

## ICA at VCU Announces Spring and Summer 2021 Exhibitions and Programs

***Season Features Solo Exhibitions with New Commissions by Dineo Seshee Bopape and Ibrahim Ahmed and Public Programs that Foreground Collaboration, Creation, and Mutual Learning***



Images: Dineo Seshee Bopape, Clay animation sketch, courtesy of the artist; Ibrahim Ahmed, *Does Anybody Leave Heaven?* (2019), courtesy of the artist.

Richmond, VA – March 25, 2021 – The **Institute for Contemporary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University (ICA at VCU)** today announced its programming for spring and summer 2021, featuring new commissions, museum debuts, and a robust slate of virtual programs that gives audiences unprecedented access to art, artists, research, and creation. Spotlighting an international group of creative voices, the season includes the first solo museum exhibition of work by Cairo-based artist **Ibrahim Ahmed** and the first solo U.S. museum exhibition by South African artist **Dineo Seshee Bopape**, comprised entirely of new, site-responsive commissions. Throughout the spring and summer, the ICA will also expand upon its **Public Study** and **VPM + ICA Community Media Center** initiatives with new programs that invite the public to share their own stories, perspectives, and ideas.

“This season, we’re bringing to Richmond creative voices from around the world whose projects each have something powerful to say about our current context, both on a local and global level,” said **Dominic Willsdon, Executive Director of the ICA at VCU**. “As we continue to grow our Public Study offerings, we hope to bring our audiences into closer contact with these artists and their work, allowing them to experience and contribute to ICA programming in more active, intimate ways.”

The ICA’s upcoming schedule of exhibitions highlights new and recent work by a global group of contemporary artists who—through a range of media and perspectives—explore topics including identity and place; the movement of peoples, both voluntary and forced; and the complex legacies of history, memory, and trauma. In addition to ongoing presentations of work by **Harold Mendez** and **Kandis Williams**, the season also includes the debut of two major solo exhibitions:

- ***Ibrahim Ahmed: It Will Always Come Back to You*** (July 30, 2021 – November 28, 2021), a selection of textile-based sculpture, painting, and photo collages produced by Ahmed since 2013, delving into themes related to colonization, power structures, cultural interactions, and the fluidity of identity. The exhibition will also feature a large new ICA-commissioned sculpture.

- ***Dineo Seshee Bopape: Ile aye, moya, là, ndokh...harmonic conversations...mm*** (late summer 2021), an exhibition of new, ICA-commissioned video, sculpture, and installation by Bopape that explores histories of trauma, memory, and resistance across four sites connected to the transatlantic slave trade: Richmond, New Orleans, Senegal, and Ghana.

In summer 2020, the ICA launched *Public Study*, a slate of in-person and digital programs that invites the public to engage with art and research in an open-ended and collaborative way, which to date has included intimate digital gatherings with artists, insights into the creation of an ICA publication, and a dial-in art hotline. In the coming months, the ICA will debut “Public Annotations,” the newest *Public Study* program in which audiences collaboratively read, edit, and respond to open-access PDFs of key texts related to upcoming exhibitions. The first set of “Public Annotations” texts will tie into [Kandis Williams: A Field](#), which opened in November 2020 and will remain on view through September 12, 2021; [Harold Mendez: Let us gather in a flourishing way](#), which opened in early March and will remain on view through June 27, 2021; and *Dineo Seshee Bopape: Ile aye, moya, là, ndokh...harmonic conversations...mm*, diving deeper into related topics such as sexuality, Blackness, labor, botany, plantation logic, racial capitalism, and post-colonial poetics.

The ICA will also continue its ongoing series of virtual classes, workshops, and discussions on podcast development through the VPM + ICA Community Media Center, a free resource launched to the public virtually in fall 2020 with a forthcoming studio and workspace opening in the Murry DePillars Learning Lab at the ICA for in-person recording and instruction in fall 2021. Guests will include Blake Day, talent acquisition partner for Spotify Studios; and Phoebe Judge and Lauren Spohrer, co-creators of *Criminal*. Led by Director of Community Media **Dr. Chioke l’Anson**—Assistant Professor of African American Studies at VCU and underwriting announcer at NPR—the Community Media Center offers rare opportunities to network and learn from leading producers of audio content, supporting students, community members, and anyone with an interest in podcasting as they work to share their stories.

Throughout the spring and summer, the ICA will also be collaborating with artists on two major projects centered around music and publishing. The first, ***Doing Language***, is a multi-part project that upends traditional notions of publishing by highlighting the work of nine artists whose practices engage with language in various—and often unconventional—ways: **Justin Allen, Chloë Bass, Bryan Castro, Riley Hooker, Joselia Rebekah Hughes, MA.MOYO aka Belinda Zhawi, Massa Lemu, Malcolm Peacock, and agustine zegers**. Beginning this spring, the ICA will be supporting these artists in the realization of new work which will unfold to the public throughout the summer and fall. The project is co-organized by ICA Assistant Curator for Commerce and Publications Egbert Vongmalaitong and ICA Research Fellow and VCU Assistant Professor in Graphic Design Nontsikelelo Mutiti.

The second collaborative project is ***Elevator Pitch***, a web-based micro-concert music series hosted in the ICA’s one-of-a-kind elevator, a gift of the Saunders Family Foundation. The series will focus on music of the African diaspora including indigenous sound, jazz, hip-hop, rock, and soul, and early episodes will feature primarily local and regional musicians. Pending COVID restrictions, the ICA will begin recording sessions in the coming months and premiering episodes via YouTube in the late summer. More details on *Elevator Pitch* and *Doing Language* will be announced at a later date.

Additional information on the ICA’s spring/summer 2021 exhibitions and programs follows below.

## **Exhibitions**

***Ibrahim Ahmed: It Will Always Come Back to You***

July 30, 2021 – November 28, 2021

The first solo museum exhibition of Cairo-based artist Ibrahim Ahmed (b. 1984, Kuwait), *It Will Always Come Back to You* presents a thematic selection of his work from 2013 to 2020 in a variety of media, including primarily textile-based sculpture, painting, and photo collage. The exhibition also features a new large sculpture commissioned by the ICA.

Born in Kuwait, Ahmed spent his childhood between Bahrain and Egypt before moving to the US at the age of thirteen. In 2014, he relocated to Cairo, where he currently lives and works in the informal neighborhood of Ard El Lewa. Ahmed's manipulations of material, especially textile, are informed by research into the histories and movements of peoples and objects. His works in mixed media, sculpture, and installation engage with subjects related to colonization, structures of power, cultural interactions, and fluid identity, generating discussion around ideas of the self and notions of authenticity with the parameters of the nation-state. Ahmed's work has been included in major group exhibitions internationally, including at the Sharjah Art Museum, 4th International Biennial of Casablanca (2018), 13th edition of the Biennial of Dakar - Dak'Art (2018), 13th Havana Biennial (2019), and 12th edition of the Bamako Encounters - African Biennale of Photography (2019-20).

*Ibrahim Ahmed: It Will Always Come Back to You* is curated by ICA Executive Director Dominic Willson.

***Dineo Seshee Bopape: Ile aye, moya, là, ndokh...harmonic conversations...mm***

Late summer 2021 (dates TBA)

Dineo Seshee Bopape (b. 1981, Polokwane, South Africa) presents a suite of new, ICA-commissioned work spanning video, sculpture, installation, and animation. Focusing on sites that were involved in the transatlantic slave trade, Bopape's exhibition connects histories of slavery, trauma, and memory across four places chosen for their locations as former slave routes or ports of slavery-related commerce: Richmond, New Orleans, Senegal, and Ghana. Merging the artist's interests in soil and architecture, the exhibition mines the natural and built environments in all four sites to explore the legacies of pain, spiritualism, resistance, and rebellion held within each.

Celebrated for her research-intensive explorations of place, history, and spirituality, Bopape—who co-represented South Africa at the 2019 Venice Biennale and has won the Future Generation Art Prize and the Sharjah Biennial Art prize, among other accolades—often roots her work in the material and metaphysical qualities of earthly elements like soil, clay, and dust. She continues this practice in *Ile aye, moya, là, ndokh...harmonic conversations...mm*, gathering clay and soil samples from the four sites and incorporating them into each of her new works. Harnessing raw material and video footage from each of these places, Bopape explores their parallel histories and the interconnectedness of land, water, and body as sites of both trauma and commemoration.

As part of the exhibition, the ICA and Bopape are partnering with the Menokin Foundation, a nonprofit dedicated to preserving the historic Virginia plantation home of Declaration of Independence signer Francis Lightfoot Lee and sharing the stories of the site's inhabitants, including those who were enslaved there. Descendants of enslaved laborers at Menokin are creating small sculptures from clay sourced from the property, which Bopape will arrange into a larger installation at the ICA.

*Dineo Seshee Bopape: Ile aye, moya, là, ndokh...harmonic conversations...mm* is curated by Amber Esseiva, Associate Curator at the ICA at VCU.

**[Harold Mendez: Let us gather in a flourishing way](#)**

On view through June 27, 2021

Following its debut at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (ICA LA), this solo presentation of work by LA-based artist Harold Mendez (b. 1977, Chicago) travels to the ICA at VCU. Borrowing its title from a poem by Juan Felipe Herrera, the exhibition will include a selection of approximately 20 works by Mendez made over the past decade as well as newly produced works. Working between photography and sculpture, Mendez explores the tension between fiction and truth, visibility and absence, with an interest in how constructions of history and geography shape our sense of self.

A first-generation American of Mexican-Colombian descent, Mendez's work often considers the transnational experience, ritual, and cultural memory. His large format two-dimensional works transform found photographs through a laborious manual transfer process similar to lithography. Using charcoal or graphite to build the surface, Mendez both traces and erases archival imagery with specific sociocultural or art historical references to create otherworldly new images. His sculptures take found objects, industrial goods, or symbolic organic matter—such as eucalyptus bark, bone, or cochineal pigment—to examine identity and place; certain works become living rather than static objects, requiring the daily replenishment of water or flower petals. While experimenting with dramatic shifts in scale and unorthodox materials, Mendez's excavatory approach to production is a process of unearthing and transforming that highlights the tenuous relationship between history and its representation.

*Let us gather in a flourishing way* is curated by Jamillah James, Senior Curator at ICA LA. The Richmond presentation is organized by ICA at VCU Executive Director Dominic Willsdon.

**[Kandis Williams: A Field](#)**

On view through September 12, 2021

*Kandis Williams: A Field* features new, site-responsive commissions by Kandis Williams, an LA-based artist and founder of CASSANDRA PRESS, an artist-run publishing and educational platform centered on femme-driven activism and Black scholarship. Through a combination of sculpture, video, and installation, *A Field* addresses the regimes of control associated with Black labor, including at prison farms in Virginia. The exhibition transforms the ICA's soaring top-floor gallery into a horticultural environment filled with collaged plant sculptures, drawing connections between the oppression of Black people in America and the world of non-human plant life, and exploring the ways in which people, much like the crops they cultivate, can be subject to exploitation and control.

In 2021, the ICA will launch several programs and initiatives related to the exhibition including a digital catalogue, artist talks, and "Public Annotations." The latter invites audiences to lend their voices to the artistic and curatorial research process by collaboratively editing open-access PDFs that explore topics central to the exhibition, such as sexuality, Blackness, labor, and botany.

**Programs**

**[Public Study](#)**

Ongoing

*Public Study* is a recently launched initiative of programs that invites the public to engage with art and research in a variety of ways—in-person, virtually, and via phone. *Public Study* is concerned with collective research—including the marginalia, the side conversations, the notes and sketches, and the differing points of view, which together catalyze alternate ways of thinking and engaging with art. Participants can take part in offerings like digital presentations, annotating archival texts and images, and shared activities that challenge traditional research and presentation formats, decentralizing expertise by giving people the opportunity to learn from a variety of experiences and forms of knowledge. Projects are ongoing and participants are encouraged to drop in and experience collective research and collaborative learning.

*Public Study* programs available in spring and summer 2021 include:

- **1-844-NOT-ZOOM** (1-844-668-9006), an art hotline that invites anyone to dial in to hear original audio content from artists, offering fresh alternatives to the online realm that can be easily accessed from your phone. The hotline was launched in fall 2020 and is regularly refreshed with new work.
- **Public Annotations**, an online project in which audiences are invited to read and respond to key texts for upcoming shows via open-access PDFs. An exercise in collaborative reading, commenting, and synthesizing, *Public Annotations* seeks to reorient curatorial and artistic research by inviting the ICA's publics into the process. Each PDF serves as a living document, allowing multiple forms of knowledge to accumulate in one space over time. Public Annotations will debut in the coming months with a suite of texts related to the ICA's current exhibitions *Kandis Williams: A Field* and *Harold Mendez: Let us gather in a flourishing way*, as well as its forthcoming exhibition by Dineo Seshee Bopape.

### [VPM + ICA Community Media Center](#)

Ongoing

An innovative partnership between the ICA at VCU and VPM, Virginia's home for public media, the VPM + ICA Community Media Center is a multi-year initiative supporting the creation of a new media center inside the ICA and offering workshops, seminars, and symposia on the development of podcasts and other audio content. As a free public resource for anyone with an interest in audio content creation, the Community Media Center aims to create new opportunities for storytelling, train and educate the next generation of audio producers, and amplify voices often missing from traditional media. Programming launched virtually in fall 2020, with the workshop and recording studio inside the ICA slated for opening in fall 2021.

Upcoming VPM + ICA Community Media Center programs in spring 2021 include:

- Let's Apply to Spotify: Tips for Getting a Job in Podcasts with Blake Day (March 31)
- CMC Live Event with Phoebe Judge and Lauren Spohrer (April 21)

For more information, or to register to attend an upcoming program, visit [icavcu.org/communitymedia/](https://icavcu.org/communitymedia/)

### **About the Institute for Contemporary Art**

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](http://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. VCUarts is one of the top-ranked public art schools in the U.S. and offers degree programs across the visual and performing arts and design. VCUarts is housed within a major urban research university that has been recognized for its community-engaged research. Encouraging intellectual inquiry in and through the creative fields, VCUarts fosters rich, interdisciplinary collaborations between artists, designers, health practitioners, and more.

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