

Institute for Contemporary Art at VCU to **Announces Winter/Spring 2019 Program**

**Upcoming Exhibitions will Feature New and Recent Work by Multidisciplinary Artists
Cauleen Smith, Irena Haiduk, and Martine Syms**

Richmond, VA – October XX, 2018 - In the spring of 2019, the Institute for Contemporary Art (ICA) at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) will feature new and recent work by artists Cauleen Smith, Irena Haiduk, and Martine Syms in two exhibitions, *Dialogues: Irena Haiduk + Martine Syms* and *Cauleen Smith: Give It or Leave It*. Convening the work of three visionary artists whose practices comprise diverse media, from video, installation, sound, performance to photography, the ICA will activate the Steven Holl-designed ICA with immersive and experiential installations and dynamic public programming. These exhibitions build off of the ICA's commitment to presenting socially informed art that engages local, national, and international audiences in conversations about the current moment. Both exhibitions will open on February 15, 2019.

"Artists and visitors alike come to the ICA to be inspired – by the art, the architecture, and the vibrant cultural landscape of Richmond," said Dominic Willsdon, the ICA's incoming executive director. "I am thrilled to join the ICA at this exciting time, as we launch the 2019 season with a series of projects that stem from this inspiration, interacting with the distinctive topography of the Markel Center to produce meaningful and thought-provoking experiences for those who encounter them."

In the inaugural exhibition of the ICA's annual *Dialogues* series, artists **Irena Haiduk** (b. 1982, Belgrade, Yugoslavia) and **Martine Syms** (b. 1988 Los Angeles, USA) engage with themes of entrepreneurship, feminism, and resilience through new multimedia installations developed for the ICA. Inspired by the architecture of the ICA's Markel Center, the series pairs two artists to activate the distinctive "V" shape of the second-floor galleries. Each artist will occupy their own space, but the series asks viewers to consider areas of overlap, resonance, and difference between their practices. To launch the series, Haiduk and Syms are producing new projects for the ICA, titled respectively *Tableau Économique* and *Shame Space*. By activating expanding fields of commerce and technology in ways that allow visitors to participate directly in the projects, these works extend Syms and Haiduk's investment in entrepreneurship as a framework for their multidisciplinary conceptual projects. Co-curated by Chief Curator Stephanie Smith and Assistant Curator Amber Esseiva, *Dialogues: Irena Haiduk + Martine Syms* will be on view through May 12, 2019.

Irena Haiduk works across disciplines — including writing, installation, and performance—to create projects where design, seduction, power, and embodied ways of knowing intersect. While unflinchingly attuned to humanity's dark tendencies, recent projects have also proposed new models for living well with objects and each other. Haiduk is the founder of Yugoexport, which is both a conceptual art project and an actual corporation inspired in part by the self-managed factories and experimental clubs of the former Yugoslavian territories. For her project in *Dialogues*, titled *Tableau Économique*, Haiduk will temporarily invade/possess the ICA's

physical, technical, and interpersonal infrastructure in order to demonstrate Yugoexport's economy. The project will have dual functionality: in "leisure mode," it will exist in a state of rest to be viewed as an installation, and in "labor" mode attendants will sell Yugoexport products to outfit an "army of beautiful women." Most notable among these products is the Borosana labor shoe. Originally developed in Yugoslavia in the 1960s to support nine hours of comfortable standing, the shoe is an example of great utilitarian design for working women that Haiduk has revived for Yugoexport. During the exhibition's run, it will become the official work shoe of the ICA: any interested staff member will be issued a pair that they may wear only during working hours, to mark separation between states of labor and leisure.

Haiduk's counterpart in *Dialogues*, **Martine Syms**, utilizes a combination of video, installation and performance, interwoven with explorations into technique and narrative to examine representations of blackness and its relationship to vernacular, feminist thought, and radical traditions. Syms's research-based practice frequently references and incorporates theoretical models concerning performed or imposed identities, the power of the gesture, and embedded assumptions concerning gender and race. For this exhibition, Syms will present a new project *Shame Space* which centers around an interactive video installation in which video monitors appear against the backdrop of a photographic wallpaper. On the screens we encounter the protagonist *Mythiccbeing* (my thick being) embodying the postures of his Los Angeles life, as if from the journal pages of a dark shadow. Through SMS conversation with a chatbot programmed by the artist, gallery viewers can control the appearance of animation, image, and text across the monitors, engaging in live-editing the narrative of *Shame Space*.

"Bridging perspectives and artistic approaches allows for a richer conversation," says Stephanie Smith, ICA Chief Curator. "By placing these two artists in dialogue with each other and with the building itself — and supporting the production of two major new projects — we hope to also encourage conversation among our visitors about the ways in which embedded systems of power continue to function in contemporary society."

"It is with pleasure that we bring the visionary work of these two powerful artists to the ICA," says Assistant Curator Amber Esseiva. "Both Syms and Haiduk explore structures that we as citizens engage with every day, and their work offers a reminder of the power of artists to help reimagine our futures"

Cauleen Smith: *Give It or Leave It* will travel to the ICA following its premiere in September 2018 at the Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania. The solo exhibition of film, video, and sculpture by filmmaker and artist Cauleen Smith (b. 1967) will fill the ICA's Beverly Reynolds Gallery with an overlapping series of immersive installations, and reach into the adjacent Royall Forum. Taking its title from a revision of the threat "take it or leave it," *Give It or Leave It* cultivates a spirit of generosity, hospitality, and selflessness and proposes a new rule for a better world: creating something, offering it, and gifting it, regardless of the gesture's recognition, acceptance, or rejection. *Cauleen Smith: Give It or Leave It* is curated by Anthony Elms, Chief Curator of the Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania, and coordinated at the ICA at VCU by Assistant Curator Amber Esseiva, Adjunct Assistant Curator

of Film Enjoli Moon, and Chief Curator Stephanie Smith. The exhibition will be on view through May 5, 2019.

Establishing the thematic core of the exhibition are two new films—"Pilgrim" (2017) and "Sojourner" (2018) — that navigate four distinct universes: musician Alice Coltrane (1937–2007) and her ashram; a 1966 photo shoot by Bill Ray at the Watts Towers; Noah Purifoy (1917–2004) and his desert assemblages; and black spiritualist Rebecca Cox Jackson (1795–1871) and her Shaker community. For Smith, each of these sites embodies an act of creativity and radical generosity rooted in current events and social communities, allowing her to reimagine a future that is black, feminist, spiritual, and unabashedly alive. *Give It or Leave It* places these films in conversation with thematically related projects that include handmade banners as well as installations that mix video with sculptural and textural elements. These include "Two Rebeccas" (2018), in which footage projected onto an assemblage of disco balls fractures across an expanse of shag carpet and artist-designed wallpaper, and "Epistrophe" (2018), in which multi-channel projections of dreamlike landscapes are generated by closed-circuit cameras trained on an elaborate table-top tableau. Smith will also intervene directly in the Markel Center's architecture with a new site-specific application of colored film gels to exterior windows, which will temporarily bring new hues to the building's facade and create shifting pools of color within interior spaces as light moves across the building.

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.

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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