FIRST FRIDAYS
FOOD, FUN & ART DOWNTOWN

LAUREN SERPA
A WOMAN OF CONSIDERABLE TALENTS

ART DISTRICT
THE RIVER CITY’S CREATIVE HUB

VCU’s Artistic Addition
In Search Of: Comfort Foods
City Markets
LIVING SPACES IN THE ARTS DISTRICT
Intrigue and mystery reside at the intersection of Broad and Belvidere. Amongst the clamor of everyday traffic, VCU students and other pedestrians and the overall din of a construction site, one question remains: What is that thing? No, it is not the newest intergalactic vehicle for the latest Star Wars or Star Trek movie. It’s the newest addition to the ever-growing VCU landscape downtown — the Institute for Contemporary Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University (ICA). The building itself is named the Markel Center, recognizing the incredible contributions made by that family.

The ICA will be a non-collecting institution. This means that there will be no permanent exhibitions, only rotating ones from a wide range of artists including both those with VCU connections as well as contemporary artists from around the world. Works of art will span across all mediums — painting, sculpture and photography, plus multimedia, ranging from video to sound to touch. It’s a little unclear as to whether the sense of taste will be part of the artwork but don’t be surprised as artists move toward an ever-immersive experience.

The only permanent exhibit will be the building itself, designed by architect Steven Holl. Holl’s previous works include the Kiasma in Helsinki, Finland, the Horizontal Skyscraper in Shenzhen, China, and the Cité de l’Ocean et du Surf museum in Biarritz, France. The New York-based architect was influenced by the location of the museum and its various entry points into the community. These entry points will be reflected within the museum’s entrances and exits. The ICA’s location is viewed as a transitional gateway for the city, linking old and new, urban renewal, the past and future of the city.
To understand the why behind the ICA, we must look back to, perhaps, the city’s oldest art gallery. For decades, the Anderson Gallery, which first opened in 1931, was the hub of artistic activity within VCU, presenting juried shows, graduate presentations, as well as exhibits from well-known international artists. It became a beloved hive for the artistic mind, but with the growth of VCU’s arts program, the space became outdated and inadequate. Looking for alternatives became a priority. The space permanently closed in 2015 and ground was broken soon thereafter at the intersection of Broad and Belvidere for the ICA.

Maura Scanlon, director of communication, told me that the ICA is “an evolution of the Anderson Gallery” and is “not in competition” with the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. The VMFA is primarily composed of permanent collections with a couple of visiting exhibits. The ICA will display works of contemporary art within four galleries and a performance space.

When will the ICA open? “We’re aiming for fall,” Scanlon said. Like the autumn leaves, it appears that the architectural, artistic and cultural landscape in Richmond will be changing.