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VCUQatar Celebrates its 2015 Commencement Ceremony

Doha, Qatar – VCUQatar held its 2015 Commencement Ceremony on 4 May at the Education City Student Center, conferring 61 Bachelor of Fine Arts degrees in fashion, graphic, interior design and painting and printmaking and seven Master of Fine Arts degrees in design. The 14th Commencement brings the number of VCUQatar alumni to 538.

“Graduation is a time for celebration and reflection. Your work and actions throughout your years at VCUQatar express your transformational learning experience,” said VCUQatar Dean Allyson Vanstone. “As critical artists, designers and scholars, you confront existing expectations and create new paths; you seek out unknown opportunities and build bridges of understanding across people and cultures. You have the knowledge, skills and abilities to approach any challenge with experimentation, collaboration and commitment.

“You have been exceptional representatives of VCU in Qatar, Richmond and throughout the world. You have enriched both our university and our wider community through your unique voice. I have no doubt that you will continue to serve as ambassadors of your university and become important contributors in your chosen field,” she added in her last message to a class of graduating students; Vanstone will be leaving Doha in June after a successful eight-year tenure at VCUQatar.

Dr. Gail Hackett, Virginia Commonwealth University’s newly appointed provost and vice president for academic affairs also addressed the graduating students during the ceremony. “Today, you graduate into a world that is depending on you to be its newest leaders, innovators, and creators. And your remarkable ability to create may help solve problems that will change this world forever. You’ve already begun doing this in many ways. If you can create, then you can do anything. If you can speak through art, then you can empower those who are voiceless. If you can evoke emotions, then you can invoke change. If you can translate the voice inside you, then you can transform the world around you,” said Dr. Hackett.

Sculptor and VCUarts alumna Diana Al-Hadid delivered the commencement address to the 68 graduates during the afternoon ceremonies. Born in Aleppo, Syria, she currently lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. After graduating from Kent State University with a BA in Art History, she went on to study at Virginia Commonwealth University and received a MFA in sculpture in 2005.

Ms. Al-Hadid reflected on her own post-graduate years in her Brooklyn studio, emphasizing the importance of self-motivation and encouraging the young artists and designers to trust the direction of their work. “I realized it’s okay not to know what’s happening. In fact, much of the pleasure of making is in the discovering. If I knew what was happening at every step of the way, or if I knew what something was going to be about, I would be less interested in making the effort. It would seem I had already solved the problem before it had begun,” said Ms. Al-Hadid.

“One of the best things I’ve learned along the way is how to put less pressure on the front end of a project, less pressure on that first mark. Its single job is to get your body and mind simply to react, that’s it. The first decision doesn’t define the work, its only purpose is to make you act again. The only proof you have that you are an artist is when you act,” she said.

Ms. Al-Hadid works with a variety of materials to create monumental sculptures, drawings and panels, all of which blur the lines between figuration and abstraction. Her work references history by drawing influence from disrupted typologies found in architecture, antiquity, cosmology and Old Master paintings. Her work is included in influential collections such as The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond, Virginia and The Whitney Museum of American Art and The Judith Rothschild Foundation in New York City. She has exhibited widely including at the Secession in Vienna, Austria, Nasher Sculpture Center in Dallas, Texas and the Nevada Museum of Art in Reno, Nevada. Her work is currently on view at OHWOW Gallery in Los Angeles.

Ms. Al-Hadid’s ended her address to the graduates with a call to commit themselves to their future endeavors, creative or otherwise. “Be sincere in what you do. Be sincere and do it with everything you’ve got. And hurry up about it,” she said.

The ceremony marks the culmination of years of hard work and perseverance on the part of the BFA and MFA graduates. They have spent their time at VCUQatar fulfilling an intensive and rigorous curriculum, one designed to foster not just first-rate artists and designers but well-rounded individuals prepared for the challenges and responsibilities of a highly complex professional world. Students, their families, friends, faculty and staff came together to celebrate VCUQatar graduates’ accomplishments and rejoice in their venture into the professional field as they take their expertise and creative capacities to every area of art and design.

Fashion design graduate and Valedictorian Dylon Adonis highlighted the unique brand of tenacity and camaraderie that characterized the Class of 2015, citing it as key to the

graduates' success—both in the past and for the future. “We, as designers and artists, have a duty to improve the visual world, the buildings we enter, the clothes we wear, and the political and social causes we wish to address. Here at VCUQatar, the professors have guided us and, at times, allowed us to guide ourselves to find our identity as a designer and artist to advance.

“We look past gender, race, and religion. We do not box individuals to provided the ‘us vs. them’ movement seen too frequently throughout history. We congregated underneath VCUQatar’s umbrella to constantly improve others and ourselves. Our diverse community repetitively adhered to our desire to progress,” he said.

Following the Valedictorian’s speech, Dr. Gail Hackett, provost and vice president for academic affairs at VCU, presented the candidates of the Master of Fine Arts degree in Design their diplomas; Dean Vanstone presented the candidates for the Bachelor of Fine Arts degree their diplomas and Dr. Hackett conferred upon them their MFA and BFA degrees. Dr. Barry Falk, dean of the Honors College at VCU Richmond, also recognized the honors graduates.

The 68 new VCUQatar graduates will join the band of 470 alumni who are pursuing successful careers within the government, nonprofit and private industries in Qatar and around the world. Many VCUQatar graduates have gone on to establish their own businesses, thereby contributing to the development of the small and medium enterprise culture in Qatar.

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About Virginia Commonwealth University in Qatar:

VCUQatar is the Qatar campus of the prestigious Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts in Richmond, Virginia. Established in 1998 through a partnership with Qatar Foundation, VCUQatar offers students the opportunity to earn a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in fashion design, graphic design, interior design and painting & printmaking, a Bachelor of Arts degree in art history and a Master of Fine Arts degree in design.

In addition to a comprehensive annual public events program that includes a wide range of exhibitions, lectures and fashion events, the University hosts the biennial international design conference Tasmeeem and the biennial Hamad bin Khalifa Islamic Art Symposium, attracting globally recognized designers, academics and thinkers while fostering sustainable, university-community partnerships that enhance the educational, economic and cultural vitality of Qatar. For more information please visit www.qatar.vcu.edu

Qatar Foundation – Unlocking Human Potential

Qatar Foundation for Education, Science, and Community Development (QF) is a private, non-profit organization that is supporting Qatar on its journey from carbon economy to knowledge economy by unlocking human potential, for the benefit of not only Qatar, but the world. Founded in 1995 by His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, the Father Amir, QF is chaired by Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser.

QF's work encompasses education, research and community development. World-class universities are brought to Qatar to help create an education sector in which young people can develop the attitudes and skills required for a knowledge economy. At the same time, QF builds Qatar's innovation and technology capacity by developing and commercializing solutions through key sciences. The Foundation also works to foster a progressive society while enhancing cultural life, protecting Qatar's heritage and addressing immediate social needs in the community.

For a complete list of QF's initiatives and projects, visit <http://www.qf.org.qa>