



**Ninety
years
of
creative
daring**

This fall marks 90 years since Theresa Pollak first opened the doors to our school, inaugurating a culture of bold creative leadership in Richmond. Her vision, and the vision of all those who would build VCUarts with her, was of an institution that prepared young artists to chart new frontiers in ways yet to be imagined. Together, over nine decades, we have transformed her first drawing and painting classes into a thriving arts school with a global presence and a stellar reputation.



Left: A vintage postcard showing the Richmond Art Club. The club was located on the corner of Grace and Belvidere until it closed in 1917.

1909
At the turn of the century, Richmond was the most densely populated city in the South, boasting a sophisticated streetcar system and a thriving African-American community in Jackson Ward. Yet Richmond was deeply divided—women did not have the right to vote, and *Plessy v. Ferguson* had given racial segregation legal precedent. This was the city that artist Nora Houston returned to in 1909, after years of studying modern art in New York.

Below: Nora Houston (L) in a 1917 portrait, and Adèle Clark (R) at an Equal Suffrage League of Richmond rally in 1915.



1912–17
Houston began teaching at the Richmond Art Club in her twenties, where she reunited with her childhood friend Adèle Clark, a fellow artist, activist and suffragette. The two remained close for the rest of their lives as they lobbied for women's rights at the state capitol and cooperated with black suffragettes in Richmond. But art was their central connection, and in the 1910s, Clark and Houston taught many promising students—including a teenage Theresa Pollak.



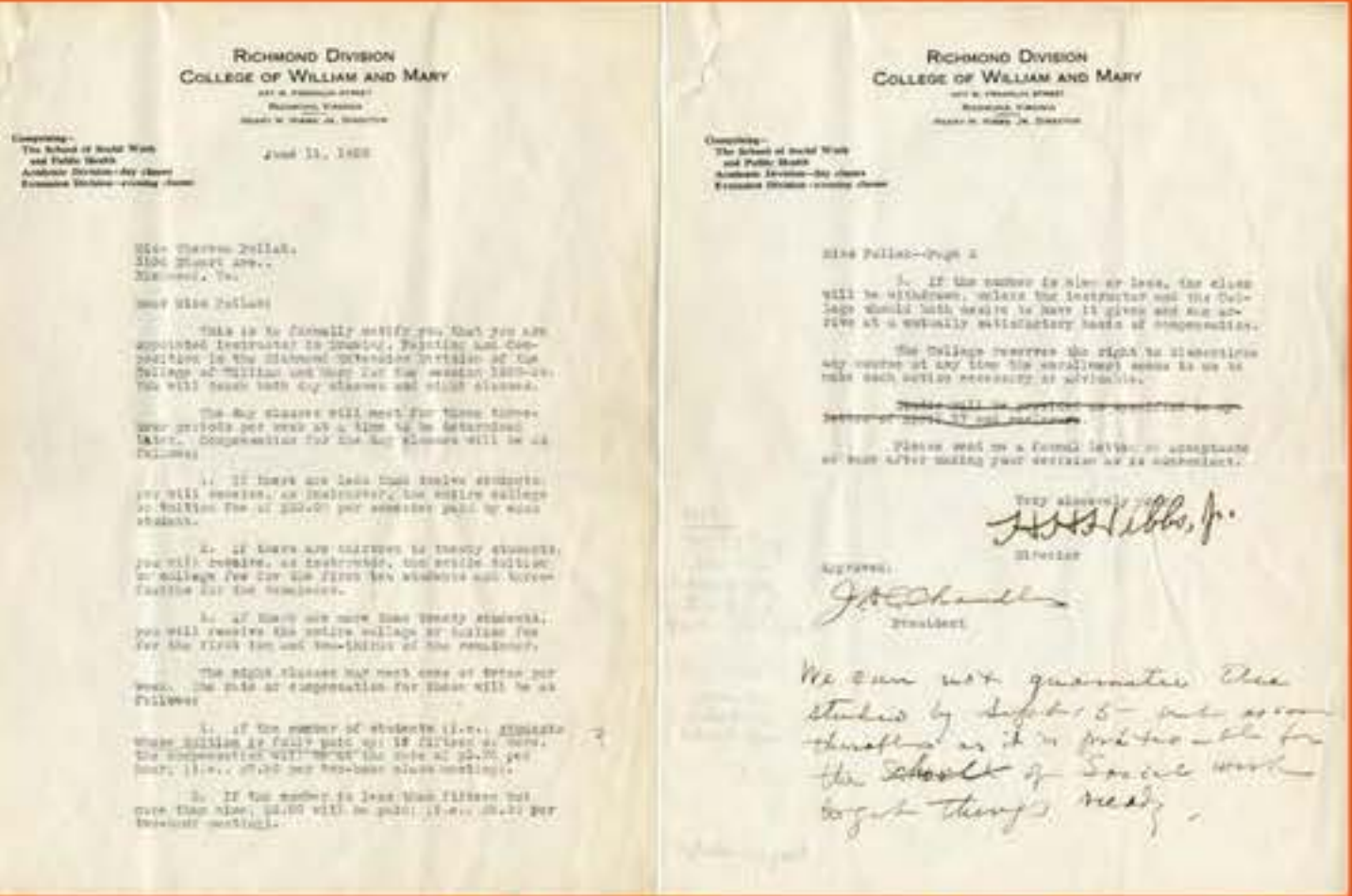
1917
The Richmond School of Social Economy was founded in 1917, and in June of that year it hired Dr. Henry Horace "H.H." Hibbs, Jr. as its first director. Over many years, this predecessor to VCU would change its name again and again before settling on Richmond Professional Institute in 1939.

"When I was a child growing up in Richmond there was no art gallery or museum, no art in the colleges and no art school—except the Richmond Art Club."
Theresa Pollak, 1973

1920s
The Roaring Twenties marked a period of great artistic growth for the city of Richmond. WRVA began broadcasting news and music programming, the Mosque (now known as Altria Theater) was constructed, and the Loew's and Byrd cinemas both opened their doors. In Jackson Ward, the Hippodrome was a hotspot for African-American performers.

1928
After purchasing a brick stable on Shafer Street, the school (now an extension of the College of William and Mary) planned to launch an art curriculum. Hibbs raised money from a number of Richmonders for this purpose. One gift of \$1,000 came from Colonel Abraham Archibald Anderson, a New York painter and conservationist who had recently purchased 900 acres of land where Richmond International Airport stands today.

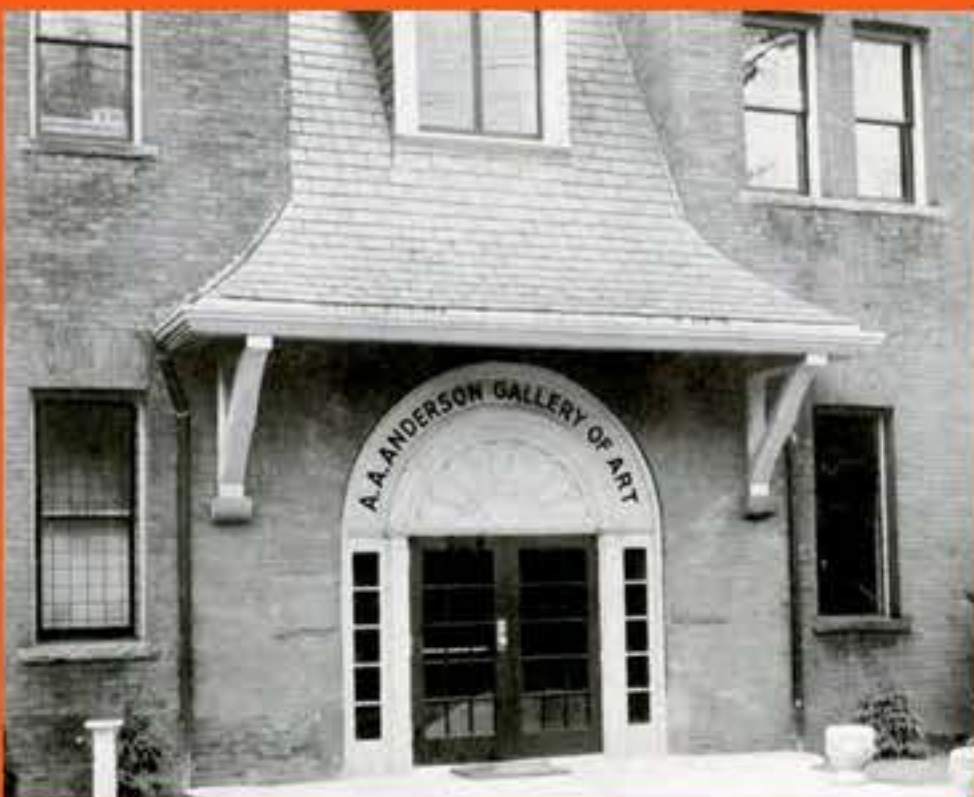
Theresa Pollak, then 29, learned about Hibbs' plans from a few colleagues who suggested she apply to be the art program's first teacher. Hibbs hired her in June, but with some caveats: the school couldn't yet afford her a regular salary, and she would have to recruit the students herself. By September, she had enrolled eight full-time and 30 part-time students.



Above: Theresa Pollak's appointment letter from Hibbs, 1928.

"We have had an unprecedented amount of favorable word of mouth publicity since the exhibition started. ...I have never heard anything that I have worked on, in the 15 years I have been here, so highly praised and so universally pleasing to all" -H.H. Hibbs

1931
Anderson donated another \$10,000 to the school, which was used to found the Anderson Gallery of Art—the first and only modern art gallery in Richmond until the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts opened in 1936. The Anderson Gallery debuted with a popular solo exhibition of Anderson's paintings.



1934
Marion Junkin began serving as associate director of the art school, alongside Pollak, until 1942. "We were a good team," wrote Pollak. "The two of us together planned and formed the character and objective of the school." Junkin would go on to found the department of art at Washington and Lee University in 1949.

Left: The Anderson Gallery, ca. 1931. Right: *First Robin* by Marion Junkin, 1941. The original title was *Giving Our Past the Bird*.

1941
The burgeoning School of Art was featured in *Life* magazine. The story included a photo of Junkin, then associate director of the art school, and a class sketching on Monument Avenue, as well as a reproduction of his painting *First Robin*, a commentary on the "Lost Cause" myth promulgated on Monument Avenue.



1950

After more than 20 years leading the School of Art to national recognition, Pollak stepped down from the school's leadership. She continued to teach until her retirement in 1969.

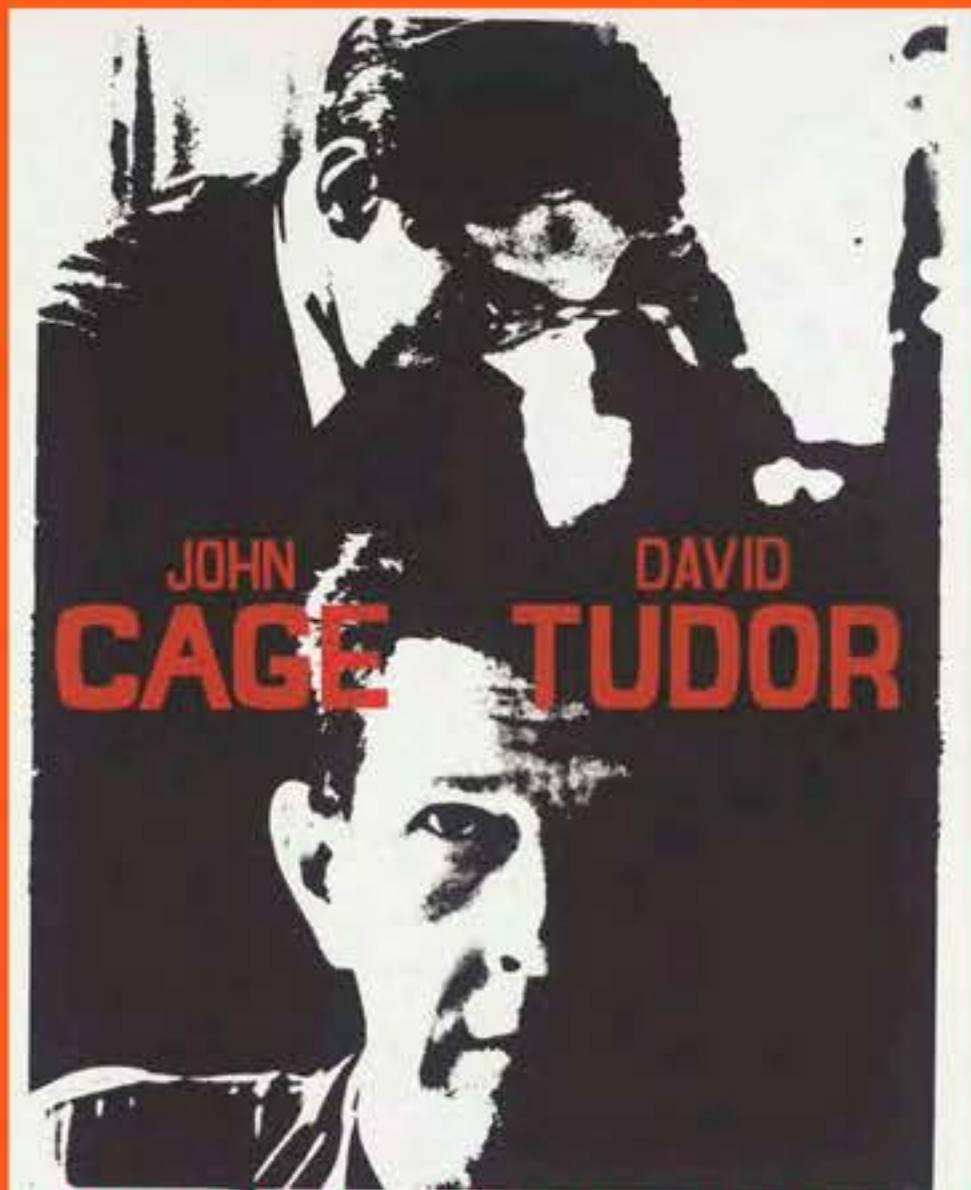


Judith Godwin (BFA '52) at Betty Parsons Gallery in New York, 1959. Image used with permission of Judith Godwin.



1964-67

The BANG Arts Festival, a weeklong professor- and student-created event, was held in conjunction with the Spring Arts Festival. Local and national artists were invited to join students at exhibitions, concerts, panel discussions and film showings, bringing a wide range of modern art voices to Richmond. During its four-year run, BANG attracted many celebrities of the 1960s art world, including John Cage, Allan Kaprow, Jill Johnston, Roy Lichtenstein, Robert Morris and Yvonne Rainer.



IN CONCERT MARCH 21, 8PM, SCOTTISH RITE TEMPLE: IN CONJUNCTION WITH BANG - THE RPI SPRING ARTS FESTIVAL MAR. 21ST-25TH



Top right: A concert poster announcing the event.



Bottom, left to right: Poster advertising a panel discussion with Barnett Newman, Allan Kaprow, Dan Flavin, Donald Judd and Ernest Trova on March 25, 1966;

Poster announcing a performance by Judith Dunn, with accompaniment by free jazz musicians Bill Dixon and Alan Silva, on March 23, 1966;

Poster advertising the BANG 2 festival, April 19-26, 1965. Images courtesy of Special Collections and Archives, VCU Libraries.

July 1, 1968

In 1962, the college, now named Richmond Professional Institute, had separated from William and Mary to become an independent state institution. Six years later, RPI and the Medical College of Virginia merged to form Virginia Commonwealth University.



Left: The Anderson Gallery in the 1970s.

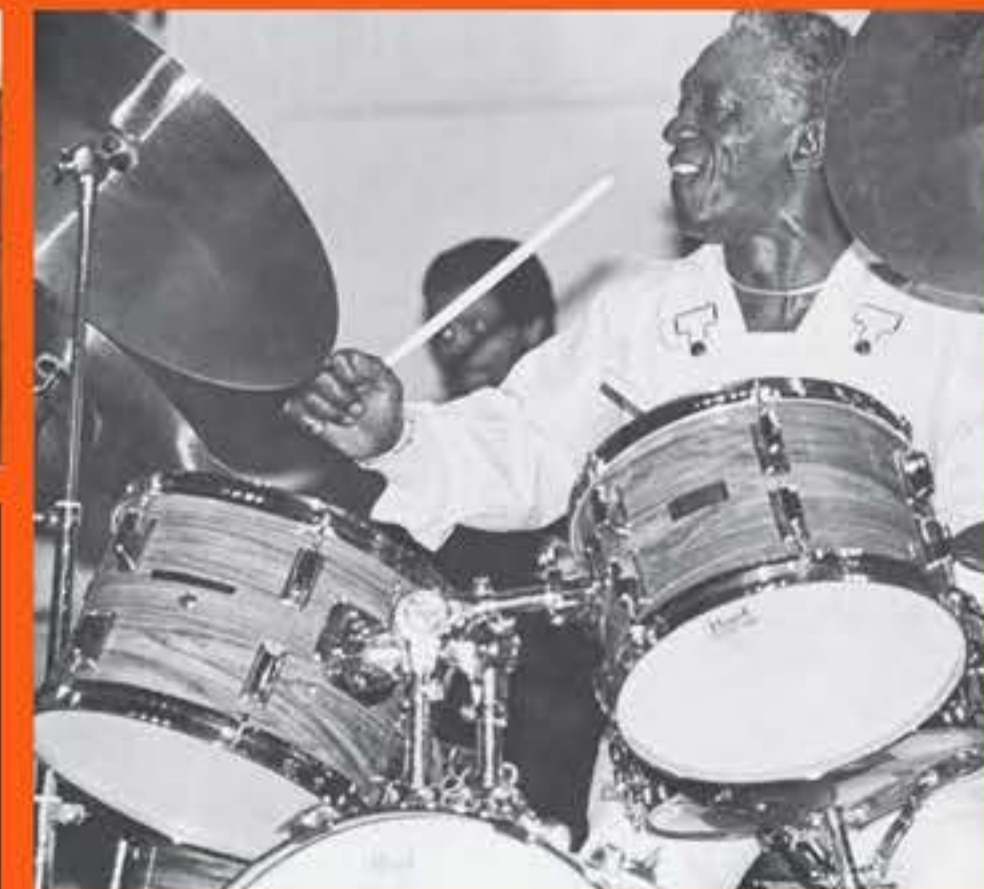
1970

Since the opening of the VMFA in 1936, the Anderson Gallery had slowly transitioned into a library at RPI. However, with the founding of VCU came a reassessment of the art school's identity. Maurice Bonds, head of art history, worked with the retired Hibbs to reopen the Anderson Gallery as a cutting-edge contemporary art gallery. For 45 more years, the gallery would welcome eminent artists of the 20th century, including Wassily Kandinsky, Pablo Picasso and Yoko Ono, as well as faculty members Richard Carlyon, Sonya Clark and Myron Helfgott.



1973

The Masonic Temple, located at the corner of Broad and Adams streets, was vacated by the Freemasons and converted into a bustling studio. It was a place like no other, with a boxing ring, pigeons flying through broken windows and paintings piled up in the hallways. Among the many VCUarts community members that worked there were Katherine Bowling (BFA '78), James Bumgardner (BFA '58), Caryl Burtner (BFA '78), Mary Crenshaw (BFA '77), Randy Dudley (MFA '76), David Freed, Reni Gower, Myron Helfgott, Julian Jackson (BFA '79), Jim Luton (BFA '83), and Bernard Martin (BFA '59).



1977

Murry N. DePillars became the first African-American dean of the School of the Arts. Under his leadership, the facilities available to the performing arts expanded considerably. He served until 1995.

1980

VCUarts Music and Virginia Union University co-hosted Richmond's first Spring Jazz Festival.

Drummer Art Blakey opened the first concert of the series. "Music washes away the dust of everyday life," he mused to the audience. "This music's gone around the world; this music's got everyone swinging."

Above: Art Blakey performing at the Spring Jazz Festival, ca. 1980. The photo, part of a story titled "JAZZZZZZZ," was published by VCU in the May 1980 issue of the *School of the Arts Journal*.

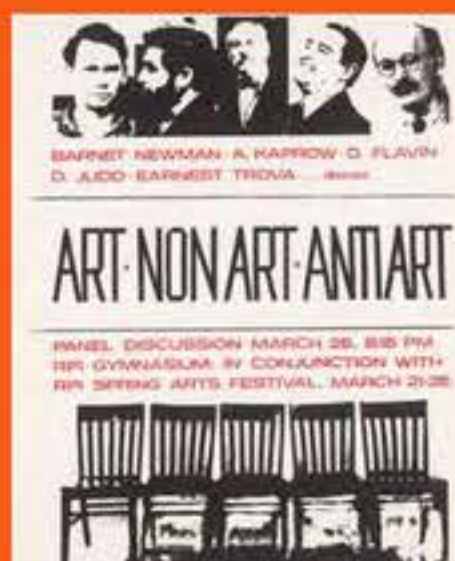
1952

As a senior, Judith Godwin (BFA '52)—one of the few women celebrated as an abstract expressionist artist in the 1950s—was faced with an impossible schedule, all due to a policy about student attire. Women at RPI were not permitted to wear jeans outside of the art studio.

So after every class, Godwin ran to her dorm at Ritter-Hickok House, changed into a skirt for lunch, then ran back later to change into jeans.

One day, Godwin decided she'd had enough: "I wore, straight from my class, jeans, and had a 20-minute lunch instead of a 10-minute lunch."

She was immediately reported to the Dean of Women. But instead of being reprimanded, Godwin successfully convinced the dean to have the dress code changed for RPI's women.



Top center: The Scottish Rite Temple hosted John Cage and David Tudor's 1966 premiere of *Variations VI* at BANG 3.

1981

The dance program began conferring bachelor's degrees after moving to VCUarts from the Department of Health and Physical Education.



1981

Vibeke Sorensen, an assistant professor at VCUarts, introduced the world of computer generated art in an issue of *Richmond Arts Magazine*, a publication produced by students and faculty. In describing her 1980 video performance that used digital effects and synthesizers, she said, "One can control the shapes as one sees them, just as a musician would hear his sound as he plays his instrument. This is unprecedented in the history of visual art, and for many years it was only a dream."

1982

The W.E. Singleton Center for Performing Arts first opened, with an inaugural concert by the Vienna Symphony Orchestra.

Above: Still from the video *Aquarelles* (1980), by Vibeke Sorensen, Tom DeWitt and Dean Winkler.



1996

Richard Toscan became the dean of the School of the Arts. Under his 14 years of leadership, VCUarts opened a campus in the Middle East, and VCUarts became the highest ranked public art school in the country.

Left: Photo by Sarah Ferguson, courtesy of VCUarts Dance + Choreography.

1984

GWAR, a Dada-esque thrash metal band known for their elaborate and grotesque stage shows, was founded when then-painting student Dave Brockie (BFA '86) met Chuck Varga and Hunter Jackson (BFA '82) at the deserted Richmond Dairy plant. Brockie was the lead singer of a band called Death Piggie, and when he saw the costumes and props Jackson and Varga were creating for a science fiction film, he brought everyone together to create GWAR.

Since their 1988 debut album *Hell-O!*, GWAR has been a cult phenomenon. Mixing abrasive guitars and outrageous costumes, GWAR's performances are famous for their social satire, live mutilations of props that resemble celebrities, and spraying fake bodily fluids on the audience.



1997

VCUarts forged a partnership with the Qatar Foundation to create an art school in Education City, Doha—the first American university campus established in the Gulf nation of Qatar. The first class enrolled a year later; today, VCUarts Qatar alumni represent over 50 nationalities.

Above: After Chinese students were killed in the Tiananmen Square Massacre of 1989, VCUarts students fashioned a memorial on the Student Commons Lawn. The massive "Goddess of Democracy" was constructed with the assistance of Richmond artists, the local Chinese community and city merchants.



2003

U.S. News & World Report first ranked VCUarts' graduate sculpture program number one in the nation—a position it still holds today.

2011

Joseph Seipel succeeded Toscan as the dean of the School of the Arts, after 17 years as professor and chair of the Department of Sculpture. Seipel was instrumental in raising \$38 million to build the VCU Institute for Contemporary Art.



2014

The Depot first opened at the site of a Richmond railway terminal, built in 1907. The renovated building houses the Center for the Creative Economy and Arts Research Institute on its ground floor. Its second floor is now devoted to the Cinema program. The Depot Annex is located behind the main building and features a new 8,000-square-foot dance studio that includes lockers and showers, as well as offices and laboratories for the Department of Kinetic Imaging.



2017

The Arts Research Institute was founded as a hub for creative research and interdisciplinary practice across VCU. The institute reflects the university's mission of advancing the human experience through all forms of knowledge. ARI encourages artists to interpret and address contemporary issues by supporting faculty with research development, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration and initiating public dialogue. Projects supported by ARI include John Freyer's *Free Hot Coffee* bike, Semi Ryu's storytelling platform *VoicingElder*, and Pamela Lawton's age-integrated arts learning program *Artstories*.



Above left: Semi Ryu's *VoicingElder* project utilizes digital avatars "puppetry" that helps older adults recall memories from their past.

Above: Photo courtesy of Iwan Baan Architectural Photography.

2017

Shawn Brixey became dean of the School of the Arts. A graduate of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, he is the first VCUarts dean with an academic background in both arts and engineering.

Left: The Depot's main building on 814 W. Broad St. in 2018.

2018

The Institute for Contemporary Art at VCU opened to the public, strengthening the relationship between VCUarts and Richmond, and forging a new conduit to the international arts community.