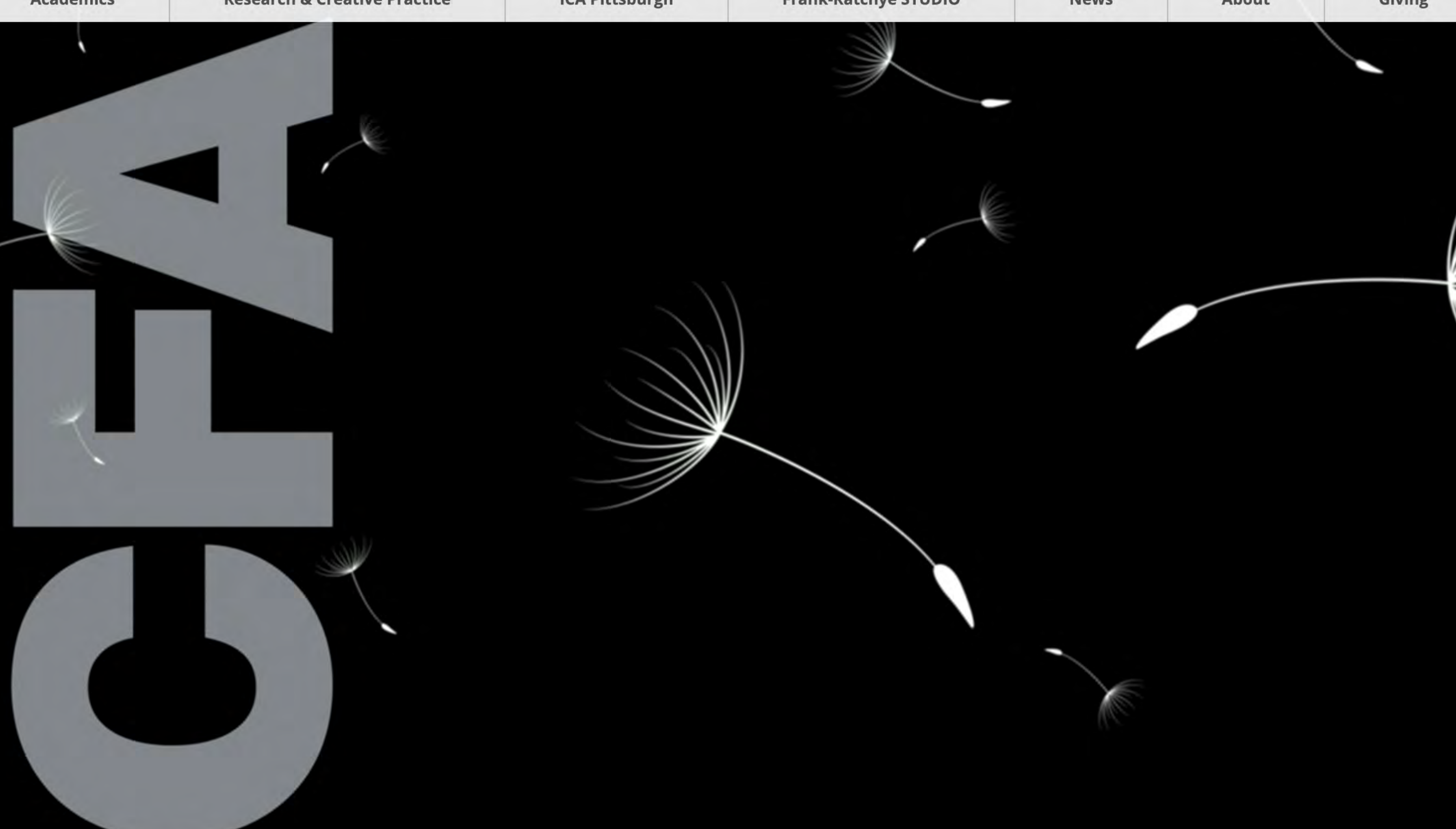


College of Fine Arts



Seeding Change

This moment at the College of Fine Arts is about change, and energy, and the energy of change.

It's about the influence and impact of our work moving outward from the center, testing itself in the world through what our faculty, staff, students and alumni create.

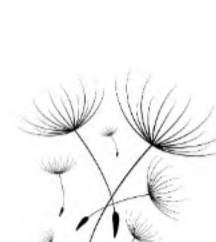
It's about fearlessly questioning that which has gone unquestioned for a very long time.

It's about leaning on community and the momentum of community in overcoming inertia.

It's about repeatedly and loudly asserting the critical importance of the arts as an insistent reminder of our shared humanity.

In this issue, you'll find evidence of change within today's CFA, as well as our impact externally thanks to alumni of all vintages who continue to surprise, delight, move — and change us.

 | Dean Mary Ellen Poole



School of Architecture

[Home Away From Home](#)



School of Art

[Seeds of the Arctic](#)



School of Design

[PIA: A Connected Airport](#)



School of Drama

[Flower Power](#)



School of Music

[Artistic Alchemy](#)



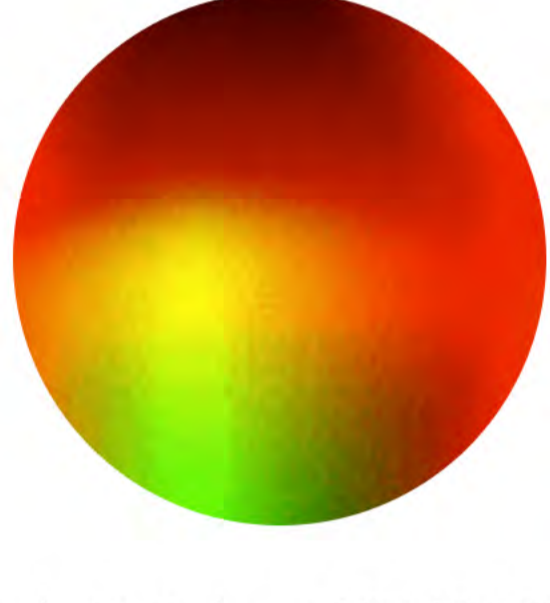
BXA Intercollege Degree Programs

[Slaying Off-Broadway](#)



Miller Institute for Contemporary Art

[Impossible Music](#)



Frank-Ratchye STUDIO for Creative Inquiry

[Funding "LIVE! ART&&CODE"](#)



Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

[Angelica Perez-Johnston Joins CFA](#)



Master of Arts Management

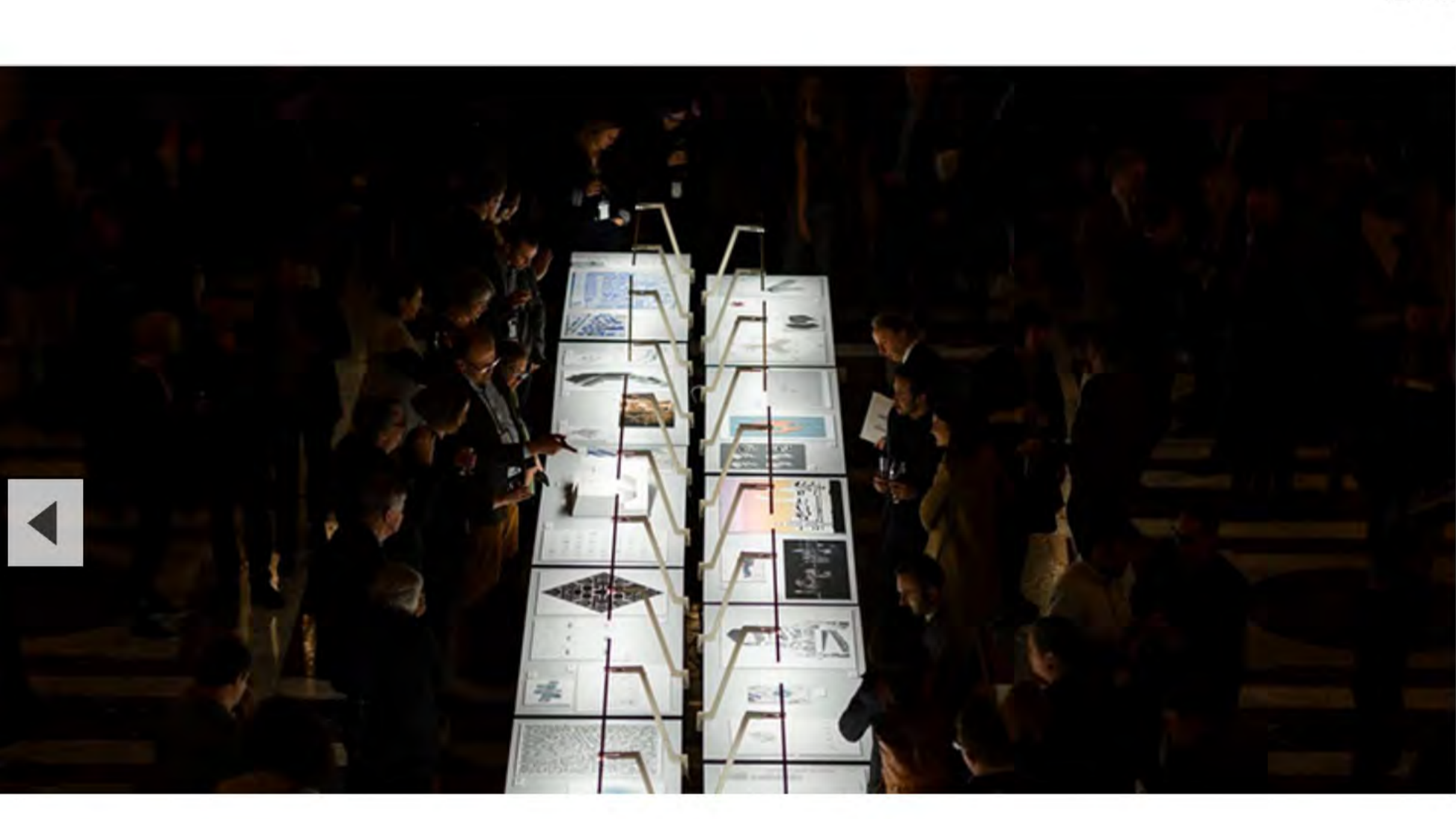
[Raising LGBTQ+ Voices](#)



Master of Entertainment Industry Management

[The Next Chapter](#)

Events



[Architecture Event]

Fall 2023 Public Programs: Revolutions

August 17 - November 10

Architects who "make the revolution irresistible." Artists and thinkers who challenge us to envision a multitude of approaches to making and being. Join us for lectures, discussions and film screenings.

[Find more information about Public Programs](#)

Why I give back



Christiane Noll

Spotlight Features



[Music Spotlight]

[Future Focused](#)

Welcoming Joanna Bosse as Interim Head, School of Music

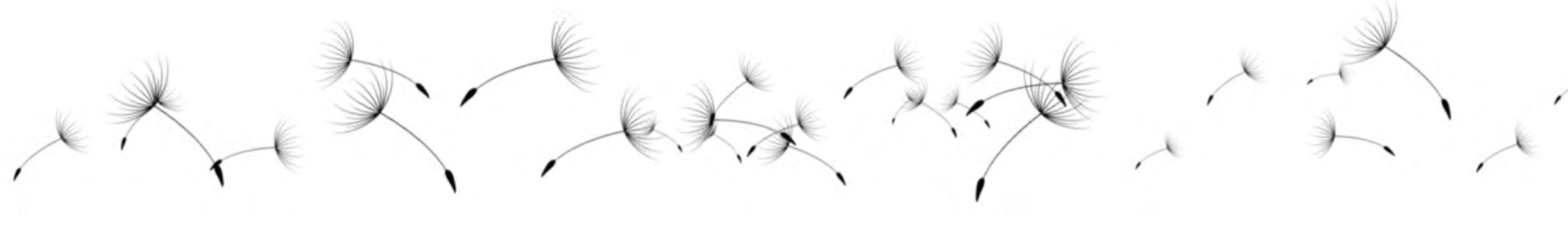
In Case You Missed It

[Catch Up on CFA Stories from Last Semester](#)



Alumni News

[Make a Gift](#)



Looking for a past version?

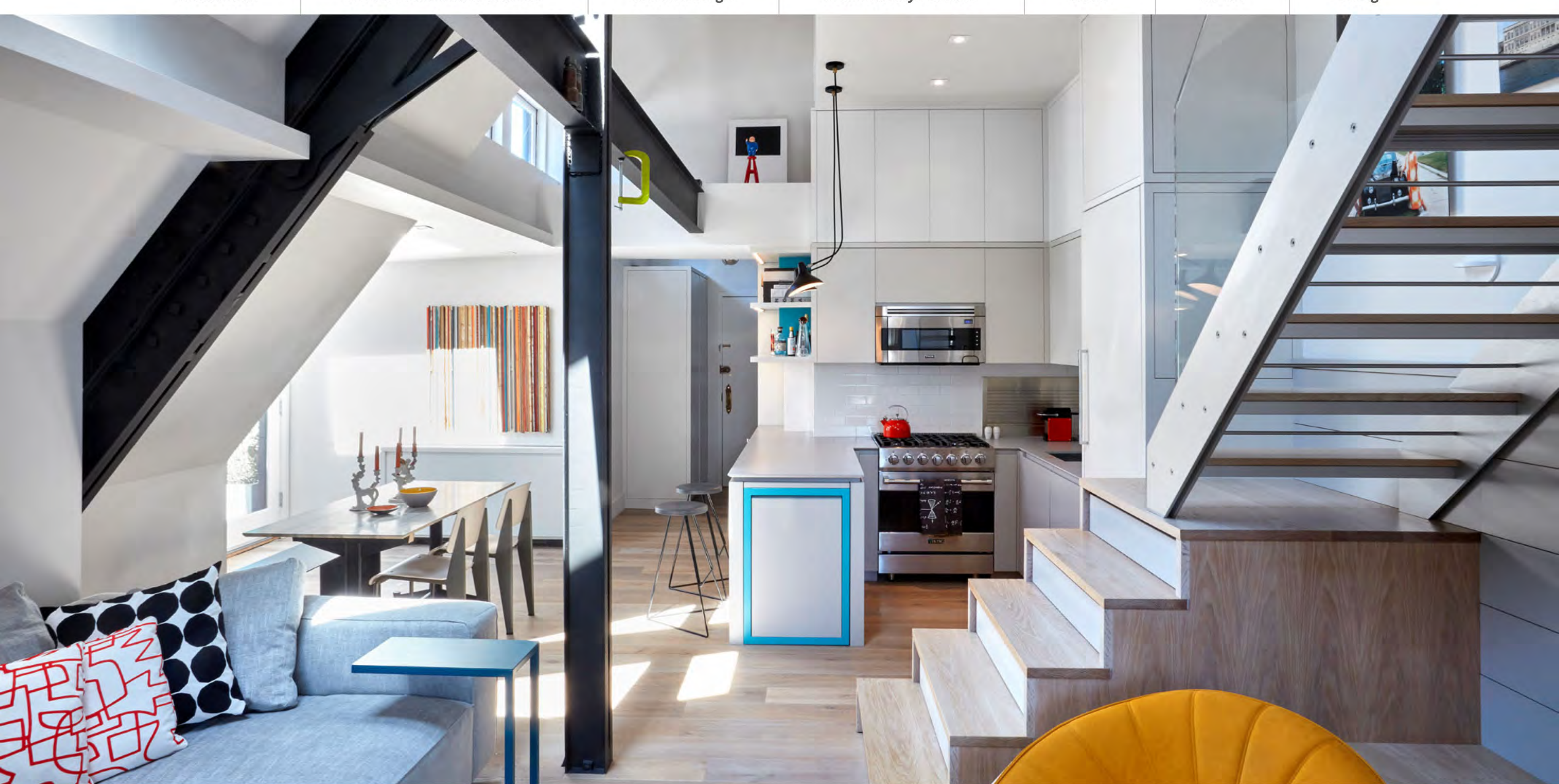
You can find past digital and print versions of the magazine, starting with our inaugural 2018 CFA 01 magazine in our [CFA MAGAZINE ARCHIVE](#) ►

Tell us what you think!

Let us know what you hoped to see — and what you liked! [EMAIL US AT CONTACT-CFA@CMU.EDU](mailto:CONTACT-CFA@CMU.EDU) ►

<p>College of Fine Arts Magazine</p> <p>Publisher: Mary Ellen Poole, Dean, CFA Executive Editor: Pam Wigley Editor: Cally Jamis Vennare Editor & Digital Content Designer: Alexis Morrell Design Director: Mark Werle Designer: Rob Azarcon Production Artist: Deborah Allen Project Manager: Thomas Swiech Animation: Adam Chizmar</p>	<p>Writers</p> <p>Harrison Apple Margaret Cox Dan Green Gabriella Lossia Joe Lyons Alexis Morrell Shannon Musgrave Lauren Stash Emily Syes Cally Jamis Vennare Pamela Wigley</p>	<p>Design & Production</p> <p>University Communications and Marketing</p> <p>Photographers</p> <p>Jenny Anderson Beth Barbis Crystal Hu Kent Miles Joan Marcus Matthew Murphy Seyl Park Russ Rowland Sean Salamon Alexa Viscius Paul Vladuhick Pamela Wigley Evan Zimmerman</p>	<p>CFA Leadership</p> <p>CFA Dean: Mary Ellen Poole School of Architecture Head: Omar Khan School of Art Head: Charlie White School of Design Head Interim: Eric Anderson School of Drama Head: Robert Ramirez School of Music Interim Head: Joanna Bosse BXA Senior Associate Dean of Interdisciplinary Initiatives: M. Stephanie Murray Miller ICA Director: Elizabeth Chodos Frank-Ratchye STUDIO for Creative Inquiry Director: Nica Ross MAM Program Director: Jessica Bowser Acrie MEIM Program Director: Daniel Green</p>
--	---	---	---

College of Fine Arts

[Academics](#)[Research & Creative Practice](#)[ICA Pittsburgh](#)[Frank-Ratchye STUDIO](#)[News](#)[About](#)[Giving](#)

School of Architecture

Home Away From Home

written by
Pamela Wigley

Growing up one of four children in Bangkok, Thailand, Goil Amornvivat left the comforts of home to attend middle and high school in Massachusetts. His mother, who encouraged her children's independence, furthered his future when she sent him to Paris for the summer at age 16. He enjoyed his time there, but didn't find his second home until he arrived in Pittsburgh to attend Carnegie Mellon University's [School of Architecture](#).

With an older brother already ensconced in engineering studies at CMU, it could have been that familial bond that helped Amornvivat feel the connection. Instead, he said, "it was the care and tutelage of his professors and the city itself that provided direction."

"Pittsburgh is a remarkable place for young architects. The lessons are written in steel and stone — even through the College of Fine Arts building, whose architect, Hornbostel, designed the building as a learning tool for young architects."

Goil Amornvivat

Amornvivat found inspiration in [Doug Cooper](#), Andrew Mellon Professor of Architecture, whom Amornvivat still recalls getting down to the students' level to teach them how to observe, understand and draw the environment.

"He was there beside us as we used the city as our laboratory to learn," Amornvivat said. "He was hands-on, patient and kind. He knew everything there was to know about his subject. Doug, Pittsburgh and Carnegie are all exceptional; they are the gold standard in architecture education. And, at a time when I needed to feel a connection, I found it."



The combination of nurturing and learning put Amornvivat on the path to big things. He earned his bachelor's from CMU in 1996 and went on to Yale University to earn his master's degree. There, he met Tom Morbitzer, now Amornvivat's life and business partner at [AMMOR Architecture llp](#). Morbitzer has witnessed firsthand the influence that Carnegie's School of Architecture had on Amornvivat.

"He talks about his time there frequently. His teachers not only taught him architecture, but also how to teach architecture — how to be nimble. Goil makes everything he touches better."

Tom Morbitzer

Being nimble in a business that's always changing is a definite plus. At the core of their work, though, is one simple component that has always worked to their benefit: Listening.

"You have to listen [to your clients] in so many different ways," Amornvivat said. "[Vivian Loftness](#) started her deanship with a 'listening tour.' To us, as students and young adults, it was refreshing, a different kind of leadership. It said all the right things to impressionable minds."

Learning to listen, he said, helped him achieve other notable milestones in his career. He was on Bravo television's "Top Design," served as a designer on TLC's "Trading Spaces" and was the winner of HGTV's White Room Challenge. From his winnings on the latter, Amornvivat donated the winnings to a soup kitchen in his Brooklyn neighborhood.

"A rising tide lifts all ships, and I wanted my TV experiences to be meaningful and to help others," he said. The exposure earned him and Tom some great clients, including Whoopi Goldberg, who has the team at AMMOR design her annual holiday ornament, among other projects — such as designing her offices and her game show set. Their hard work, though, is what keeps the firm chugging.



"We have a mid-western 'can-do' attitude," Amornvivat said. "We take each challenge one step at a time. As Doug Cooper taught me, a drawing starts with just one line. We're down-to-earth people; we call it 'relatable creativity.'"

He finds himself referring to other tenets he learned while a student at CMU, ones that he uses nearly every day in his work. First, the aforementioned 'can-do' attitude, instilled by the teachers he had at the school: Steve Lee, Bruce Lindsey, Stephanie Bartos and Scott Smith. Next, a belief that you must follow a lifelong path of curiosity and learning. Third, Amornvivat said that CMU instilled him with a sense of 'responsibility,' which is to say the 'ability' and passion to 'respond'. "It's more than the brick. We want what we make to be thoughtful and have meaning."

Having a partner who shares his philosophies helps, too. On working with Morbitzer, Amornvivat said that compatibility plays into everything they do. "To every pot, you need the right lid. We trust each other. Tom sees the best. This optimism is a uniquely American perspective to everything."

When giving advice to current students and young architects, Amornvivat encourages them to "connect the dots, look at challenges and see opportunities. Be present, open and available. Take risks. And always, be a good, ethical person, even if it doesn't pay off right away."

Successful architects, Morbitzer added, are those who can imagine something that doesn't yet exist, helping to resolve a concern or meet a need.

Amornvivat concurred. "Architecture, education and practice can truly engage the world."



[◀ Back to CFA Magazine 08](#)

College of Fine Arts

[Academics](#)
[Research & Creative Practice](#)
[ICA Pittsburgh](#)
[Frank-Ratchye STUDIO](#)
[News](#)
[About](#)
[Giving](#)


School of Art

Seeds of the Arctic

Richard Pell Explores the Art & Science of the Svalbard Global Seed Vault

written by
Cally Jamis Vennare

As founder and executive director of the [Center for PostNatural History](#) (CPNH), one of [Richard Pell's](#) first exhibits was a diorama of The Svalbard Global Seed Vault in the remote Norwegian island of Spitsbergen. The vault is the world's largest secure seed storage facility, holding the seeds of tens of thousands of varieties of essential food crops such as beans, wheat and rice. It also protects the global food supply in the face of mismanagement or natural disasters of apocalyptic proportion. He had always hoped to visit Svalbard, particularly so after curating the CPNH diorama, yet the journey to its isolated location in the town of Longyearbyen remained out of reach ... until now.

In October 2023, Pell will participate in a 17-day expeditionary residency program in [The Arctic Circle](#). Alongside 15 artists and innovators, the Carnegie Mellon University alumnus (CFA, 1999) and associate professor of art will live and work on-board an Arctic-class tall ship while sailing the waters of Svalbard, an Arctic archipelago just 10 degrees latitude from the North Pole.



Although Pell has never sailed and “doesn't particularly like winter,” he can't wait to experience the Arctic Circle — a nexus where art intersects science, architecture, education and activism. No matter that he may be limited to only four hours of sunlight during some parts of his expedition, there are passions to pursue and collaborations to explore. Pell hopes to find the right balance between completing a series of defined projects — like 3D photography and video, sculpting, astronomy, and fossil collection — and experiencing the unknown. “I don't want to anticipate all of it,” he said with a smile, as he thought about the adventure that lies ahead.

Within the walls of the Svalbard Global Seed Vault, Pell believes he will find a Noah's Ark of not only nature, but also culture.

“The vault represents a part of life that human beings take under their wings ... to protect and become entwined with. While there is beauty in recognizing the importance of doing so, it is also frightening to know that you have to store its contents remotely ... so far away from people. I find a great deal of hope and warning in that place. And that contradiction is attractive to me.”

Richard Pell
Associate Professor, School of Art

What does Pell hope to bring back to the classroom following his Arctic journey? “I'd like my art students to better understand geology, its relationship to time, and its connection to a past life. I don't have a deep history or knowledge of fossil collection behind me, so I've been talking with paleontologists.” He welcomes the cross-departmental dialogue, something that he learned to appreciate and hone during his time as a Carnegie Mellon student.

“I'm a product of CMU. I came in as an artist and it was through the very wide aperture, the open concept plan of CMU's School of Art, that I found that art and science could talk together. It's a modern invention that we keep them so separate, to the point that we are almost worried about them contaminating each other. I'm much more interested in that contamination. There's something humbling and experiential about glimpsing something incredibly ancient — like a fossil — that not only tells us about nature, but also culture. And I believe that is best expressed through an arts and cultural lens.”



◀ [Back to CFA Magazine 08](#)

[Faculty & Staff Resources](#)
[Contact](#)

CFA

College of Fine Arts
Carnegie Mellon University
5000 Forbes Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15213
[Contact Us](#)



Legal Info | www.cmu.edu
© 2026 Carnegie Mellon University



College of Fine Arts

Academics

Research & Creative Practice

ICA Pittsburgh

Frank-Ratchye STUDIO

News

About

Giving



School of Design

PIA: A Connected Airport

written by
Joe Lyons & Pamela Wigley

A team of Carnegie Mellon University School of Design master's students has won the [2023 iF Design Award](#) for creating a program that provides all-in-one-voice assistance at airports. The honor follows two other awards in recognition of their work. Master's students [Weijie Wang](#) (MDes '23), [Devika Pillai](#) (MPS '22), [Matt Muenzer](#) (MPS '22), and [Youngryun Cho](#) (MDes '23), won the [Gold Award at the HCI 2022 Conference](#) for their team project, called "PIA." Only one project from the conference receives a Gold Award. Days after this announcement, their work also received the [Notable Interaction Award from Core 77](#).

PIA, short for "PIA - Intelligent Voice Assistant for Pittsburgh Airport," proposes an AI-driven digital assistant to ease the airport experience as a mobile app, through kiosks and voice user interface (VUI). The latter allows people to interact with computers, smart phones and other devices using just their voice (think Siri or Alexa). So, for people who have various questions or concerns about airport travel, PIA is a one-stop solution.



"We all know that flying commercially can end up being a total mess, and have all been in a position where we felt helpless," explains Weijie Wang, a member of the design team. "From late or canceled flights, missed connections, long lines, crowded terminals, and unappealing food, the current traveler experience can be complicated and disconnected."

The team didn't want their design to be confined to the airport itself, though. The design covers the holistic commercial flying experience, including travel timing to and from the airport, multilingual assistance, intelligent flight updates, and more. The team drew from research at the Pittsburgh International Airport, as well as familiar experiences dealing with travel logistics.

"We visited the Pittsburgh Airport during our initial research phase, but also could draw upon a rich stock of pain points and insights that people had all throughout the journey — before the airport, at the airport, and after leaving the airport. We saw a massive opportunity for design intervention in the space and were eager to dig into it."

Devika Pillai

PIA helps to solve the disjoint between airports and individual airlines. "Airlines cover booking, check-in, boarding, and (importantly) the flight, but airports are the go-to party (or should be) for securing parking during your trip, finding dining and shopping before your flight, finding a way into town after landing in a new city, and so much more. PIA's connected assistance can fill in those gaps and elevate previously underwhelming or invisible services," said Matt Muenzer.

To account for the rushed nature of travel, PIA utilizes AI-driven voice assistance as a key aspect of its design. Plus, team members recognized that PIA could be incorporated into existing airport features, such as assistive kiosks. "PIA's mobile app provides both touch and voice-led interfaces for travelers on the move, and this system also activates underused check-in kiosks, such as those we found distributed throughout the Pittsburgh airport."

Tackling travel issues through design thinking came naturally to the team, as explained by Youngryun Cho.

"With how many logistical and economic factors are at play in air travel, it's not surprising that a huge disconnect emerges between service providers and customers. Design tools and skills we used on this project helped us step into a perspective from which we could start to see novel and mutually beneficial solutions in the space, even though we started as total outsiders."

Youngryun Cho

Although there's no current plan for the future of PIA, the group is hopeful that it will have an impact on travel systems and how we consider the whole airport experience.

"We're extremely proud of our students for their work," said Interim Head of the School of Design, Eric Anderson. "This kind of forward-thinking, innovative work is a prime example of how our current students and alumni are making a difference in our world."



◀ Back to CFA Magazine 08

Faculty & Staff Resources

Contact

CFA

College of Fine Arts
Carnegie Mellon University
5000 Forbes Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15213
[Contact Us](#)



Legal Info | www.cmu.edu
© 2026 Carnegie Mellon University



College of Fine Arts

[Academics](#)[Research & Creative Practice](#)[ICA Pittsburgh](#)[Frank-Ratchye STUDIO](#)[News](#)[About](#)[Giving](#)

School of Drama

Flower Power

written by
Pamela Wigley

A special exhibit inspired by Carnegie Mellon University alumnus Billy Porter — with works by fellow Tartans — was in full bloom throughout the spring, summer and fall at Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens in Pittsburgh.

[“Flowers Meet Fashion”](#) showcased extravagant fashion designs and brilliant horticultural displays inspired by Billy Porter’s local roots and artistic accomplishments.

Porter, a College of Fine Arts [School of Drama](#) graduate, filmed much of his film, “Anything’s Possible,” at Phipps and developed a relationship with the organization. Together, they created this special event that highlighted designs from six professional costume designers, as well as costumers and students from Porter’s local alma maters, Carnegie Mellon University’s School of Drama and Pittsburgh Public Schools’ CAPA High School.



One Designer’s Story

Damian Dominguez found inspiration in his designs for the Phipps show in two ways: His Mexican heritage and his love of Porter’s Christian Siriano gown, designed for Porter for the 91st Academy Awards.

For Dominguez’ Phipps creation, flowers formed the colorful décor on a design he created for the show, intended to blend in with the real flora but stand out on its own for its forward-fashion design.



As a native of Dalton, Georgia, Dominguez formed an early love of theater and music. He earned his undergraduate degree in theater and music from the University of Georgia. Dominguez learned much during his undergrad years from a professor, Ivan Ingerman, whose designs for “Disney on Ice” fascinated Dominguez.

“His passion was palpable,” Dominguez says. “I’m grateful for his introducing me to costume design.”

He returned to Dalton to become a middle school band director. Although he loved working with the students, he longed to pursue a career in costume design. After doing so for several years, he decided to go to graduate school and pursue an advanced degree.

Enter Carnegie Mellon, which Dominguez long had set his sights on. He was dismayed to learn after two times applying that he still had not been accepted. Undaunted, he applied a third time and was rewarded with an acceptance at his person-to-person interview with Bessie F. Anathan University Professor of Design Susan Tsu in Pittsburgh.

“My final interview was my first trip to Pittsburgh, and I absolutely loved it. My friends and I celebrated my interview with Susan and, then, my acceptance after being asked to join the program.”

Damian Dominguez

Currently freelancing in Pittsburgh, Dominguez has recently finished shows at City Theatre and Pittsburgh Public Theater. He takes time to join family in Mexico, where his grandmother still lives and from where he has learned to inject cultural influence into his work. He also serves as a part-time professor at Point Park University in costume design.

He encourages other designers — current students and recent alumni — to tap into their feelings and create what matters most to them.

“At the end of the day, we are fundamental storytellers as part of a performance, even down to the color of a sock. With this career, so much of what you do is in the moment. You may do things you don’t want to do, but it affects the future you. So, take care and be kind to the past, present and future versions of yourself.”

Damian Dominguez



featuring the following:

photography at Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Garden by Paul Vladuhick

learn more:

[Damian Dominguez](#)

[◀ Back to CFA Magazine 08](#)

[Faculty & Staff Resources](#)

[Contact](#)

CFA

College of Fine Arts
Carnegie Mellon University
5000 Forbes Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15213
[Contact Us](#)



Legal Info | [www.cmu.edu](#)
© 2026 Carnegie Mellon University





School of Music

Artistic Alchemy

Keith Lockhart and Jason Posnock Join Forces for a New Era of Leadership at Brevard Music Center

written by
Cally Jamis Vennare

Sixteen years ago, Keith Lockhart's musical path converged with Jason Posnock when Lockhart was appointed artistic director of [Brevard Music Center \(BMC\)](#) Institute and Summer Festival. This October, in the exquisite Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina, a new artistic alchemy between the Maestro and the Musician will occur when Posnock begins his tenure as BMC's president and CEO. These two Carnegie Mellon [School of Music](#) alumni discuss what brought them to CMU, what united them in Brevard, and their collective vision for the future of an institute and festival that inspires 40,000 music lovers, 700 students and 80 faculty each summer.



"You have great talent. Go to Pittsburgh and study at Carnegie Mellon University with Istvan Jaray." Those were the words of the legendary conductor Otto-Werner Mueller to a 21-year old Keith Lockhart. More than four decades later, they still resonate with Lockhart (CFA 1983), who has served as artistic director of the Brevard Music Center Institute and Summer Festival since 2007, having attended as a teenager for two summers in 1974 and 1975.

A graduate of Furman University, Lockhart had just made it through the highly competitive and grueling Yale Audition process when Mueller — professor of conducting at Yale School of Music and music director of Yale Philharmonia at the time — urged him to move to Pittsburgh to study at CMU with his former protégé, Istvan Jaray.

In 1981, Lockhart was the only conducting student in CMU's instrumental program and, as such, benefited from the intense but inspiring instruction that Jaray provided. Daily lessons could run 4-5 hours at a time. In his first semester, Lockhart conducted two of six performances of "Die Fledermaus."

"I was Jaray's assistant for everything. I got every crumb that fell off the table. It was very useful pre-professional training!"

Keith Lockhart

After earning his master's degree in orchestral conducting from the College of Fine Arts, Lockhart was hired by Carnegie Mellon. Over six years, he honed his craft across multiple CMU departments and disciplines — from musical direction of symphony, opera, chamber, drama and musical theatre to instruction of keyboard, clarinet and woodwinds methods to non-majors.

Lockhart left the university world to become the assistant director of Akron Symphony. A year later he was recruited to become the associate conductor of Cincinnati Symphony and Cincinnati Pops (1990-1995) — where his skills at the podium caught the eye of the [Boston Pops](#) and led to his eventual appointment as its conductor in 1995. He has remained with the Pops to this day, while extending his time and talents to the BBC Concert Orchestra (Principal Conductor, 2010-2018), Utah Symphony (Music Director, 1998-2009) and many other esteemed institutions in the U.S. and abroad.



Lockhart has conducted nearly every major orchestra in North America, as well as symphonies in London, Vienna, Berlin, Tokyo, Hong Kong and Melbourne. "Keith has had one of the most significant careers of an American conductor in the last 40 years," said Jason Posnock, who has worked alongside the Maestro at BMC since 2007.



Jason Posnock, currently vice president and chief artistic officer at BMC, had a distinctively different, yet equally rewarding experience at Carnegie Mellon. A graduate of Princeton University (AB, Music), the Royal College of Music (ARCM, Violin Performance) and University of Nebraska-Lincoln (MBA), Posnock was accepted into CMU's Performance Residency Program and studied with Andrés Cárdenes for three semesters from the fall 1998 to 1999. Cárdenes, who was concertmaster of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra at the time, encouraged Posnock to audition for the residency program after several private lessons with the talented young musician.

"It was a life-changing experience that transformed my whole physical approach to playing the violin. One of the things that makes CMU a special place to study music is that it's a very high level, conservatory-style music school in one of the best, well-rounded university settings in the country. You may be practicing five hours/day and taking lessons, but you're also interacting with people in disciplines that are far afield on paper from your own."

Jason Posnock

"There's a real concentration on bringing departments together and the cross-pollination of music with schools of thought in science, the humanities and other interdisciplinary areas," said Posnock. "Working with Mr. Cárdenes prepared me at the highest level. Being around brilliant and interesting people in different fields was an inspiring way to keep me moving forward."

Upon completion of his residency, Posnock lived and worked in Pittsburgh for almost a decade with his wife, flutist Dilshad Posnock (MFA, School of Music). Both Posnocks worked for CMU's School of Music — Jason as an adjunct professor and Dilshad as director of the Artist Diploma Program — as well as performed regularly with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra and other arts organizations.

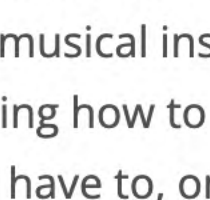
Posnock and Lockhart eventually met at BMC. After almost two decades of collaboration, they will enter into a new partnership in October 2023 when Posnock takes over the helm of BMC as its president and CEO.



What lies ahead for BMC in this new era of leadership? Both Lockhart and Posnock are aligned in their vision for artistic excellence and growth without ever losing sight of BMC's mission to educate the next generation of gifted musicians.

"We are — first and foremost — an educational institution that has a performance component. Everything needs to grow out of that. We want to be the very best Brevard we can be. We want to continue to bring in a more talented, more versatile and more engaged student body every year. We want to model different careers in music," said Lockhart. "At BMC, you engage with faculty, legendary artists and peer musicians — all of these people who have had to make the same decisions that they [BMC students] will have to make."

"This very subject speaks to why CMU has such an important role to play," added Posnock. "Not only are you going to BMS or CMU for the musical instruction and conservatory experience, you are broadening your skillset. You are learning how to write, how to think critically, how to function in the world in a way that you will have to, one way or another, if you're playing your instrument or not. Looking back, whether we knew it during those moments we were at CMU, that is how CMU impacted our career trajectories."



featuring the following:

photography of Lockhart and Posnock by Seyl Park

image of 2023 BMC Summer Festival faculty, staff, students and alumni (from left to right): Annalese Lohr, Karen Strittmatter Galvin, Erin Higgins, Mike Perdue, Jason Posnock, Keith Lockhart, Kenneth Eggert, Jae Hyun Moon, Dilshad Posnock, Eric Huang, Jacob Hartman

◀ Back to CFA Magazine 08

College of Fine Arts

Academics

Research & Creative Practice

ICA Pittsburgh

Frank-Ratchye STUDIO

News

About

Giving



BXA Intercollege Degree Programs

Slaying Off-Broadway

written by
Emily Syes

The gory, feminist musical "[The Trouble with Dead Boyfriends](#)" took center stage off-Broadway this summer for a one-month run at The Players Theater. The CMU-heavy production was originally performed on campus as part of [School of Drama's](#) 2016 PLAYGROUND festival of independent student work.

At that time, Annie Pulsipher (CFA 2017) was an MFA dramatic writing student seeking a musical collaborator to bring her concept to fruition. She formed a creative partnership with [Alex Petti](#), a 2015 [bachelor of science and arts](#) graduate in chemistry and music composition, who was working in New York City as an information technology project manager at Merck by day and a composer/lyricist by night.

Their energetic, silly horror show follows a trio of best friends — Stella, Grace and Madison. Influenced by romance in young-adult novels, the girls are desperate to find the perfect boyfriend of their dreams before prom at George A. Romero Memorial High. They try to grasp to their fantasy of "a love that lasts forever" until their dates prove to be monstrous — literally revealing their true forms as a vampire, ghost and zombie. Before the nightmare of prom night is over, the schoolgirls realize that their truest, deepest form of love is the bond between friends and finally exorcize their toxic monster boyfriends.



"The Trouble With Dead Boyfriends" is a hilarious, dark romp with catchy lyrics and a pop rock score. It challenges the cliché ideas that young girls are often taught about relationships and desirable behavior from men. Petti stated there is a "message about real empowerment — the power of female friendship and rejecting the idea that you have to look for fulfillment in a romantic partner."

It's been a little over a year since Petti has taken the leap to be an artist full-time. He credits the time he spent in the [BXA Intercollege Degree Programs](#) at CMU as a science student and his early corporate career with giving him the organizational, process and project management skills required to be successful in the musical theater industry.

As a senior, Petti created his first musical production, "Guts," for his BXA capstone. The year-long project provided him with the opportunity to learn important lessons and go through necessary steps that he applied while writing music, lyrics, orchestration, and producing "The Trouble With Dead Boyfriends." He also made important contacts that he has continued to work with as collaborators.

"The staying power of the great people that I met both in the BXA programs and CMU at large, it's just really special."

Alex Petti

Petti is grateful for the support the show received in 2017 from Carnegie Mellon for the MCL Chicago Premier Premieres! festival of musical comedy, in which "The Trouble With Dead Boyfriends" was the winner. The show also won SheNYC best score in 2018.

After a successful off-Broadway run, Petti has confidence the show will find a larger venue and plans to record a cast album. The team also aims to license the musical for the high school and college stage where their message can reach and entertain a young audience of women and the marginalized community.



featuring the following:

photography by Sean Salamon

◀ Back to CFA Magazine 08

Faculty & Staff Resources

Contact

CFA

College of Fine Arts
Carnegie Mellon University
5000 Forbes Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15213
[Contact Us](#)



Legal Info | www.cmu.edu
© 2026 Carnegie Mellon University



College of Fine Arts

[Academics](#)
[Research & Creative Practice](#)
[ICA Pittsburgh](#)
[Frank-Ratchye STUDIO](#)
[News](#)
[About](#)
[Giving](#)


Miller Institute for Contemporary Art

Impossible Music

written by
Margaret Cox

Carnegie Mellon University's [Miller Institute for Contemporary Art](#) will present "[Impossible Music](#)," an exhibition of sound, scores, sculptures, video and live performance that extends discourses on conceptual and experimental music and its intersections with art. The exhibition — on display Saturday, September 30 through Sunday, December 10 — opens with a reception on Friday, September 29 from 6–8 p.m. There will be performances by Aki Onda, Black Quantum Futurism and more. The Miller ICA, and all events associated with this exhibit, curated by Raven Chacon and Candice Hopkins, are free and open to the public. The exhibition will be accompanied by a series of booklets featuring critical conversations and artist interviews.

"Impossible Music" includes existing and commissioned work by: Terry Adkins, Black Quantum Futurism, Benvenuto Chavajay, Nikita Gale, Sarah Hennies, Tom Johnson, Conlon Nancarrow, Aki Onda, C. Spencer Yeh, Christine Sun Kim and Potlatch Records Listening Station.

"Impossible Music" suggests the multitude of compositions that are too complex for the human hand, some only playable by machines; scores that stretch the realms of musical possibility — a piece that plays for a thousand years, for example. It's entirely never heard by a single pair of ears; songs that can only take place in the future; as well as propositional or purely conceptual music — those works that can only be realized in one's mind. The exhibition also looks to instances where music was banned or socially unacceptable at certain moments in history in the Americas (the ban of Indigenous ceremonial songs or the pre-Civil Rights era prohibition of public performances of Black musicians). With this in mind, the exhibition points to instances where the need to move sound underground enabled the formation of new freedoms and new sounds.



Curator Bios

Raven Chacon, co-curator, is a composer, performer and installation artist from Fort Defiance, Navajo Nation. As a solo artist, collaborator, or with Postcommodity, Chacon has exhibited or performed at Whitney Biennial, documenta 14, REDCAT, Musée d'art Contemporain de Montréal, San Francisco Electronic Music Festival, Chaco Canyon, Ende Tymes Festival, 18th Biennale of Sydney and The Kennedy Center. Every year, he teaches 20 students to write string quartets for the Native American Composer Apprenticeship Project (NACAP). He is the recipient of the United States Artists fellowship in Music, the Creative Capital award in Visual Arts, the Native Arts and Cultures Foundation artist fellowship, and the American Academy's Berlin Prize for Music Composition. He lives in Albuquerque, N.M.

Candice Hopkins, co-curator, is a citizen of Carcross/Tagish First Nation and lives in Albuquerque. Her writing and curatorial practice explores the intersections of history, contemporary art and indigeneity. She works as senior curator for the 2019 and 2021 editions of the Toronto Biennial of Art and was part of the curatorial team for the Canadian Pavilion of the 58th Venice Biennale, featuring the work of the media art collective "Isuma." She is co-curator of notable exhibitions, including "Art for New Understanding: Native Voices 1950s to Now;" the 2018 SITE Santa Fe biennial, Casa Tomada; documenta 14 in Athens, Greece and Kassel, Germany; "Sakahàn: International Indigenous Art" at the National Gallery of Canada and "Close Encounters: The Next 500 Years" in Winnipeg, MB. Her recent essays and presentations include "The Gilded Gaze: Wealth and Economies on the Colonial Frontier," for the documenta 14 Reader, and "Outlawed Social Life" for South as a State of Mind.

Stavia Grimani, assistant curator, is an experienced art programmer for more than 10 years and has worked directly with internationally acclaimed artists, curators and organizations to create vibrant and successful multidisciplinary programming. Her expertise in organizing exhibitions allows her to demonstrate a dedicated knowledge in research, as well as critically assess contemporary culture by displaying a strong sense of self-motivation, attention to detail and commitment to long-term goals.



featuring the following:

work by Christine Sun Kim "Six Types of Waiting in Berlin," 2017

[learn more:](#)

["Impossible Music" at the Miller ICA](#)

[◀ Back to CFA Magazine 08](#)

[Faculty & Staff Resources](#)
[Contact](#)

College of Fine Arts

Academics

Research & Creative Practice

ICA Pittsburgh

Frank-Ratchye STUDIO

News

About

Giving

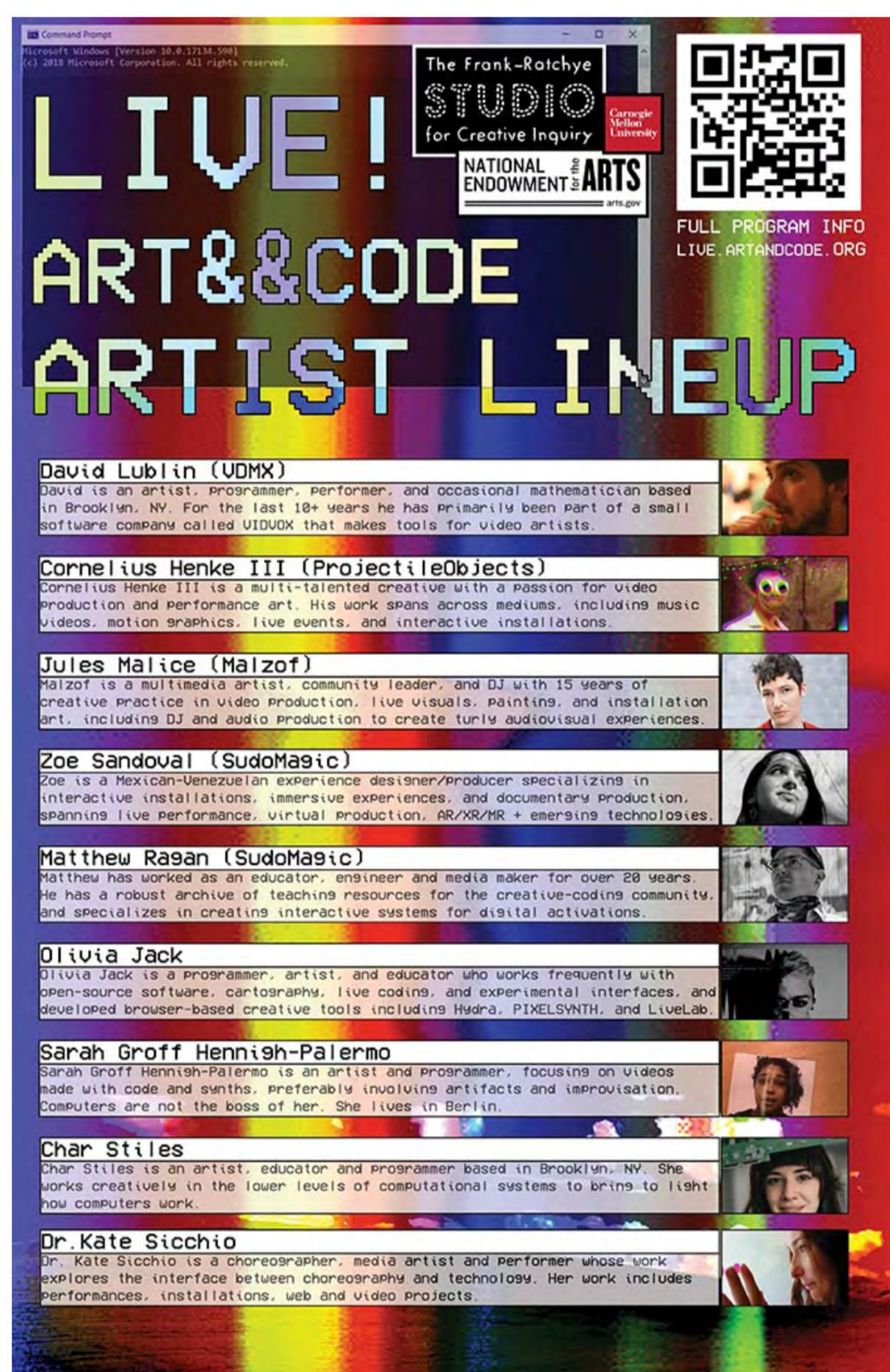


Frank-Ratchye STUDIO for Creative Inquiry

Funding "LIVE! ART&&CODE"

written by
Harrison Apple

Carnegie Mellon University's [Frank-Ratchye STUDIO for Creative Inquiry](#) has been approved for a \$25,000 Grant for Arts Projects award from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) to support ART&&CODE. The STUDIO's project is among 1,130 projects across the country, totaling more than \$31 million, that were selected during the second round of 2023 funding by Grants for Arts Projects, NEA's largest grants program for organizations, providing comprehensive and expansive funding opportunities for communities.



The STUDIO's "LIVE! ART&&CODE" is comprised of weekend workshops and events that bring together media artists, performers, teachers working at the intersection of performance, real-time visuals, live coding, and nightlife.

This public-serving and highly interdisciplinary series is dedicated to skill sharing and community building in and around Pittsburgh nightlife and live performance. Taking place at CMU's Pittsburgh campus and local venues, the program features artist-led workshops, performances, panel discussions, and participant-driven exhibitions.



LIVE! Art&&Code is spread across three learning/performing weekends!

Beginning in October and extending into early December, each weekend is dedicated to a unique group of instructors who are passionate about sharing their practices, workflows and techniques for creating compelling live visuals.

<p>LIVE! Visuals for Performance</p> <p>October 12 – 13</p> <p>The STUDIO, along with co-producers Jules Malice "Malzof" and Cornelius Henke III, will host a VJ Meetup and VDMX workshop taught by its creator, David Lublin.</p>	<p>REALTIME! TouchDesigner Intensive</p> <p>November 10 – 12</p> <p>The STUDIO will host artist talks and a two-day TouchDesigner Workshop from Zoe Sandoval and Matthew Ragan, the co-creators of TouchDesigner's curriculum and the creative production force behind SudoMagic.</p>	<p>LIVE! Code!</p> <p>December 1 – 3</p> <p>The STUDIO will host artist talks, a one-day workshop in Live Coding and a closing party featuring projections by our visiting instructors Olivia Jack, Sarah Groff Hennigh-Palermo and STUDIO Alum Char Stiles!</p>
---	--	---



[◀ Back to CFA Magazine 08](#)

[Faculty & Staff Resources](#)

[Contact](#)



College of Fine Arts

[Academics](#)
[Research & Creative Practice](#)
[ICA Pittsburgh](#)
[Frank-Ratchye STUDIO](#)
[News](#)
[About](#)
[Giving](#)


Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Angelica Perez-Johnston Joins CFA as Associate Dean for DEI

written by
Pamela Wigley

The College of Fine Arts at Carnegie Mellon University welcomed Dr. Angelica Perez-Johnston as the new Associate Dean for [Diversity, Equity and Inclusion](#) (DEI) July 1.

Perez-Johnston comes to CMU from Community College of Allegheny County, Pittsburgh, where she has served as Chief DEI Officer since July 2021. Prior to that, she was the director of IDEAS (Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Access & Social Justice) at Allegheny College in Meadville, Pa. Additionally, she served as director of First Year Experience and Transition Programs at Thiel College in Greenville, Pa., and held roles in student-facing services at Thiel and Clarion University, Clarion, Pa., among several other higher education roles. She is a native of Clarion County.

She earned her associate's degree in paralegal studies at Bradford School of Business, Pittsburgh, and graduated with her bachelor's degree from Edinboro University in Edinboro, Pa., in psychology with a developmental concentration. Perez-Johnston earned her master's degree in counseling from Edinboro before going on to receive her doctorate in public administration from West Chester University in West Chester, Pa.

“The work of ensuring equitable access to our artistic community, of understanding the often unjust history of our art forms, of reaffirming every day our determination to address those inequities and injustices — that work is foundational and ongoing in the College of Fine Arts. We can't take our eyes off it for a minute. I am so pleased that Angelica will bring her skills and experience to CFA as both a partner and a leader in this never-ending project.”

Mary Ellen Poole
Dean, College of Fine Arts

Perez-Johnston said that at CMU, she will prioritize increasing the capacity for the work of diversity, equity and inclusion, as well as working with those who serve in like roles on the entire campus to become a “hub for students, faculty and staff in a real, intentional way.”

“My experiences in a variety of higher education environments, as well as being a former mental health professional, have afforded me the opportunity to view the work of diversity, equity and inclusion from a more intentional lens. I have focused data experience to my role within CFA.”

Angelica Perez-Johnston
Associate Dean of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, College of Fine Arts

Dean Poole thanked the search committee members for their tireless work in finding Perez-Johnston.

“I'm deeply grateful to the diligent and thoughtful search committee, led by Kim Beck and Robert Ramirez, and to those who took time to meet with the candidates and get feedback at, perhaps, the busiest time of our year,” she said. “We are thrilled to welcome Angelica to the College of Fine Arts.”



[◀ Back to CFA Magazine 08](#)

[Faculty & Staff Resources](#)
[Contact](#)

CFA

College of Fine Arts
Carnegie Mellon University
5000 Forbes Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15213
[Contact Us](#)



[Legal Info](#) | [www.cmu.edu](#)
© 2026 Carnegie Mellon University



College of Fine Arts

[Academics](#)[Research & Creative Practice](#)[ICA Pittsburgh](#)[Frank-Ratchye STUDIO](#)[News](#)[About](#)[Giving](#)

Master of Arts Management

Raising LGBTQ+ Voices

Justin Fyala Brings Joy & Justice of Choral Music

written by
Lauren Stash

For 42 years, the [Gay Men's Chorus of Washington, D.C.](#) (GMCW) has been redefining what it means to be a chorus.

With performances that span genres, honor musical milestones across the decades and shine a light on the LGBTQ+ community, they like to say, "You've never seen a show like this."

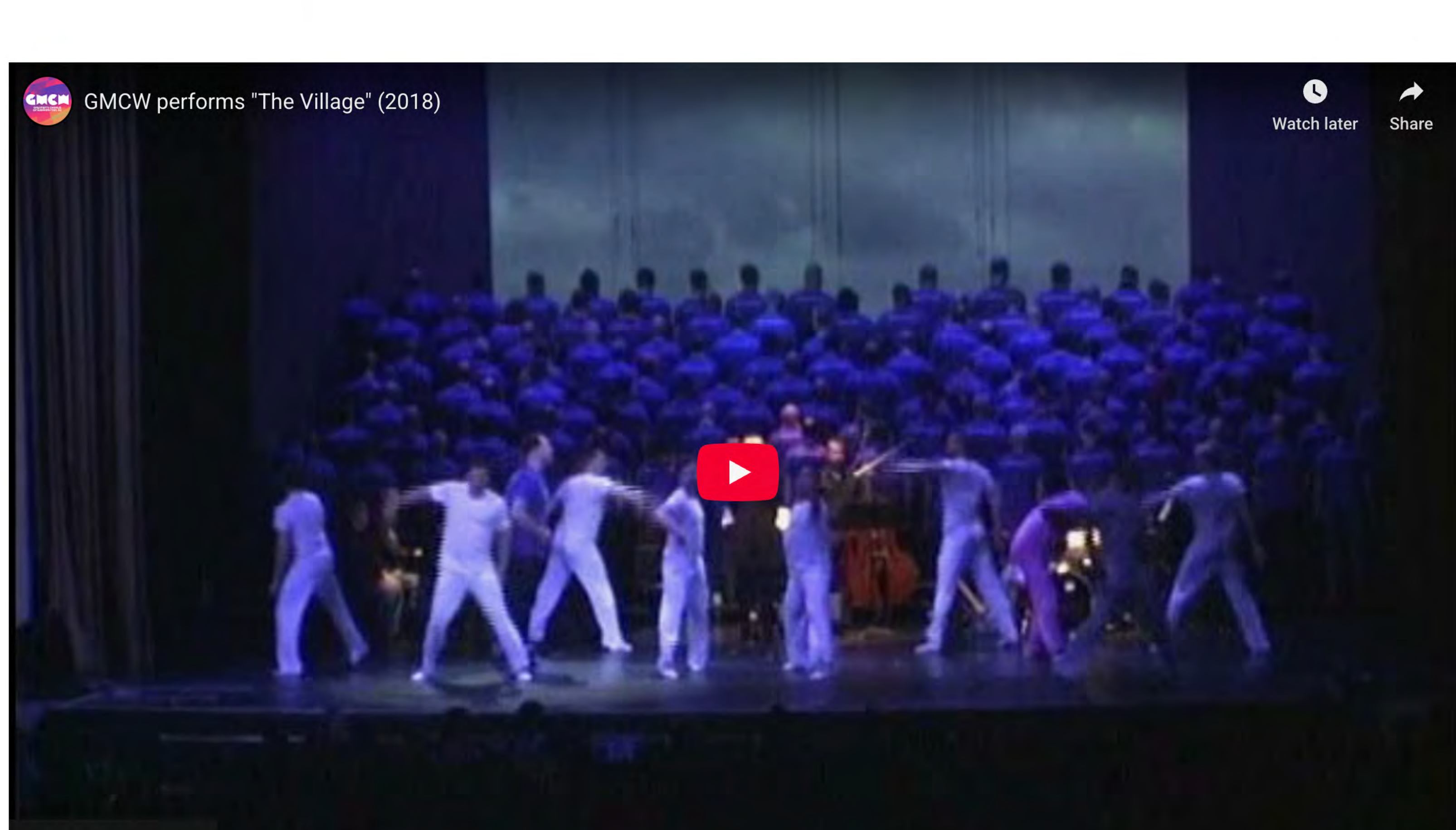
And for Carnegie Mellon alum and GMCW Executive Director [Justin Fyala](#), the GMCW's mission of "equality and inclusion with musical performances and education promoting justice and dignity for all" inspired him to create a supportive environment that allows performers to practice their art at the highest level.

"I think music on its own is, of course, wonderful, but when you put music in the context of loftier ideals like love and service and empathy, you can start really communicating with people."

Justin Fyala

Fyala, a 2011 graduate, who holds a [Master of Arts Management degree](#), a joint program between the College of Fine Arts and Heinz College of Information Systems and Public Policy.

Now in his seventh year as executive director and with previous roles at The Youth Choral Theater of Chicago and Chicago Fringe Festival — as well as a fascination with choral music that began as a child — Fyala commits his professional and personal energies to bringing the gift and joy of choral music to as many audiences as he can.



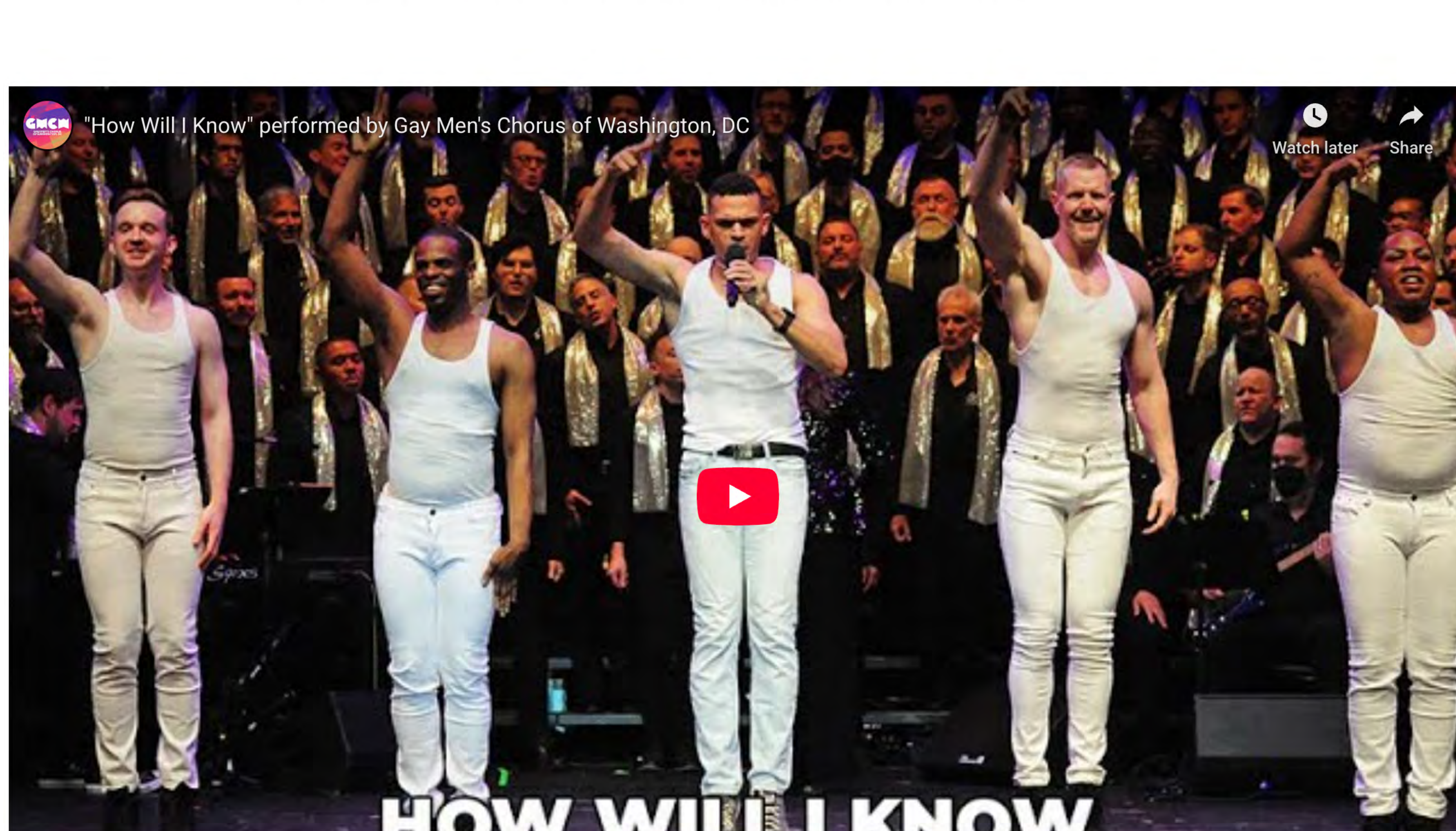
More than 250 singers make up the GMCW and take part in more than 125 outreach concerts and events each year. The organization also boasts three vocal ensembles, a youth chorus and a dance ensemble. They have performed for two presidents — Barack Obama and Bill Clinton — and in venerable venues like the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and Carnegie Hall.

At GMCW, performers can focus on bringing their best and fullest selves to the stage with the confidence that the organization they love is growing and thriving under Fyala's leadership.

"I break my role into four main pillars — finance, fundraising, operations and connections. I connect with members of our surrounding communities, too. It's important to make sure we are linked with other choruses, as well as with other LGBTQ+ organizations, both locally and nationally."

Justin Fyala

Those efforts ensure that the GMCW is influencing audiences in Washington, D.C., and also is part of a larger impact being made by LGBTQ+ arts organizations around the country.



Fyala credits much of his confidence in promoting the organization's mission to his days as a Tartan.

"The most significant thing that I can make a connection to is having learned how to energize large groups of people," he said. "Participating in group projects and meeting so many new people in my classes gave me the skills to get people with differing perspectives and opinions on the same page. Now, I help our members, audiences and community of supporters understand that no matter what, our mission is always at the forefront."

Fyala also gave a nod to a Heinz College presentation skills class with former teaching professor Pam Lewis with developing his poise around public speaking. Speaking to GMCW's needs and goals in a professional but compelling way means getting the attention of the right people.

"I've learned how to guide an organization through where it is at present — learning everything you can about it and sharing what you've learned with people who can help push you forward — while looking toward and planning for the future."

While Fyala's work provides support, guidance and direction behind the scenes, he draws inspiration from the talent that he sees on stage.

"I'm enjoying watching our group execute a four-year-long project called 'Portraits,'" he said. "It's a commissioned piece of nine works by nine choreographers accompanied by nine new pieces of music. It's really grown and gained shape over the few years it's been in progress."

The piece is set to premiere next June and represents a broad spectrum of sexual, gender, racial, ethnic and cultural identities. This sort of deep exploration is part of what Justin sees as the strength and depth of GMCW's purpose.

"What organizations like ours can do is so important. Not only for our performers who are provided with a safe creative space, but also for our larger community of audience members and donors who can watch one of our shows and get something they need. That can mean an escape from the outside world or a sense of community at a time when LGBTQ+ individuals can feel isolated."

Justin Fyala



featuring the following:

videos from [GMCWashington YouTube](#)

"The Village" video was part of the "Transamerica" performance, which set out to uplift and educate about the gender-nonconforming and nonbinary communities. It was a true turning point for the organization. They began including more people in the chorus, and now anyone who sings in the tenor/bass range can audition.

"How Will I Know" was part of a tribute concert to Whitney Houston in March 2023, which was celebratory and engaging, truly bringing the community together.

[◀ Back to CFA Magazine 08](#)

[Faculty & Staff Resources](#)[Contact](#)

CFA

College of Fine Arts
Carnegie Mellon University
5000 Forbes Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15213
[Contact Us](#)



[Legal Info](#) | [www.cmu.edu](#)
© 2026 Carnegie Mellon University



College of Fine Arts

[Academics](#)
[Research & Creative Practice](#)
[ICA Pittsburgh](#)
[Frank-Ratchye STUDIO](#)
[News](#)
[About](#)
[Giving](#)


Master of Entertainment Industry Management



The Next Chapter

MEIM Advisory Committee Member John Gresch Looks to the Future

written by

Gabrielle Lossia & Dan Green

It's time for John Gresch to enjoy a new phase of his life: Spending time with loved ones and focusing on personal creative interests. John, a Carnegie Mellon [Master of Entertainment Industry Management](#) Advisory Committee member and [School of Drama](#) alumnus, recently celebrated his retirement from ARRI Lighting and Camera. There, he was senior vice president of sales and marketing, and he spent more than 36 years providing the best lighting and camera equipment to the motion picture and television industries.

"Leading teams with creativity, innovation and emotional intelligence, Gresch provided outstanding customer service and fostered genuine relationships with colleagues and clients alike."

Daniel Green

Director, Master of Entertainment Industry Management

"During his time at ARRI, he had the honor of accepting an Engineering Emmy on behalf of the company, but his illustrious career started in a place familiar to many of us — high school theatre. And that eventually led him to CMU's School of Drama," Green said.

After graduating from CMU with a degree in lighting design, Gresch moved to Los Angeles and worked at Berkey Colortran, a manufacturer of lighting products. He and two fellow CMU alumni then started a venture called Excalibur Cases — specializing in equipment cases. Although it was a great learning experience, the business was not what Gresch had envisioned, and he transitioned to become a regional sales manager at ARRI.

He spent the next three decades growing as a leader at ARRI through his execution of business planning, sales strategy and production management, helping to grow the brand recognition of ARRI Lighting. He also became involved as a board member and eventual president of CMU's West Coast Drama Alumni Clan (WCDAC). Gresch was a bridge for recent School of Drama grads making their way into the entertainment industry.

"John is a natural leader and mentor. He loves helping others reach their goals and excels at building lasting relationships. John's legacy of mentorship will be honored by a new ARRI internship program coming this fall, which will bear his name."

Daniel Green

Director, Master of Entertainment Industry Management

Mentoring through the MEIM program, even indirectly, came naturally to Gresch, who served as a MEIM Advisory Committee member. Through WCDAC, Gresch met Dan Martin, a CMU faculty member and eventual dean of the College of Fine Arts, who was developing a master's program that included a year of practical work in Los Angeles for those looking to receive an education in the management of screen-based media. Martin invited Gresch to be a part of the newly formed MEIM Advisory Committee before the program even had a home space in L.A. His guidance, together with many diverse industry professionals, helped to develop the MEIM curriculum, its internships, and ways to market the program to the industry.

"We at MEIM are grateful that John said 'yes' all those years ago to serving as an advisor to the MEIM program," Green said. "We wish John the best of luck in this new chapter, and we're excited for him to take some time to focus on someone who has always taken a back seat until now — himself."

Now, as he looks forward to his personal journey for the future, Gresch provided one last mentoring exercise to MEIM students and recent alumni:

"Find a balance between your professional and personal passions," he said. "It can be devastating when things go awry, but having mentorships and people to turn to when things seem overwhelming will be extremely valuable. As for me, I had wonderful mentors, many who were Carnegie Mellon alumni."



featuring the following:

photo (left to right): Emanuel 'Manny' Treeson*, Cassidy Pearsall*, Andrew Schmedake*, Drew Findley*, Dan Efras*, Kristen Merlino*, Juliet Brown*, Jeff Ravitz, Chris Werner*, John Gresch*, Ryan Fletcher, Cindy Limauro**, Christopher Popovich, Laura Tetlow, Jim Tetlow*, Stephen Gresch (son), Dan Green*

* Carnegie Mellon Alumni

** Carnegie Mellon Professor

[◀ Back to CFA Magazine 08](#)

[Faculty & Staff Resources](#)

[Contact](#)

CFA

College of Fine Arts
Carnegie Mellon University
5000 Forbes Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15213
[Contact Us](#)



Legal Info | www.cmu.edu
© 2026 Carnegie Mellon University





Living Life on Her Own Terms

Christiane Noll Looks Back on Her Career

written by
Pamela Wigley

After 35 years in the entertainment industry, Christiane Noll is looking back with satisfaction. Although her journey is far from over, Noll has accomplished a great deal in her career and feels great pride in the fact that, for much of her history, she created her own path.

The 1990 Carnegie Mellon University [School of Music](#) alumna (vocal performance/music theater) also credits many along the way in helping her create a thriving career. That said, she is a firm believer that someone who wants to obtain success in show business must work hard to help garner their own rewards.

“Success is, in large part, your own making. If you want something, go get it.”

Christiane Noll

“You might imagine your journey in this business is linear and merit-based, but it’s not. So many opportunities will come your way that seem to have no connection. Only later can you realize that everything you have done has led you to where you are at that moment. You have to decide what will work best for you.”

Growing up in New York and New Jersey, she found obvious musical influence in her parents. Her father, Ronald, was a conductor and Emmy Award-winning music supervisor for the CBS network; her mother was celebrated soprano Sara-Ann Noll. So, she was exposed to the performing arts from an early age. Educators played a role in her love of performing, as well.

Noll pointed to Ed Brown, her seventh-grade teacher; Giacomo Oliva, her high school choral director who encouraged her to participate in regional choirs; and Charlotte Black, her voice teacher at CMU who Noll said helped plant the seeds of healthy singing and inspired her creative passion.

“She would say, ‘Tell us a story with your voice and your acting,’” Noll said. “She also showed us that some people made it in the business and some didn’t. We needed to see that — to see that we played a part in our own futures.” Longtime Professor Robert Page also proved to be a positive influence during her time at CMU.

She chose Carnegie Mellon because the university had both computers and theater, so laughingly, she thought she might gain expertise in both areas. At CMU, Noll said, she drove herself and worked hard to refine her talents. “Do the work! That’s what I remember learning and still remember it and practice it to this day.”



Noll’s expansive catalog of work includes stage, concerts, cabarets and recordings. She created the role of Emma on Broadway in “Jekyll & Hyde” (1997) and appeared in 1999’s “Ain’t Nothin’ But the Blues.” She received an Ovation Award for her role as Hope Cladwell in the National Tour of “Urinetown” (2004) and went on to create the roles of Vanna Vane in “The Mambo Kings” (2005), Jane Smart in “The Witches of Eastwick” at the Signature Theatre in Arlington, Va., (2007), and Elizabeth Lavenza in “Frankenstein – A New Musical” (2007).

In 2009, she played Mother in “Ragtime” at the Kennedy Center and won a 2010 Helen Hayes Award for Best Actress in a Musical. She followed that performance by playing Mother on Broadway in the 2010 revival of “Ragtime” and was nominated for a Tony Award for Best Performance by a Leading Actress in a Musical. In 2012 she won the Off-Broadway Alliance award for “Closer Than Ever” at the York Theatre and created the role of Hannah Chaplin in “Chaplin” on Broadway, garnering a 2013 Drama Desk award nomination.

In 2017 she won the St. Louis Critics Circle award for playing Sally in “Follies” at Repertory Theater of St. Louis and the Connecticut Critics Circle award for Diana in “Next to Normal” at TheaterWorks Hartford. Noll was part of the first national touring company for “Dear Evan Hansen,” playing the role of Cynthia Murphy and later played the same role in the Broadway company in October 2019. She resumed the role in December 2021 after Broadway’s COVID-19 pandemic hiatus. She wrapped that role in September 2022.



Her concert, performance and recording work is just as impressive. Noll frequently performs Broadway favorites in concert and has been a guest soloist with the orchestras and symphonies around the world. Her Carnegie Hall debut was with the New York Pops, her Hollywood Bowl debut was with Julie Andrews, and her opera debut was with Placido Domingo at the National Opera. Noll also performs a solo cabaret show and has released five solo CDs of her work. She was the singing voice of Anna in the 1999 animated “King and I” for Warner Brothers and appeared in the 2013 NBC national television broadcast of “The Sound of Music Live!” as Sister Margaretta. She has guest starred in a number of NY-based television shows.

The one role she says she hasn’t played yet — but isn’t ruling it out for the somewhat distant future — is Madame Armfeldt from Stephen Sondheim’s “A Little Night Music.”

For now, between engagements, she focuses on family and preparing the next generation of vocalists by teaching them voice over Zoom. She currently teaches about 10 students (two in Cairo, Egypt), and she said she appreciates the opportunity to teach while remaining active in the profession.

“Actors never retire,” she said. “They get more selective in what they do. So, now, I’m here to connect students to themselves and their gifts — whether they are choosing to have a theater career or not.”

Christiane Noll

For those at Carnegie Mellon who are following in her footsteps, Noll offered additional advice.

“Lift each other up, rather than tearing each other down,” she said. “Take it all in. Be prepared. Be patient with yourself and others. Be kind to everyone in all departments. You come to this through your own journey. Find what makes you happy and bring that to your work. There is no one else like you. Remember, there is no one way to do it. Figure out what works for you and then surprise yourself.”

Noll supports students in other ways, as well. She has made gifts to Carnegie Mellon nearly every year since her 1990 graduation. She is a member of the [Andrew Carnegie Society](#) (ACS), and created the Charlotte Black Memorial Award in honor of her late voice teacher.

Less than a year after graduating, Noll landed the first national tour of “City of Angels” and then immediately went to the first national company of “Miss Saigon” in Chicago. While experiencing this run of luck and good fortune, Noll said, “my dear voice teacher, mentor and friend, Charlotte Black, was deteriorating due to a battle with cancer.”

Upon Black’s passing, she felt very strongly about honoring her, her teaching and her memory.

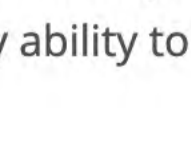
“I wanted a monetary award to go to a junior student who had overcome something during their time at CMU. Charlotte taught many students that were not the immediate stars of the department. More of a ‘diamond in the rough.’ I wanted to recognize those students.”

Christiane Noll

The sole donor who continues to donate to this now-endowed award, Noll said she is committed to fund the monetary award “as long as I am earning a decent salary.” She has heard from award recipients through the years via letters of gratitude. And when she last did a Master Class at CMU, she had the opportunity to meet one of the recipients. Another introduced herself at the stage door of Heinz Hall when Noll played Pittsburgh with “Dear Evan Hansen.”

This year marks 50 years of existence for the ACS, whose members are committed to CMU’s future and have demonstrated that commitment through generous support of the student experience, impactful research, and attracting highly talented, collaborative students, faculty and staff to CMU.

“Honoring an important teacher is a wonderful way to contribute to and support hard-working students,” Noll said. “I am very proud of my ability to do so and encourage others to help in a similar way.”



featuring the following:

photography by Jenny Anderson, Joan Marcus and Russ Rowland

[make a gift](#)

[◀ Back to CFA Magazine 08](#)

College of Fine Arts

[Academics](#)[Research & Creative Practice](#)[ICA Pittsburgh](#)[Frank-Ratchye STUDIO](#)[News](#)[About](#)[Giving](#)

Future Focused



Welcoming Joanna Bosse as Interim Head, School of Music

written by
Pamela Wigley

Joanna Bosse will join the College of Fine Arts (CFA) and the [School of Music](#) as Interim Head and Visiting Professor of Music for a two-year term beginning August 1.

Bosse currently serves as Associate Dean for Administrative Affairs and Strategic Initiatives in the College of Music at Michigan State University (MSU). Prior to that appointment, she served for six years as Associate Dean for Academic Affairs in the Residential College in the Arts and Humanities at MSU.

"I am delighted to welcome Joanna to our community," said Mary Ellen Poole, dean of the College of Fine Arts. "I'm confident that she will be a strong advocate for the students, faculty and staff of the School of Music while engaging them in crucial conversations about the future."

An ethnomusicologist and dance scholar with a Ph.D. from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Bosse has taught at MSU, Bowdoin College, Millikin University, and Illinois State University. Throughout her career, she has expressed a strong commitment to the notion that sustained artistic practice is a necessary component of optimal wellness for individuals and communities. To that end, this philosophy is reflected in her research interests that most recently include the relationship between music, health and well-being; music and movement; and music cognition and emotion.

"I look forward to working with the faculty, staff, students and alumni who are part of the School of Music, focusing on future-directed initiatives that build upon the strong foundation that is part of the school's history," Bosse said.

Bosse's publications have focused on partnership dance traditions like salsa, tango, swing and ballroom among amateur, hobbyist performers. Her book, *Becoming Beautiful: Ballroom Dance in the American Heartland* (University of Illinois Press 2015), presents an ethnographic case study of amateur ballroom dancers who experience personal transformation through artistic engagement, and her award-winning documentary film, *Becoming Beautiful* (2017), has screened on three continents. Her research on whiteness, race and performance appears in *The Journal of American Folklore*, *Dance Research Journal*, *Ethnomusicology Forum*, and elsewhere.

"Pittsburgh is a city rich in the arts, and I'm excited to become part of the CFA and CMU communities, as well as the broader arts community," Bosse said. "We have an obligation to the next generation of music students, and I truly look forward to working with the school's team to meet their needs."

[◀ Back to CFA Magazine 08](#)[Faculty & Staff Resources](#)[Contact](#)**CFA**

College of Fine Arts
Carnegie Mellon University
5000 Forbes Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15213
[Contact Us](#)



[Legal Info](#) | www.cmu.edu
© 2026 Carnegie Mellon University





Finding What Matters

Betty Rexrode Follows the Passions of Her Environment

written by
Pamela Wigley

Betty Rexrode learned from an early age to appreciate the environment. Growing up in York, Pa., she was the middle child in a family with a strong farming background. Her paternal grandfather was a farmer; her maternal grandfather served as the Commonwealth's Secretary of Agriculture. The love of the land passed on to later generations, and Rexrode developed an appreciation of the surrounding farmland's natural beauty.

It may seem odd, then, that Rexrode ultimately landed in New York City. After studying in Rome during her time as an undergrad at Carnegie Mellon's [School of Architecture](#), she moved there briefly to practice after graduating in 1989. Her career path then took her to Pittsburgh, Texas and, finally, New York, which allowed her to live closer to family. As a practicing architect, Rexrode's appreciation for beautiful environments continued. Since 1995, her primary work has focused on the design of art galleries: first as an associate with Richard Gluckman Architects, then at [Rexrode Chirigos Architects NYC](#) where, since its founding in 2006, she has created 25 more New York art galleries.

Art, a first love, became incorporated in her studies as an undergrad at CMU, where she earned a minor in art (painting) and subsequently continued post-bac studies at the University of Texas at Austin in fine arts. Now, 28 years later, her combined interests contribute to her success designing galleries in New York City.

"I spent a lot of time on my grandparents' farms," she said. "I learned to appreciate and love the land and environment, and what you need to do to maintain, conserve and restore it. All of this comes full circle with our Living on Net Zero project and our urban initiatives in New York."

Net Zero, described as "off the grid 54 miles from Times Square," is Rexrode's connection to her roots. Although her professional work showcases some of the world's greatest art galleries, her personal work highlights her ongoing dedication to the natural environment. Even while maintaining her New York City apartment with husband and business partner Michael Chirigos, there came a time when the family recognized that having a strong connection to the outdoors to raise their family was important to them.

They found Oak Island, a community [highlighted in The New York Times](#), where their house at the time was covered in vines and looked a bit like a chicken coop, she remembered. The island was, and still is, like stepping back in time — no public utilities (no electricity, gas or water), emergency services provided by fireboats, and all trash hauled off the island by owners. Undaunted, Rexrode, Chirigos and their kids (4 and 2 at the time) felt like they had come home and thought they might thrive there, learning about the land and living in harmony with it.

They bought their home and became part of the community, sharing the island with 50 other neighbors. The family eventually installed solar panels and lighting, along with other renovations to the home, but kept its original structure intact while updating — always mindful of the natural environment. The children learned to "plant what you can eat," Rexrode recalled, embraced raising vegetables and oysters, foraging beach plums and berries and, most recently, adding scallops to their aquafarm.

Rexrode said she loves the juxtaposition of her city life with her life on the water. Both fulfill her desire to create, she said, as an architect of structural spaces and natural wonders. She thinks back often on her time at CMU and the inspiration of several people who encouraged her to pursue her architecture studies.

"Slee [[Steve Lee](#)] hooked me in pre-college," she said. "He later became one of my first-year professors, and I was fortunate to work with [his firm] Tai + Lee during my junior year."

Rexrode also gave kudos to then-faculty member Walter Boykowycz, whom she called "the quietest member of the faculty with the most thoughtful comments," who also led her summer studio experience in Rome with Nino Saggio. [Doug Cooper](#) also served as an influence in "every level of drawing" and independent study, as did Mike Chirigos, who taught the design build program and with whom she connected after returning from studying abroad.

"He was the architect that explained to me what an employer needs to do to make you an architect," she recalled. "I took the job [with his firm]. He taught me how to think on a practical level and get things built. And the perk? He introduced me to his son, Michael — my husband and business partner!"

In her daily work, Rexrode refers back to her CMU education, which instilled critical thinking as an essential part of her process. "Learn that, and there's not a thing you cannot do or master."

"I am in debt to those who gave their time to teach me, and I'm grateful to be able to do the same through having summer CMU interns, having CMU join our staff, being able to mentor through the American Institute of Architects, and teaching third-year students at Pratt," she said.

To those architecture students and recent graduates, Rexrode passed along advice she thought would be helpful as they pursue their degrees and their careers.

"Take the time to identify what matters to you," she said. "Ask why, and meet with people who share that interest. Challenge what matters to you and refine what that means over time."

During her own time at CMU, Rexrode was grateful for exposure to other areas of study on campus. She advised current students to explore the departments and colleges outside of their own. "The world is vast. What you can do and how you make your impact have endless opportunities."

She hopes students take the time to explore Pittsburgh. Whether that's getting a "late-night fix" at one of Oakland's many diverse food establishments or going to the Carnegie Museum. Or visiting the industrial mills and Pittsburgh bridges (which she focused on with faculty members Charlee Brodsky and Doug Cooper), which influenced her on-going research on the New York Bridges as public spaces and her involvement with Transportation Alternatives.

From the vast farms of eastern Pennsylvania to the heart of Manhattan and, still, in her environmental community on Oak Island, Rexrode has made the most of her passions. She said she loves where she's landed but, if she weren't doing what she currently does, she would see herself in painting, expanding her oyster raising and encouraging Aquaculture as a means to restore the bays, or venturing into landscape design.

"But who's to say those are not all a form of practicing architecture?!" she said with a laugh. And with that, she dons her bicycle helmet and heads back to create something special in whatever environment is her current focus.

[◀ Back to CFA Magazine 08](#)



Forging a Heist Narrative

Lyndon Barrois Jr.'s "Rosette" Fuses Art, Cinema and History

written by
Cally Jamis Vennare

In "[Rosette](#)," a recent solo exhibit at the Carnegie Museum of Art (CMAA), Carnegie Mellon Assistant Professor of Art [Lyndon Barrois Jr.](#) drew from his love of the heist film genre to create a never-to-be-realized film script. The story's protagonists, two museum conservators who may be forgers, are tasked with caring for objects deemed valuable to Belgium's cultural heritage.

Are these conservators committing forgeries to sabotage a method of evaluation based upon authenticity? By raising questions of authorship, legitimacy and ownership, Barrois challenges us to consider what it means to care for these objects physically, culturally and intellectually.

Working with CMAA's Richard Armstrong Curator of Art, Liz Park, Barrois' fictional script came to life in the museum's Forum Gallery through the use of film stills, posters, sets and props starkly juxtaposed with "forged" paintings, sculptures and objects borrowed from both Carnegie Museums of Art and Natural History. The exhibit, which ran from May 5 through August 27, allowed visitors to enter a unique world of cinema, art and history.

Barrois often uses cinema as a primary tool of reference — not only in his artistic endeavors, but also in the classroom. By looking at the intentions of a film, what is happening within it, and how images can be composed to frame a certain narrative (or a broader, alternative storyline), he helps his students express key elements of a cinematic story through images, objects or sculptures. This approach, which he calls "static cinema," is one that was strongly influenced by the work of LA-based artist [Kathryn Andrews](#).

It is Barrois' hope that "Rosette" motivates viewers to dig a bit deeper to develop a curiosity about what they were seeing — "an eclectic collection that would otherwise never be hung in the same space in a museum" — and spark an important and relevant dialogue around issues of authorship, authenticity and ownership.

"There's always an inclination within me to present things that have some level of conviction to them — like relaying a kind of conviction to the audience as to whether or not something is real or true. This is really a series of firsts for me, so it's been a learning process, but also a bit of an evolution of some of the visual and material language that I've been working toward for the last few years."

The idea of a heist narrative involving a forger had been on Barrois' mind for almost 20 years, yet the structure of the story and character makeup changed over time. And therein lies another key lesson for his class of emerging artists at CMU — to embrace flexibility and follow an idea through, even in the face of doubt. "Rosette is a reinforcement of that sentiment. As a student, you have lots of doubts. So do !! But it's OK to do things differently ... and to deviate. I never made some of the things that look like this exhibition. But it's really exciting and, hopefully, there are rich results."

read more:

[Professor Barrois Opens Solo Show 'Rosette' at the Carnegie Museum of Art](#)

[Art Heists True and False: Lyndon Barrois Jr. at Carnegie Museum of Art](#)

[Lyndon Barrois Jr.: Rosette uses a fake heist film to address real issues in the art world](#)

◀ Back to CFA Magazine 08

College of Fine Arts

[Academics](#)
[Research & Creative Practice](#)
[ICA Pittsburgh](#)
[Frank-Ratchye STUDIO](#)
[News](#)
[About](#)
[Giving](#)


Fusing Disciplines and Creating Connections



Dr. Mark Baskinger Named Director of the Joseph Ballay Center for Design Fusion

written by
Joe Lyons

Carnegie Mellon University's [School of Design](#) has announced that Associate Professor [Mark Baskinger](#) has been named the inaugural director of the newly established Joseph Ballay Center for Design Fusion, starting in July 2023. The center, created by a \$10 million gift from Professor Emeritus Joseph Ballay, establishes a formal presence of design expertise and outreach at CMU and also will serve as a central hub for design courses for the CMU campus community, executive education, sponsored projects and collaborations, and design research.

"Our international search for the inaugural director of the Joseph Ballay Center for Design Fusion made it clear that Dr. Mark Baskinger is the ideal choice," said Eric Anderson, Professor and Interim Head of the School of Design.

Baskinger, who currently teaches across all levels of design curriculum in the School of Design, has been featured in numerous design publications and international magazines, has had his work exhibited in museums all over the globe, holds 5 US design patents, and is also the co-author of "Drawing Ideas." He holds a PhD from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, an MFA in Industrial Design from the University of Illinois (UIUC) and a BFA in Graphic Design from Carnegie Mellon University.

Baskinger, whose promotion to full professor at CMU will become official in July, has unique experience as both a design practitioner and a design educator. This combination of perspectives was an important factor in naming Baskinger as director of the Ballay Center.

"Both a practicing designer and design educator have to know their stuff, of course, but a design educator has the ability to expose the design process to those who are new to it — the capacity to explain, taken to the extreme — to make the abstract concrete and clear, and to form new connections through collaboration," said Joe Ballay, who also taught Baskinger when he was a student at CMU. "Mark Baskinger has the potential to go down in history as one of the great design educators."

Much like his combined experience as a design educator and practitioner, Baskinger sees the word "fusion" as key to the mission and vision of the Ballay Center.

"There's no shortage of interesting people and work at CMU; connecting with the right mix of programs, people and projects can yield amazing things," said Baskinger. "From my experience directing the CMU MoonArk project, I've had the opportunity to connect with most units on campus and to work with faculty across many disciplines. I've found CMU to be fertile ground for ideas fueled by a general sense of collegiality. Although it's easy to come up with ideas (there's never a shortage of ideas around here), putting them into action will be essential for the Ballay Center."

Baskinger also sees the Ballay Center as a bridge to other units on campus, and broadly, to connect academia and society in productive ways. "The Charter for the Ballay Center states the School of Design is a unique place where design, the arts, the sciences and the humanities converge. And in the spirit of convergence, I see the Ballay Center becoming a destination for collaboration and transformational educational experiences."

The Ballay Center is an extension of the School of Design and Baskinger views its targeted goal as fostering an agility of practice across disciplines through design thinking, methods, practice and mindset.

"The ability to see beyond and around any problem space is a key value for design," said Baskinger. "Situating concepts and solutions against a broader context while simultaneously addressing mission-critical requirements illustrates the inherent contribution of design thinking; but perhaps most important is that for a designer, the thinking happens through making and the designed artifact holds agency in addressing large issues and problem spaces."

Baskinger, who calls Ballay "the gold standard for a design faculty member who thinks beyond interdisciplinarity," is looking forward to beginning his work as director of the Ballay Center by setting the groundwork for the Center and establishing its policies and practices.

"In many informal conversations recently, it is clear that there is an incredible appetite for design on campus and so many colleagues have great ideas for collaboration, research projects and educational initiatives," said Baskinger. "I share their excitement."

"Mark has an impressive career as an influential professor and researcher who is well connected and respected across academia and professional communities," added Anderson. "His extraordinary skill of visioning, leading and collaborating on highly complex multidisciplinary projects, such as the MoonArk, excites us about the possibilities the design center will provide and the outcomes it can achieve."

[◀ Back to CFA Magazine 08](#)

[Faculty & Staff Resources](#)
[Contact](#)

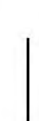
CFA



College of Fine Arts

[Academics](#)
[Research & Creative Practice](#)
[ICA Pittsburgh](#)
[Frank-Ratchye STUDIO](#)
[News](#)
[About](#)
[Giving](#)


Paths to Broadway Converge



'Sweeney Todd' Brings CFA Alumni Together

written by
Pamela Wigley

In her junior year of high school, Patricia Phillips traveled with her Denver theater class to see her first Broadway performance: the original production of “Sweeney Todd.” Little did she know then that it may have been a sign about her future.

Phillips, a 1985 graduate in vocal performance from the Carnegie Mellon University [School of Music](#), now appears in the Broadway revival of the same show, alongside fellow CMU alumni Josh Groban, Nathan Salstone, and newest ensemble cast member Danny Rothman, a 2001 graduate of the [School of Drama](#). On Sunday, June 11, the group was seen performing nationwide during “The 76th Annual Tony Awards” telecast.

No stranger to Broadway, Phillips performed in her first musical while an eighth grader in Denver. She had not had training prior to auditioning, but was given the lead role of Nancy in “Oliver.”

“I remember my teacher, Carla Roberts, who decided that every kid would audition,” Phillips said. “That opportunity meant everything to me.”

The encouragement continued from her high school drama teacher, Nancy Priest (the teacher who took the group to New York). Ultimately, she and two fellow alumni from George Washington High School in Denver and, coincidentally, from CMU School of Drama — Kent Gash ('82) and Phil Baker ('84) — told Phillips about Carnegie Mellon.

“My first semester was hard, but then I assimilated into the program,” Phillips said. “When I think back to my time at Carnegie Mellon, I remember the College of Fine Arts building [where she spent most of her time].”

She went on to perform with the [Civic Light Opera](#) and [Pittsburgh Opera](#) Chorus after graduating from CMU. A connection from CLO, Susan Schulman, led to Phillips' casting in her first Broadway show, “The Secret Garden.” Her long career on Broadway includes stints with “Kinky Boots” and more than 1,000 performances as Carlotta in “Phantom of the Opera.”

She looks forward to the future, continuing on Broadway and, perhaps, landing the “Sweeney Todd” role she would love: Adolfo Pirelli, Sweeney's rival barber, who the title character ultimately slashes with his ever-sharp blade.

Meeting an untimely demise at Sweeney Todd's blade is something fellow CMU alumnus, Nathan Salstone, knows about. The 2017 School of Drama grad is part of the ensemble for the show, and he also takes a turn in the barber's chair under the razor of fellow CMU alum and Tony nominee Josh Groban. For Salstone, a Chicago-area native, it's a great way to be part of the lights of Broadway.

Absent his father, Salstone described growing up in a “house full of women.” His mother thought that theater might fill the role of a classic male figure in his life. At age 5, he was enrolled in a children's theater troupe and by 10, he was performing in professional shows. By high school, he knew that he wanted a future in the theater, but his grades weren't helping his cause.

“It's funny to look back now and wonder how I got to Carnegie,” he said. “My high school grades were terrible, resulting in rejections from lots of other colleges. The fact that Carnegie took a chance on me was a sign to get my act together. I ate every crumb of every class I was in.”

He said that while going to college was a major shift for him, he fell in love with learning. He was inspired by the School of Drama's annual Playground event, during which classes shut down for a week so students can produce and perform their own works. By his senior year, Salstone wrote a one-man show titled, “All Anonymous,” depicting his experience with a family member's demons. It was cathartic, but also tough for him to reveal his personal thoughts.

He found solace through [Thomas Douglas](#), a School of Music faculty member who taught Salstone “Music Skills” as a freshman. He stopped Salstone after class one day.

“He asked me what I had next on my schedule,” Salstone said. “I told him I was open. And he said, ‘Come with me.’”

Outside the CFA Building, Thomas gave a motorcycle helmet to Salstone, donned his own, and the two took off on an open road adventure for the afternoon.

“He cared about what was happening with me inside, and not just about what we as students were producing,” Salstone remembered. “He knew I needed to take that break, even when I didn't know it myself.”

He found similar inspiration in School of Drama faculty member [Catherine Moore](#), who told her students to “hold on tightly, and let go lightly.” Salstone translated: “She meant that we are all just creating moments together, and that we should hold onto them — and let them go when we're ready.”

He also gave a nod to [Front Porch Theatricals](#), run by Nancy and the late Leon Zions. They operated out of [New Hazlett Theater](#) in Pittsburgh and became a second family to Salstone. “They cultivated such a positive artistic atmosphere.”

Now, six years out of CMU, he said he advises current students and recent alumni to embrace continued learning. When you're working, he said, that education continues.

He said he is thrilled to be part of “Sweeney Todd” on Broadway, but he knows it's not the end of his journey. In the future, he hopes to focus more on his music, possibly developing new music for a new show.

“I want to be able to be part of the creation of something from the ground up,” he said.

featuring the following:

photography by Matthew Murphy and Evan Zimmerman

◀ Back to CFA Magazine 08

[Faculty & Staff Resources](#)
[Contact](#)

CFA

College of Fine Arts
Carnegie Mellon University
5000 Forbes Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15213
[Contact Us](#)



Legal Info | www.cmu.edu
© 2026 Carnegie Mellon University





Ingénue ... Ingé-not-so-new!



Lisa Vroman Shares Her Musical Journey

written by

Cally Jamis Vennare

After almost 10 years inhabiting the role of Christine Daaé in “The Phantom of the Opera on Broadway,” in San Francisco, and on tour throughout the U.S., [Lisa Vroman](#) (MFA, Voice Performance) was ready to leave Broadway for some much-deserved R&R at her new home.

And then Hal Prince stopped by her dressing room.

Vroman recalls saying to him, “I think I’m done; do you know how old I am?!” But the legendary American theatre director and producer knew Vroman’s age ... and it didn’t matter one bit. “What Hal cared about was the value of the production. He was supportive and loyal to me and, of course, I was loyal to him. So, I went back for five more months of Phantom.”

With a career spanning decades and including 64 different theatrical productions, 29 opera/operetta roles, and hundreds of concert appearances around the world, Vroman has no shortage of stories to share about her life’s work with legends like Hal Prince, Stephen Sondheim, Michael Tilson Thomas, Keith Lockhart and others. Her new one-woman show, “Ingénue ... Ingé-not-so-new!”, reveals the artist’s cross-over journey through a carefully curated selection of music and memories. The 70-minute, one-act cabaret with piano and bass — featuring not less than 15 songs from iconic shows such as “The Sound of Music,” “Ragtime,” “Sweeney Todd” and, of course, “Phantom of the Opera,” among others — recently completed two successful runs at [The Green Room 42](#) in New York and [Coachella Valley Repertory](#) in California.

At her sold-out Green Room 42 show, she was delighted to see a table “filled with CMU-ers,” including David Gaines, Paul Kelley, Georgia Osborne and Phyllis Kubey. “The great thing about CMU is that you take your friends with you,” she said with a smile.

Where did the idea for her one-woman show originate? Vroman had wanted to do something for years, due to her love of being on stage and being “communal” with other actors or symphonies. “When I began with “Phantom of the Opera,” I was a classic ingénue, and when I finished 10 years later, I was the ‘ingé-not-so-new!’ A lot of people suggested that was a great name for a cabaret act — so I finally indulged them!” she said. “If you have a good story to tell in an authentic and personal way, there are thousands of things to share that relate with people.”

Vroman, a classically trained vocalist, has enjoyed success as a crossover artist — one who can straddle classical and musical theatre worlds with ease and confidence. But as a young artist, she struggled to “be authentic,” often feeling like she had to choose one genre or the other. Enter Carnegie Mellon, where she auditioned and was accepted into the [School of Music](#) MFA program in vocal performance. It was a decision that “changed my life musically” due to CMU vocal guides like Robert Page, Beatrice Krebs and Ralph Zitterbart. (Years later, Paige and Krebs would proudly witness Vroman take centerstage when “Phantom of the Opera’s” national tour landed in Pittsburgh.)

“Everyone at CMU was so supportive of me as a musician. They helped me develop all levels of my technique ... and become a complete artist. They gave me personal attention and believed in me more than I did in myself. They started me down the path that you realize never ends,” she shared with pride. “I know, and I teach my own vocal students, that you must evolve. There is a shelf-life to us as ‘vocal athletes’ and to what we do. Luckily, I’ve taken care of myself. It’s a testament to all the CMU people who made me develop a technique to start with. And I am forever grateful.”

[◀ Back to CFA Magazine 08](#)

College of Fine Arts

[Academics](#)
[Research & Creative Practice](#)
[ICA Pittsburgh](#)
[Frank-Ratchye STUDIO](#)
[News](#)
[About](#)
[Giving](#)


The Skowhegan Experience

Ajunie Virk Earns Prestigious Residency

written by
Pamela Wigley

[Ajunie Virk](#) (BHA 2023 in Film & Visual Media and Art with a minor in Animation and Special Effects) was selected for a residency at [Skowhegan](#), one of the most prestigious and important residency programs in the United States. It is exceptionally rare for a graduating undergraduate student to be selected for the program.

Skowhegan seeks each year to bring together a diverse group of individuals who have demonstrated a commitment to artmaking and inquiry, creating the most stimulating and rigorous environment possible for a concentrated period of artistic creation, interaction and growth. Located on a historic 350-acre farm in rural Maine, the campus serves as a critical component of the program.

Neither a school in the traditional sense nor a retreat, Skowhegan draws its vitality from the community created through the talent and energy of the participants, and the distinguished faculty of resident and visiting artists, who provide them with support and critical assistance. Founded by artists, and still governed by artists, the program provides an atmosphere in which participants are encouraged to work free of the expectations of the marketplace and academia.

While on campus, participants are given individual studio spaces, as well as access to a sculpture studio, a fresco studio, a media lab, a library composed of more than 14,000 volumes, more than 350-acres of farmland, forests and lakefront, and a rich community of artists. Alumni often report that the intensity of the Skowhegan experience has had a profound effect on their work and their lives. In order to allow others entry, no participant is allowed to return for a second summer. It is a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

Being chosen for high-profile programs is not unusual for Virk. Last summer, Virk and fellow School of Art junior Ester Petukhova were among 22 students who attended the Yale Norfolk School of Art's undergraduate summer residency. The highly-selective six-week program, which solicits nominations for students from universities across the country, very rarely accepts more than one student from a university per year.

The 2022 program focused on the subject, "The Shape of Empathy," through a series of visiting artist lectures, classes and studio visits. Virk and Petukhova were onsite for the program at the Battell Stoeckel Estate in Norfolk, Connecticut.

For Virk, who works primarily in 3D animation, video, and collage, residency programs complement her studies within the College of Fine Arts by allowing her to focus more intensely on one or two projects.

"Here in college, everything is very fast paced — it's project-after-project-after-project," she said. "A residency is a place where you can spend prolonged periods of time on specific projects and concepts."

The Yale program, she said, appealed to her because of its theme of empathy, which relates closely to her work's exploration of nostalgic childhood objects and cultural practices. The program was a unique opportunity to understand what empathy means to people from different cultural backgrounds, she said.

Her work will be showcased in "[Video Art PGH](#)" at the Miller ICA July 29–Sept. 3.

featuring the following:

image courtesy of Ajunie Virk, studio visit video

watch more:

[Ajunie Virk studio visit](#)

◀ [Back to CFA Magazine 08](#)

[Faculty & Staff Resources](#)
[Contact](#)

CFA

College of Fine Arts
Carnegie Mellon University
5000 Forbes Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15213
[Contact Us](#)



Legal Info | www.cmu.edu
© 2026 Carnegie Mellon University



College of Fine Arts

[Academics](#)[Research & Creative Practice](#)[ICA Pittsburgh](#)[Frank-Ratchye STUDIO](#)[News](#)[About](#)[Giving](#)

Transcendental Arrangements



Miller ICA Exhibited July 29 – September 3

written by
Margaret Cox

From July 29 – September 3, 2023, Carnegie Mellon University's [Miller Institute for Contemporary Art](#) presented "[Transcendental Arrangements: 109th Annual AAP Exhibition](#)," organized and juried by Miller ICA Director Elizabeth Chodos. Associated Artists of Pittsburgh (AAP) is the oldest continuously-exhibiting visual artist membership organization in the country.

"Transcendental Arrangements" — which focused on artistic practices that engage with ritual, magical and supernatural qualities within everyday encounters, serendipitous connections and ubiquitous symbols in our daily lives — marked AAP's 109th exhibition. For the first time, AAP's annual exhibition included a selection of artists invited by the juror from outside of the region.

"Transcendental Arrangements" featured the artwork of Sue Abramson, A.W. Allison, Elijah Burgher, Julia Haft-Candell, Jovencio de la Paz, Joshua Challen Ice, Angie Jennings, Ulric Joseph, Eli Kessler, Jessica Labatte, Deanna Mance, Brent Nakamoto, Mikael Owunna, and Paula Wilson. Music performances in conversation with the work of Sue Abramson were also scheduled throughout the exhibition, which was free and open to the general public. The exhibition was accompanied by an exhibition catalog.

"Pittsburgh now attracts a new generation of artists seeking the conditions that make a life-long commitment to making art possible. Our region has the potential to develop into a leading national voice in contemporary art," said Chodos. "AAP and the Miller ICA partnered to produce AAP's first annual membership exhibition in 109 years that combined artists living and working outside of Pittsburgh with member artists. The goal of this curated open-call exhibition was to put local artists in conversation with their national counterparts, connecting the creative activity locally with a broader discourse nationally."

"Transcendental Arrangements" was made possible by major support from The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, the College of Fine Arts, Regina and Marlin Miller, and other individual donors.

featuring the following:

work by Mikael Owunna

◀ [Back to CFA Magazine 08](#)

[Faculty & Staff Resources](#)[Contact](#)

CFA

College of Fine Arts
Carnegie Mellon University
5000 Forbes Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15213
[Contact Us](#)



[Legal Info](#) | www.cmu.edu
© 2026 Carnegie Mellon University



College of Fine Arts

[Academics](#)[Research & Creative Practice](#)[ICA Pittsburgh](#)[Frank-Ratchye STUDIO](#)[News](#)[About](#)[Giving](#)

New Publication!



2022–2023 Sylvia & David Steiner Speaker Series

written by
Harrison Apple

During the 2022–2023 Speaker Series, the [Frank-Ratchye STUDIO for Creative Inquiry](#) worked with CMU faculty, students and staff to create online, in-person and hybrid events across all five schools under the College of Fine Arts and beyond. We are proud to have hosted and sponsored over 35 speakers: a broad array of artists, activists, designers, filmmakers, performers, architects, musicians and engineers who engaged our community with one-of-a-kind events. Read more about our visiting artists in the fifth annual [Sylvia & David Steiner Series book \[PDF\]](#)!

This exciting full year of in-person programming was led by the directorship of Nica Ross, with assistance from their staff: Associate Director Harrison Apple, Program Coordinator Bill Rodgers, Financial Assistant Carol Hernandez and Business Manager Linda Hager.

featuring the following:

photography by Beth Barbis

[◀ Back to CFA Magazine 08](#)

[Faculty & Staff Resources](#)[Contact](#)

CFA

College of Fine Arts
Carnegie Mellon University
5000 Forbes Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15213
[Contact Us](#)



Legal Info | www.cmu.edu
© 2026 Carnegie Mellon University

College of Fine Arts

[Academics](#)
[Research & Creative Practice](#)
[ICA Pittsburgh](#)
[Frank-Ratchye STUDIO](#)
[News](#)
[About](#)
[Giving](#)


Good Sport



Diya Joseph Building a Career at Apple TV

written by

Gabriella Lossia & Pamela Wigley

Apple TV's first foray into sports programming also was a first for [Master of Entertainment Industry Management](#) '14 alumna Diya Joseph, a senior content producer at [Apple TV](#) specializing in broadcast design for Apple's Sports Content Initiatives.

"I was never interested in sports from a fan perspective, but my job at Apple TV has increased my excitement for live sports," Joseph said. "I act as a broadcast graphics producer on sports content, working on live motion graphics that are seen throughout the game and studio shows. My team delivers toolkits, templates, and assets to the production team, who then work from broadcast trucks during each game and update the live graphics as needed."

Her day-to-day duties vary, combining meetings and calls with pertinent stakeholders. Part of that responsibility includes managing budgets, schedules and creative direction — with the additional oversight of balancing time, budget and content. To better approach her full load, Joseph said she distributes her work into various parcels.

"When managing a team, it is important to organize responsibilities and information into three buckets: something you are accountable for, something you are responsible for, or something you are just being consulted on or informed of," she said. "For example, throughout the collaboration process with MLS, they are consulted or informed. With the MLS Season Pass, the league is in charge of live production, but I am responsible for Apple branding."

Before working at Apple, Joseph was a senior producer at Troika Media Group, a branding and creative agency in Los Angeles, with clients in the entertainment and sports industry. She started at Troika soon after graduating and worked there for eight years. While there, Joseph said, she learned to be a motion graphics producer, how to use the many "tools of the trade," even as they evolved each year, the specific skills people need, how much to charge for the work, and more. Before departing Troika, Joseph had become a senior producer. "Those eight years helped me get the job at Apple because I had transferable skills."

Her career was built on what she learned via a solid course schedule and internships during the MEIM program; the latter included Public Relations and Digital Sales at Cornerstone Agency, Warner Music Group, PMK-BNC and Sunshine Sachs. Joseph also interned with the Epic Picture Group at the Cannes Film Festival in 2013. Prior to MEIM, Joseph worked for six years in advertising and artist management, managing one of India's biggest Rock Bands, Thermal And A Quarter.

"All of this taught me essential life skills, including technical competencies like scheduling and budgeting, but also soft skills like how to manage egos and expectations," she said. That training came in handily when she joined Apple TV's sport content area.

Hard work has been essential to Joseph's ladder to success, and she acknowledges that. She encourages others to pursue their passions with a similar attitude — citing the need to stay current on news, politics and emerging technology within the industry.

"Have a research mindset and look into competitors," Joseph said. "Technology is no longer just a tool. Companies are also content creators who provide a service. If you understand this, you'll realize there are many tech companies out there with roles that could suit your skill sets."

Finally, she said, face the competition confidently. Share in co-workers' successes.

"Sharing puts you in a better frame of mind and provides you with a reference by learning what steps others have taken to succeed," she said. "Nobody's journey is the same, and you never know when you'll work together in the future!"

[◀ Back to CFA Magazine 08](#)

[Faculty & Staff Resources](#)
[Contact](#)

CFA

College of Fine Arts
Carnegie Mellon University
5000 Forbes Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15213
[Contact Us](#)



Legal Info | www.cmu.edu
© 2026 Carnegie Mellon University



College of Fine Arts

Academics

Research & Creative Practice

ICA Pittsburgh

Frank-Ratchye STUDIO

News

About

Giving

ALUMNI NEWS

Share Your Stories

Thanks to those of you who sent an alumni news update to us after seeing the new digital CFA Magazine. Although we know that many of you send your news directly to the academic program from which you graduated, we would love for you to [fill out our alumni contact form](#) so we can help to let your classmates know what you've been doing.

Here is one that came through last time!



Deborah Jaffe (BFA '97, Painting/Drawing) has traveled the world as a photographer and creative director, shooting portraits, lifestyle, travel, interiors, celebrity, reportage, still life and food.

Over a career of more than 30 years, Jaffe has photographed covers of magazines including "Real Simple," "Domino," and "ELLE Decoration UK; her editorial clients include "The New York Times," "The New Yorker," "INSTYLE," "Glamour" and "The Washington Post;" she has shot ad campaigns for Salvatore Ferragamo and catalogues for "Pottery Barn;" she has photographed portraits of Jon Stewart, Chris Rock, Joan Rivers, Jerry Falwell, Jack Kornfield and others. Jaffe has been a Getty photographer since their inception.

Jaffe is currently working on her memoir and documentary, which is being produced by Warner Media and That's Wonderful. The memoir covers the story of her father, Sam Jaffe, an ABC NEWS Moscow and Hong Kong Bureau Chief who was accused of being a spy, double agent and sleeper agent for the KGB by the FBI and CIA.

"During my childhood my father was blacklisted, and my parents sued the FBI and CIA to get the information on why they thought he was a spy under the FOIA," said Jaffe. "We were represented by the ACLU. The case took 9 years, but most of the information in the documents was redacted under national security and remains so to this day. I am trying to find out what happened, and how that affected my life growing up."

Jaffe is grateful for her years at CMU, and still keeps in touch with her classmates who she says are all living interesting lives.

Find out what alumni are doing across the [School of Architecture](#), [School of Art](#), [School of Design](#), [School of Drama](#), [School of Music](#) and [BXA Intercollege Degree Programs](#).

We'd love to hear from you! Keep us up to date on what's happening in your personal and professional life. [FILL OUT OUR ALUMNI CONTACT FORM](#) ►

◀ Back to CFA Magazine 08

[Faculty & Staff Resources](#)

[Contact](#)

CFA

College of Fine Arts
Carnegie Mellon University
5000 Forbes Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15213
[Contact Us](#)



Legal Info | www.cmu.edu
© 2026 Carnegie Mellon University

