

**ICA at VCU Announces Its Inaugural *Summer Sessions* Program,
A Nine-Week Series that Explores What We Hold in Common and What Divides Us,
To Inform Future ICA Programming**

ICA to host Wednesday and Saturday public engagements in the ICA's Beverly W. Reynolds Gallery, designed specifically for this collaborative experience

Richmond, Virginia – June 5, 2019 – On June 15, 2019, the Institute for Contemporary Art (ICA) at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) will launch the inaugural installment of *Summer Sessions*, an interactive public program that will span three summers and invite the public to think with the ICA about issues that concern all of us. Dialogue takes center stage as the ICA's first-floor gallery becomes a vibrant, flexible space in which to gather, pose questions, and make connections. The program will blend performances, thematic workshops, and lively discussions with opportunities for more informal exchange.

The first *Summer Session*—to run June 15 through August 18, 2019—will focus on what it means to live in a commonwealth such as Virginia and how that commonwealth can and should evolve in the 21st century. Through public social sessions and program sessions, closed field research sessions, and ongoing opportunities for public commentary in the gallery, *Summer Sessions: Commonwealth* will examine themes such as Natural Resources, Built Environment, Dependence/Independence, Assembly, and Public Domain.

"*Summer Sessions* will be occasions to think out loud, in public. They are designed as focused periods of conversation, collaborative and transparent research, and play," said Stephanie Smith, ICA Chief Curator. "The series provides a platform for us to try out different program models. Inviting dialogue about issues that concern all of us, listening, and using what we learn to help guide our programming—this is how the ICA works."

This first series, *Summer Sessions: Commonwealth*, is initiated by Smith and Noah Simblist, Chair of Painting and Printmaking at VCUarts, as part of the ICA's contribution to *Commonwealth* (working title), a multi-year collaboration with arts organizations also located in commonwealths: Beta-Local, an artist-run non-profit in San Juan, Puerto Rico; and Philadelphia Contemporary in Pennsylvania. At the ICA, *Summer Sessions: Commonwealth* will inform the planning of a related exhibition staged across all three cities in the fall of 2020, as well as a publication to be released in 2021.

"Centuries ago, 'the commonwealth' was understood as a model of political organization meant to achieve public welfare or the common good. The 'commons' referred to a medieval notion of natural resources to which all members of society had access, like water or air, and 'wealth' referred to happiness or well-being," said Simblist. "But over time the utopian origins of the term 'commonwealth' have been complicated by its associations with colonialism." Considering both common wealth and common debts, throughout these sessions the ICA will assess how society might recover the larger meaning and potential of 'the commonwealth.'

Several guest speakers will join for these topical conversations including Marshall Brown, Director of the Center for Architecture, Urbanism, and Infrastructure at Princeton University; Heather Davis, Assistant Professor of Culture and Media at the New School in New York; Patton Hindle, Director of Arts for the crowdfunding platform Kickstarter; and Gregory Sholette, Co-Director of the Social Practice program at Queens College and author of *Delirium and Resistance: Activist Art and the Future of Capitalism* (2017).

Sessions will be facilitated by Richmond-based activist and urban gardener Duron Chavis and community organizer Rebecca Keel, with active participation by partners from across the Richmond region including The Conciliation Project, Storefront for Community Design, the DJ collective Ice Cream Social, and community radio station WRIR. Related artists' videos will also be screened each week, including works by Jonas Staal (Netherlands) and Carolina Caycedo (Columbia). Each event will occur in the ICA's Beverly W. Reynolds Gallery,

which has been transformed for this project by DSGN AGNC (Brooklyn, New York) + Fundación Horizontal + El Equipo Mazzanti (Bogotá, Columbia) as a place where individual stories and practices can connect. During normal operating hours, ICA visitors will witness the accumulated traces of the ongoing discussions and collaborative work, and can add their own feedback.

The second Summer Session will focus on a new topic, to be announced in the coming year. Additional details on the Commonwealth exhibition in Richmond, San Juan, and Philadelphia will also be announced in the coming year.

Summer Sessions: Commonwealth Schedule

June 15-August 18, 2019

Visit icavcu.org for in-depth descriptions of weekly themes, full list of partners and speakers, and details about social sessions.

Each **Wednesday Social Session** is both a gathering and introduction to the week's themes, bringing together Session partners, community members, and the public around music and common interests. Live DJ, hands-on activities, and cash bar.

Each **Saturday Program Session** dives into weekly topics related to the term "commonwealth," with relevant speakers, a workshop, reflection period, and a taping of WRIR-FM's "Local Voices Live."

*Exhibition will be open to the public during all events and during regular ICA operating hours.

WEEK 0: Introduction

Saturday, June 15, 1-5 pm

Introduction to Summer Sessions. Talks and workshops including collaborators Beta-Local (San Juan) and the Summer Sessions design team (New York + Bogota)

WEEK 1: Natural Resources

Facilitator: Duron Chavis

Guest: Heather Davis

Social Session - Wednesday, June 19, 6-8 pm

Program Session - Saturday, June 22, 1-5:30 pm

WEEK 2: Built Environment

Facilitator: Duron Chavis

Guest: Marshall Brown

Social Session - Wednesday, June 26, 6-8 pm

Program Session - Saturday, June 29, 1-5:30 pm

WEEK 3: Dependence/Independence

in lieu of programming during this holiday week, the ICA will post "Declarations of Dependence" written by project collaborators

WEEK 4: Assembly

Facilitator: Rebecca Keel

Guest: Gregory Sholette

Social Session - Wednesday, July 10, 6-10 pm

Dance party hosted by Chaz Barracks, featuring DJs Ice Cream Social

Program Session - Saturday, July 13, 1-5:30pm

WEEK 5: Public Domain

Facilitator: Rebecca Keel

Guest: Patton Hindle

Social Session - Wednesday, July 17, 6-8 pm

Program Session - Saturday, July 20, 1-5:30 pm

WEEK 6-8: Reflection

No programming

WEEK 9: Closing

Saturday, August 17, 1-6pm

Workshop and conversations to reflect on Summer Sessions. and a closing celebration

About the Institute for Contemporary Art at VCU

The Institute for Contemporary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University is a non-collecting institution that showcases a fresh slate of changing exhibitions and programs. The ICA is a place to explore new ideas, providing an open forum for dialogue and collaboration across the region and the world. Mirroring the increasing emphasis on cross-disciplinary studies across VCU, the ICA has created a new environment for artists and scholars from around the world to test ideas. As a university-wide resource, the ICA links campus, community, and contemporary artists by supporting local creative communities, engaging an international network of contemporary artists and organizations, and encouraging collaborations with VCU departments, faculty, students, and the Richmond community. The ICA is a responsive institution that offers a broad range of artistic perspectives from across the world, with the goal of questioning assumptions and encouraging critical discourse. For more information on the ICA, please visit icavcu.org.

About VCU and VCU School of the Arts

VCU is a major, urban public research university with national and international rankings in sponsored research. Located in downtown Richmond, VCU enrolls more than 31,000 students in 217 degree and certificate programs in the arts, sciences, and humanities. One of the nation's leading schools of arts and design, VCU School of the Arts offers 15 undergraduate and 10 graduate degree programs in fine arts, design, performing arts, historical research, and pedagogical practice. Distinguished faculty members are internationally recognized in their respective fields, contribute significantly to the stature of VCU, and are committed to mentoring the next generation of artists, entrepreneurs, scientists, scholars, and engaged citizens of diverse communities around the world. Its campus in Qatar provides students and faculty with a direct tie to the Middle East and underscores the school and university's commitment to global education and experience.

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