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For Immediate Release:

Commission Awards \$40,000 to Virginia Sculptors and Playwrights

December 8, 2005- The Virginia Commission for the Arts is pleased to announce the recipients of the 2005-2006 Artists Fellowships. This year, eight Virginia artists have been honored, concentrating in the fields of sculpture and playwriting. The awarded artists will each receive fellowships of \$5,000.

A diverse array of talent was displayed from this years **sculpture applicants**, and this promising work should bring an exciting new air into arts in Virginia. **Rachel Hays**, who is a graduate student at the Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts, earned her undergraduate degree at the Kansas City Art Institute. Hayes is a fiber artist focusing in large scale installations; her experience as an artist ranges from acting as visiting artist to lecturing at universities around the world.

Danielle Riede recently completed her MFA at the VCU School of the Arts. Ms. Riede has studied at the Art Academy of Dusseldorf, as well as the Figure Drawing School of Florence, Italy. This artist has also been awarded a fellowship from the Virginia Museum of the Fine Arts. Ms. Riede has a great deal of experience teaching various artistic mediums, and self publishes a magazine titled *Bouquet*.

A professor in the Department of Craft/Material Studies at VCU, **Alan Rosenbaum** has both an extensive and impressive exhibition history worldwide. Mr. Rosenbaum's ceramic sculptures are included several public collections, the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, D.C. among the most notable. In 2000 he was commissioned by the Virginians for the Arts to create nine sculptural awards for the Governor's Arts Awards.

Richard Weaver is an instructor at the Art League in Alexandria, as well as the Beverly Street Studio in Staunton. Weaver's resume is diverse and surprising; he completed an undergraduate degree in economics from Vanderbilt University in 1980. From there, the artist went on to study at the National Academy School of Art, New York Academy of Art, and ultimately the University of North Carolina- Greensboro, where he earned a Masters of Fine Arts.

This year's playwriting fellowships were awarded to four talented authors. **Crystal Endsley** earned a Bachelors of Fine Arts from Old Dominion University in 2004, majoring in Theatre and Dance (with an emphasis in performance,) and receiving a minor in African American studies. Endsley is active as a poet through teaching, writing, performing, and numerous community outreach efforts. In the last two years she has developed a career traveling as a spoken word poet. Through these experiences of performing her own work, she aspired to write her own life story in a one woman show.

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Other recipients of the 2005-2006 playwriting fellowship include **Thomas Gardner**, who is an English Professor at Virginia Tech. Gardner's focus as a professor is on contemporary poetry, and has been published as a poet and a literary critic. He was inspired to write his first play by a colleague from the theatre department who took one of his graduate poetry classes. Since then Gardner's work as a playwright has grown through his knowledge and love of poetry.

Julie Portman, the founder of the multi-faceted arts organization Ki Theatre, continues to contribute to the organization as artistic director, playwright, performer, and teacher. Among one of Ki Theatre's most resonant programs are the life story workshops. The workshops are created to help its participants transform their experiences in life to memorable stories. The participants sharing of stories, vocally or through writing creates an understanding and non-critical environment.

Sheri Reynolds is a professor at Old Dominion University and an accomplished novelist. Among her novels are: *Bitterroot Landing*, *A Gracious Plenty*, and *The Rapture of Canaan*, which was an Oprah book club selection. Reynolds wrote her first play two years ago and describes playwriting as "one of the best learning experiences of my life."

The Commission also wishes to recognize promising efforts of the 2005-2006 Sculpture and Playwright Fellowship. **Joe Grant** and **Miyuki Nishiuchi**, sculpture finalists, each displayed commendable work. Grant is working towards an MFA at the VCU School of the Arts, specializing in glass. He has experience in teaching, assistantships, and visiting artist presentations. Nishiuchi earned an MFA at the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California. The artist specializes in video and sculpture.

Brian Silberman and **Rebekah Lynn Pierce** have proven themselves to be strong writers as alternates for this year's playwriting fellowship. Silberman, a professor at Old Dominion University, has worked hard to design and integrate a new MFA program curriculum in dramatic writing at the school. He is a successful playwright and has seen many of his plays produced on stage. Ms. Pierce earned her MA in Literature at VCU and is the founder and editor in chief of *Average Girl*. She is active in teaching and community outreach to at-risk girls in Richmond.

Each year the Virginia Commission for the Arts awards artists fellowships of \$5,000 to artists residing in Virginia. The fellowships are in recognition of creative excellence, and meant to promote and support the pursuit of artistic excellence. These annual fellowships are offered on a rotating basis to artists in the following disciplines: crafts, photography, sculpture, fiction, music composition, choreography, painting, works of paper (prints and drawing,) poetry, playwriting, and filmmaking. **To find out fellowship categories for 2006-2007, artists may contact the Commission at (804) 225-3132 or visit www.arts.virginia.gov after June 1, 2006.** The next application deadline is August 1, 2006.

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