

Paul Rucker

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ICA at VCU announces opening date, Oct. 28, and opening exhibition, 'Declaration'

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By Katherine Calos

**SF**

248 Utah Street  
SF, CA 94103  
+ 415 399 1439

**NY**

313 W 14th Street 2F  
New York, NY  
By appointment only

**WEB**

[www.cclarkgallery.com](http://www.cclarkgallery.com)



VCU's Institute for Contemporary Art is at the corner of Belvidere and Broad streets in Richmond. The building plays off the idea of forking paths.

The Institute for Contemporary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University introduced itself to the national art and architectural world at a New York luncheon Tuesday with help from the team that designed its landmark building and examples of the first art to be exhibited there.

The ICA's Markel Center will open Oct. 28 at Belvidere and Broad streets with an exhibition called "Declaration," featuring new works by artists from around the world.

The luncheon at Craft, one of the top-ranked restaurants in New York, attracted reporters from The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, Atlantic and Smithsonian magazines, the New York reporter for National Public Radio, Art in America, Architectural Digest, and Town and Country, among others.

“It was amazing,” said Lisa Freiman, ICA director. “Everyone was so pumped up about finally being able to talk about what we are planning. We are eager to bring it back home and share it in greater depth.

“The main point of the briefing was to give the publications that have long lead times a heads up on what’s coming so they can make space in their calendars and have reporters covering that important moment,” Freiman said. “We also really used it as an opportunity to shed light on the innovative things happening with VCUarts and our interdisciplinary work, especially with medicine and business.”

People in Richmond take it almost for granted that the VCU art and design program is tied with UCLA as the No. 1 ranked public school of art and design in the U.S. Nationally, that’s still a revelation, Freiman said.

“It’s important for people to understand the magnitude of what’s happening at VCU and Richmond, and how the ICA is bringing this together,” she said.

The inaugural exhibition will explore contemporary art’s power to catalyze change, according to an ICA release, and will feature painting, sculpture, multimedia works, site-specific installations and time-based performances by emerging and established artists. It will remain until Feb. 25, 2018. Among the works will be an immersive installation and related video game, a reinterpretation of Ku Klux Klan robes created weekly in 2015 to reflect recent events, a suite of letterpress prints, a radio drama, and a sound installation that includes Richmond youth reciting from Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges’ “The Garden of Forking Paths.”

The idea of forking paths is represented in the building’s innovative design by Steven Holl Architects. Two second-floor galleries reach out toward the campus in a “V” of offset boxes, which Holl has said was a reference to Borges’ concept of forking time.

International artists include Amos Paul Kennedy Jr., Marinella Senatore, Tania Bruguera and Paul Rucker. Representatives of Richmond’s arts community include VCUarts professor Stephen Vitiello and VCU alum Levester Williams.

“Our diverse program will introduce ... a variety of perspectives to inspire new ways of thinking, create meaningful connections, and explore the central issues of our times,” Freiman said in the news release. “These aims are exemplified in our opening exhibition, ‘Declaration,’ which considers the roles of art, artists, and cultural institutions in times of intense debate and social change.” The ICA, a \$41.2 million project, has nearly 41,000 square feet of space. An open circulation plan will allow visitors to experience the works from multiple sight lines.

Stephanie Smith, ICA chief curator, described the exhibition as “simultaneously grounded in a rich local context and engaged with global concerns.”

“Artists respond to the pressing issues of our times — sometimes directly, sometimes obliquely. However they choose to speak, their work opens alternate pathways. Each choice we make has consequences. Each declaration of independence or connection, compliance or resistance, leads toward different futures. The works in Declaration will invite reflection, debate, action, and collaboration, making space for individual contemplation while also unleashing the power of multiple voices,” Smith said in the release.

New commissions and premieres include:

Peter Burr and Porpentine Charity Heartscape: immersive media installation and video game premiere — two components of Burr and Heartscape’s ambitious collaborative work “Aria End.”

Amos Paul Kennedy Jr.: suite of hand-pulled letterpress prints grouped into a large wall installation and also shown at sites around Richmond.

Paul Rucker: “Storm in a Time of Shelter” reinterpreting KKK robes using diverse fabrics and patterns to illustrate the repetitive nature of history. During 2015, he made one robe per week. This will be the first showing of the full group, as well as new robes that Rucker will create in response to recent events.

Marinella Senatore: Estman Radio participatory installation involving Richmonders who collectively write and produce a new radio drama for a live performance at the ICA.

Stephen Vitiello: Sound installation titled “whether there was a bell or whether I knocked,” featuring professional recordings as well as local teens reciting phrases from Borges’ work.