures and successes no longer define you and they no longer hold you back.” Saiyed told her fellow graduates.

University Honors Program
In 2017, University Honors were conferred upon Alisha Rehan Saiyed, Al-Johara K. J. Al-Thani, Faesal Kamel Elagla, Kaltham Ahmad Alkuwari, Majdullin M. Nasselah, Nade R. Al-Khoashi, and Radheya A. Vipersas.

Latin Honors
VCUarts Qatar’s students have also shown remarkable academic achievement; from the undergraduate students graduating in May 2017, nine graduated Cum Laude; 11 graduated Magna Cum Laude; and four graduated Summa Cum Laude.

Honors & Awards
The Arab Engineering Bureau presented the 2017 awards for Design Excellence, and Creative Achievement and Potential to two graduating and two junior students from VCUarts Qatar during a ceremony at the university.

AEB’s Group CEO and Chief Architect Ibrahim Mohamed Jaidah, a longtime supporter and friend of VCUarts Qatar, presented the Arab Engineering Bureau Award for Design Excellence in Graphic Design to graduating student Eman O. Al-Jalay, and for Design Excellence in Interior Design to graduating student Majdullin Nasselah.

The Arab Engineering Bureau Award for Creative Achievement and Potential was presented to Graphic Design junior Amira Natsheh and Interior Design juniors AlJazi AlThani and Zeina Sleiman.
BFA + MFA Exhibition

Qatari weddings, eradicating whitewashed beauty standards, and Paralympic training and recreational facilities were just a few of the fascinating and involving exhibitions at the 2017 VCUarts Qatar BFA + MFA Exhibition, which opened to considerable acclaim on April 29, 2017 at VCUarts Qatar. The exhibition highlighted the impressive efforts of VCUarts Qatar’s graduating students from the BFA and MFA degree programs.

There was a large attendance on the opening day, with friends, families, and many others turning up for the event. The yearly exhibition is considered to be an excellent way to discover the outstanding works of a new generation of art and design talent in Qatar.

Also on show were several dresses by the graduates of the Fashion Design program, and these designs sat opposite those of the other BFA graduates in Room 590, while the works of the MFA graduates are at VCUarts Qatar’s Gallery, with works by the Painting + Printmaking seniors on display nearby at the Saffron Hall.

“Our seniors have engaged themselves with art and design’s on-going negotiation of new boundaries enabled by expanding technological capacities and cross-disciplinary research. They have developed projects that investigate potential relevance and value within individual experiences and localities in the face of global currents,” said Peter Martin, interim chair of Graphic Design at VCUarts Qatar.
Fashion Show
Collections by students from VCUarts Qatar’s Fashion Design program were on display during “Appliqué,” the two-day fashion show on April 12 and 13, 2017, which was hosted by Salam Stores at The Gate Mall.
This unique show, which featured the collections of 22 sophomore, junior and senior fashion students, was opened by Sandra Wilkins, VCUarts Qatar’s chair of Fashion Design, who thanked the audience for attending.
Wilkins explained that the title of 2017’s fashion show was “Appliqué,” which depicts the building of talents and skillsets, while showcasing the ability of students to take a concept all the way through to completion. She also described how important the show is both for the students and for Qatar’s fashion design industry.
The students had to submit their designs to a jury of fashion experts who are strong supporters of VCUarts Qatar’s fashion design program, and who would select the best designs for the show. “Only one garment was eliminated during this year’s jury selection, which speaks to the quality of the clothes,” said Professor Wilkins, explaining that such an occurrence was highly unusual. The fashion show allowed the students to be judged by experienced jury members who have a thorough knowledge of the fashion industry.
Also presenting their designs at “Appliqué” were several students from the fashion design program from the home campus from Richmond, Virginia.
Ahmed El Sayed, the co-founder of House of Nomad and VCUarts Qatar alumnus, was the guest designer for the show, where his most recent collection was presented to great acclaim.

The emphasis throughout was one of turning creative concepts into ready-to-wear pieces for the runway, which not only had to be beautiful, but also wearable and above all marketable. Fashion professionals, especially retailers are regularly invited each year to review the collections and concepts, and give their expert advice to the students.

The Salam Fashion Award was presented to Radhaya Visperas. The award includes mentoring in the development and design of two bespoke collections, which will be sold exclusively within a dedicated space in Salam Stores, Doha. Designs by the previous winner Mahnoor Ansari are currently on sale at Salam Stores at the Gate Mall. The W Doha Award went to Sarah Al-Abulghani, and the GLAM award went to Sarah Al-Abulghani and Samyah Abou Rahma.
VCUarts Qatar’s Golden Needle Award, which goes to the best Senior Collection, was awarded to Samyah Abou Rahma.
The award for Most Outstanding Junior Collection went to Fatima Al-Khulaifi. The award for Most Outstanding Sophomore Collection went to Haidy Rashad.

The award for Outstanding Senior with Highest GPA went to Radhaya Visperas. The awards for Outstanding Junior with Highest GPA went to Aiko Al-Sowadi and Sreelatha Saini. The award for Outstanding Sophomore with Highest GPA went to Heidi Rashad.
The Guest Designer Award went to Ahmed El Sayed from House of Nomad.
Awards were also given to Deborah Sedlak, Joshua Bigelow, Skyler Crawford and Lufia Critchfield from Virginia Commonwealth University’s home campus in Richmond, Virginia, for their Senior Collections which were shown at the event.
The fashion show counts not only on an extremely supportive audience, but was also supported by W Doha Hotel, GLAM magazine, Tajmeel Qatar International Beauty Academy, Makeup District, Bombay Silk Centre, Exclusive Events, Inglot, Tribal Gems & Jewellery, Apparel Qatar, Holika Holika and Sara’s Secrets.
Celebrating 20 Years of Excellence: Cultivating the Arts, Igniting Imagination, Shaping the Future

AS VCUARTS QATAR TURNED 20 in 2018, IT CELEBRATED ITS SPIRITED PRESENT, AND PROMISING FUTURE, WITH YEAR-LONG EVENTS & ACTIVITIES

1998–2018

To commemorate VCU’s 20th year of partnership with Qatar Foundation, VCUarts Qatar held a number of celebratory events in the 2017–2018 academic year. These included an alumni exhibition, a fun student event, an event centered on sharing alumni memories, a gala dinner, producing 20th anniversary materials, posting banners and releasing a coordinated media campaign. This coincided with a comprehensive rebranding of VCUarts Qatar to VCUarts Qatar to highlight the connection to the United States’ #1 ranked public art school, VCUarts.

VCUarts Qatar’s brand realignment
In 2017–18, as part of VCUarts Qatar’s 20th anniversary activities, the university underwent a brand realignment with VCUarts in Richmond. This realignment aims to unify the university’s identity with the home campus in Richmond, the number one-ranked public art school in the United States, according to the US News and World Report. The new name reflects the actual name of the branch campus: Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts (VCUarts) in Qatar. Adding “arts” to the name of the school, helps to clarify VCUarts Qatar’s offerings, and in turn, streamlines efforts. VCUarts Qatar now has a new brand mark highlighting the official colors of red and VCU gold.

“20/20/20” alumni exhibition
The 20th anniversary activities opened in September 2017 with an alumni exhibition demonstrating how VCUarts Qatar prepares its alumni to take the lead in designing the future. Held in the VCUarts Qatar Gallery, the “20/20/20” (20 years/20 alumni/20 September) exhibition was curated by alumna and Assistant Professor, Maryam Yousef Al-Homaid, and former Alumni Relations Coordinator and alumnus, Ahmad Oustwani. The exhibition showcased the work of 20 alumni from all programs, featured works by Abdulrahman Anwar and Mohammad Jawad, Abdulnajib Al-Kuwari, Abdulla Najib Al-Kuwari, Ahood Al Dafa, Aisha Al-Suwaidi, Assil Diab, Bouthayna Al-Muftah, Dhika Khaira, Faisal Mohammad, Fatma Al-Ramahi, Hadeer Omar, Hana Al Saadi, Leila Natsheh, Maryam Faraj D. F. Al-Suwaidi, Naila Al-Thani, Othman M. R. Khunji, Reem Al-Thani, Sahar Mari, Sumam Azzam and Wurood Ismail Azzam.
Karak Hour student event
In February 2018, students, faculty and staff gathered in the Atrium to take part in Virginia Commonwealth University-themed board games and other activities, including having their photographs taken at a 20th anniversary photo booth. Students joined the Dean on the Atrium’s stage to cut a large cake with the 20th anniversary logo.

“Hindsight” exhibition
2018 also marked the opening of “Hindsight,” an exhibition featuring photos of faculty and staff in their twenties. The year-long exhibition, which is in one of the Glass Gallery Project Spaces on the ground floor, is aimed at bringing faculty, students and staff closer together. The exhibit was curated by Digital Content and Social Media Manager, Mike Gallagher, in partnership with Department of Graphic Design faculty member Michael Hersrud.

20 Hekaya alumni event
In April 2018, more than 150 alumni attended the 20 Hekaya event to celebrate 20 years of alumni stories. Alumni Esra Kazem, Aisha Al-Sowaidi and Othman Khunji took part in a panel where they shared their stories and what VCUarts Qatar meant to them. Hadeer Omar, Wajiha Pervez, Yasmeen Suleiman and Noha Fouad, the four co-chairs of the Tasmeem Doha 2019 conference, encouraged alumni to participate in sharing their stories.

20th Anniversary Gala
VCUarts Qatar hosted a 20th anniversary gala the same evening as the commencement with special guest speaker and longtime supporter of VCUarts Qatar, His Excellency Sheikh Abdulla bin Ali Al-Thani, Ph.D., advisor to the Amiri Diwan. He said, “This significant institutional milestone—two fruitful decades of Qatar Foundation’s partnership with Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts in Qatar, reflects the continuing commitment of His Highness Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, Amir of the State of Qatar, to education as a pillar of society and an engine of growth, prosperity and security.”

AEB’s Group CEO and Chief Architect Ibrahim Mohamed Jaidah, a long-time supporter and friend of VCUarts Qatar, presented the Arab Engineering Bureau Awards for Design Excellence in Graphic Design and Interior Design.

20th Anniversary iftars
Two iftars, which took place during the Holy Month of Ramadan, concluded the University’s 20th anniversary celebrations. The 20th anniversary workers appreciation iftar took place at the Atrium on June 7, 2018 and was attended by the personnel who keep the building running smoothly, cleaners, security officers and pantry staff, along with Dean Baker and his wife Heather, staff, and the students from the Chit Chat Chai club.
A central figure in the development of VCUarts Qatar, Sandra Bell Wilkins, the founding chair of the Fashion Design program, is the longstanding face of Qatar’s fashion scene. Her vibrant presence will be sorely missed. Shortly before stepping down from her long tenure in 2018, Wilkins shared a few reflections on her time in Qatar.

How did you feel when you first came to Qatar in 1998 to start the Fashion Design program?

I first missed my family, but the hospitality and relationships I built with my students helped to ease that loneliness. The Qatari community became my family and I became so engaged that those feelings soon dissipated.

Looking back 20 years, did you envision all of this change? How does it make you feel?

Never. I have never seen any city grow at the pace that Doha has. It makes you feel like anything is possible.

Share with us the top instances in the last 20 years that stand out for you personally.

Statistically, more fashion students, single and double majors, are employed in the public and private sector. Seven of the fashion majors worked for Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser before their reorganization. Hisham Dawoud is employed by one of the United States most prestigious designers and despite the fact that Selena [Farooqui] is still in Doha, she enjoys celebrity status with her design talents. Many students I have placed in internships internationally were all asked to return for full-time employment. Despite there not being an established industry in Doha, we still attracted some of the finest foundation students to our department.

What do you hope to see the Fashion Design program achieve over the next 10 years?

I hope an industry will be established to support the local designers, with that I am confident that Qatari design will flourish. We attract the Richmond students and have to make them return to the main campus. That is a testament to the quality of our instruction. Coming to Doha has been the most exciting and rewarding experience of my life.

REFLECTIONS FROM DOHA’S QUEEN OF FASHION
THANK YOU
VCUarts Qatar’s remarkable achievements would not have been possible without the generous support of donors and partners who contribute their time, talents, and gifts to make the University the success it is today. It is the thoughtfulness that will allow VCUarts Qatar to continue on its journey of creativity and innovation.

SCHOLARSHIPS & GIFTS 2016–2018
ARAB ENGINEERING BUREAU
BIDWA RESORTS
SARAH ABDULGHANI
SALEM STUDIO STORES AND THE GATE MALL
NASER BIN KHALID HOLDINGS AND MERCEDES-BENZ
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SHAWN BRIXEY
DEAN, PENNY W. STAMPS SCHOOL OF THE ARTS & DESIGN, UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

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DEAN, HBKU COLLEGE OF SCIENCE & ENGINEERING

Many thanks to those who have graciously donated anonymously, as well as those who continue to partner with us in our quest to address and promote the interconnectedness between and among science, the arts and humanities.

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