

**Virginia Commonwealth University's School of the Arts, new Institute for Contemporary Art, and
Department of African American Studies**

**Announce Visiting Artists Meghan K. Abadoo and Paul Rucker and
Visiting Scholar Onaje X. O. Woodbine**

To Lead New Initiative on Racial Equity, Arts and Culture

Richmond, VA (August 2, 2017) – In Fall 2017, VCU School of the Arts (VCUarts), one of the nation's leading arts schools, VCU's new Institute for Contemporary Art (ICA), opening in Spring 2018, and VCU's Department of African American Studies will launch the Racial Equity, Arts and Culture Transdisciplinary Core, an initiative founded through Virginia Commonwealth University's (VCU) Institute for Inclusion, Inquiry and Innovation, known as iCubed. VCU announced today that artists Meghan K. Abadoo and Paul Rucker and scholar Onaje X. O. Woodbine will join the group as it explores efforts to redress social disparities and inequities within VCU and the broader Richmond community while drawing on the transformative potential of arts and culture.

"VCU is committed to recruiting faculty of exceptional quality who can help to reshape our educational landscape through their teaching, scholarship and service. Meghan, Paul and Onaje will contribute to a pedagogy that promises to advance student learning in meaningful and productive ways, and encourages the community to become engaged as part of the process, leading to new findings relevant to our city and beyond," said Dr. Aashir Nasim, Director of iCubed.

Founded in July 2015, iCubed builds human capital across the university and community. It connects multiple disciplines and lived experiences through the creation of transdisciplinary cores—university-community partnerships that endeavor to solve problems disproportionately affecting populations in urban areas. The mission of the Racial Equity, Arts and Culture Transdisciplinary Core is to foster critical dialogue about, and develop mechanisms for, advancing the fair treatment of people of all races in and through arts and culture. The Core is administered by the Arts Research Institute at VCUarts.

Working across disciplines, the visiting artists and scholar will support long-term planning to help shape and sustain the Core's efforts, build partnerships with key community leaders, and collaborate with students, faculty and Richmond residents to carry out artistic projects, research and scholarly work.

Situated in VCUarts Department of Dance and Choreography, Meghan K. Abadoo will expand upon a new, intergenerational dance theater work commissioned by the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. She also will support local organizing to advance the progress of African American women and girls, and conduct research to restructure pedagogical practice within a racial equity framework. Most recently, Abadoo served as a U.S. Fulbright Fellow in Accra and Dodowa, Ghana, where she conducted choreographic and pedagogical research at the Noyam African Dance Institute, and with the National Dance Company of Ghana – Ghana Dance Ensemble. Abadoo's work is informed by more than a decade of experience as an educator, cultural organizer and performer with companies such as Gesel Mason Performance Projects, Dance Exchange, Urban Bush Women and David Dorfman Dance. She is currently an Undoing Racism® trainer-in-training with the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond, and a 2017 Forty Under 40 leader in arts and humanities for Prince George's County, Maryland.

Working with the ICA, visual artist, composer and musician Paul Rucker will employ his research-based approach to discover untold stories about institutional and structural racism in Richmond. His work will include a new installation in the ICA's inaugural exhibition, *Declaration*. Framed by documents and historical artifacts, the installation will reinterpret the iconic form of 1920s Ku Klux Klan robes through use of diverse fabrics and patterns. In addition to providing workshops through VCU's Department of Music, Rucker will work with students and formerly incarcerated individuals to produce and distribute *Harmony Food Sauce*, a secret sauce to be packaged with labels detailing the current state and consequences of mass incarceration in the U.S., including statistics from the Prison Policy Initiative. The project, supported through

a 2016 Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Artist as Activist Fellowship, will provide job training for first-timers entering the workforce. Rucker is a 2017 Guggenheim Fellow and has previously served as an artist-in-residence at Maryland Institute College of Art and Creative Alliance in Baltimore, Maryland.

Onaje X. O. Woodbine, who will be in the Department of African American Studies, is an author and teacher of philosophy and religious studies whose research focuses on the search for meaning and transcendence in urban African American communities. His most recent book, *Black Gods of the Asphalt: Religion, Hip-Hop, and Street Basketball*, has been optioned for film by nationally acclaimed actor Andre Holland. Drawing from his research on the spiritual dimensions of street basketball, Woodbine will transform inner city basketball courts into spaces of healing and reflection among African American youth. In addition, Woodbine will continue writing his second book on the religious imagination and out-of-body experiences of African American women confronting the difficulties of street life. He also will draw upon the artistic media of theatre and film to immerse audiences within these critically important narratives. Before earning his Ph.D. from Boston University, Woodbine graduated with a degree in philosophy from Yale University. He has taught at Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts.

About VCU School of the Arts

VCUarts is a comprehensive art school within a major, urban public research university, located in Richmond, VA. Currently ranked the No. 1 public school of art and design by U.S. News and World Report, the school offers 15 undergraduate and 10 graduate degree programs in fine arts, design, performing arts, historical research and pedagogical practice. Its campus in Qatar provides students and faculty with a direct tie to the Middle East, a region of increasing significance in the contemporary art world. Distinguished faculty members are internationally recognized in their respective fields and 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. For more information, visit: arts.vcu.edu.

About the VCU Institute for Contemporary Art

The ICA is a non-collecting institution that will showcase a fresh slate of changing exhibitions and programs ranging from innovative visual and performing arts to various forms of design and film. Part exhibition and performance space, part laboratory and incubator, the ICA will be 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 will create a new environment for artists and scholars from around the world to test unconventional and challenging ideas. As a university-wide resource, it will engage an international network of contemporary artists and organizations while encouraging collaborations between audiences and contemporary artists and with VCU departments, faculty, students and the Richmond community. The ICA will be an agile, 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, visit: ica.vcu.edu.

About the Department of African American Studies

VCU's Department of African American Studies enjoys a rich and distinguished history as the second department of its kind created in Virginia. The pioneers who created the department as it exists today were not without challenges and setbacks, but these visionaries persevered in their commitment to teach and understand the experience of African Americans. The field of African American Studies is not without controversy, but scholars embrace these challenges as opportunities to explore and resolve critical social issues. African American Studies in the past and today imparts knowledge that contributes to positive social change. For more information, visit: afam.vcu.edu.



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