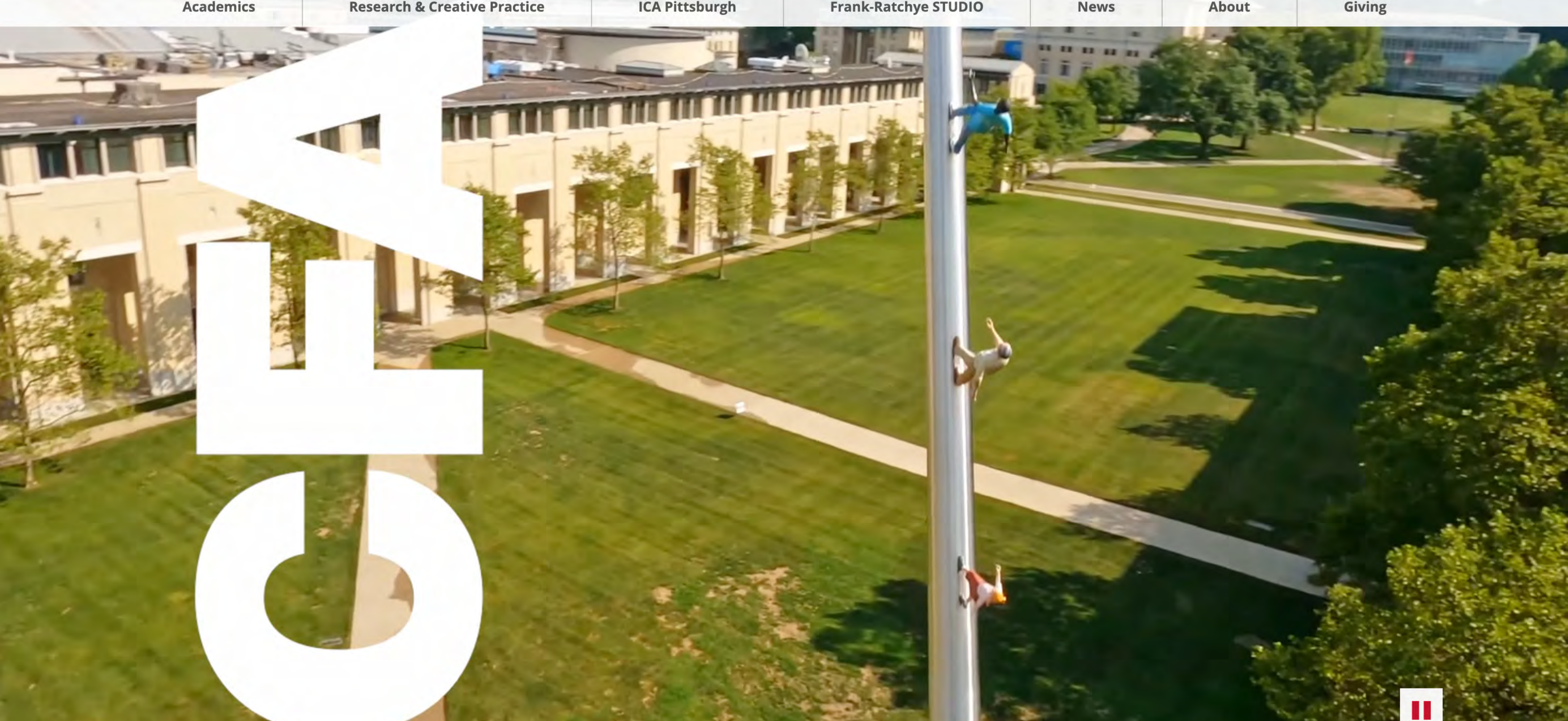


College of Fine Arts

- Academics
- Research & Creative Practice
- ICA Pittsburgh
- Frank-Ratchye STUDIO
- News
- About
- Giving



An Invitation to Wander

This edition of CFA Magazine is filled with bursting. It's an embarrassment of riches, running over with stories and testimonials of faculty, staff, students and alumni driven to use their gifts to shift the dominant narrative.

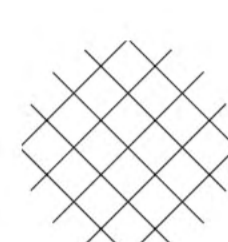
Like the Kraus Campo — source of this issue's design theme — it's an agora, a supercolliding marketplace of ideas. It's also a string of small meditations on the impact CFA people have on this world when they allow themselves to wander off the beaten path.

I invite you to wander, see where it takes you. Step out of the school box and explore a story from outside your discipline. Follow an intriguing visual cue.

Finally, a note to alumni: We haven't always been the greatest about staying in touch. [Tell us how you've been making an impact](#) or send us a story idea we may have overlooked. We are *all* the College.

With bated breath,

 | Dean Mary Ellen Poole



School of Architecture

[Studies of Stone](#)



School of Art

[How to Get to Make Believe](#)



School of Design

[There and Back Again](#)



School of Drama

[The CollABO Project](#)



School of Music

[The Art of Composition](#)



BXA Intercollege Degree Programs

[Honoring Heritage Through K-Perfumery](#)



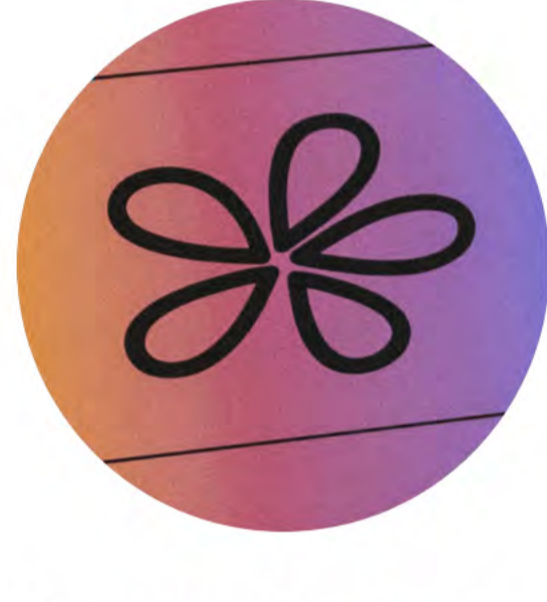
Miller Institute for Contemporary Art

[Design Unveiled for Expanded ICA](#)



Frank-Ratchye STUDIO for Creative Inquiry

[A New Cohort for Live Visuals](#)



Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

[Reflections](#)



Master of Arts Management


[From Infantry to Civic Arts Leader](#)



Master of Entertainment Industry Management

[Taught from the Inside Out](#)

Events



[Architecture Event]

Spring 2024 Public Programs: Resolutions

January 27 – May 3

What is architecture's role in revolutionizing or repairing broken systems? Join us in conversations that call for both incremental and radical shifts within our discipline, profession and society.

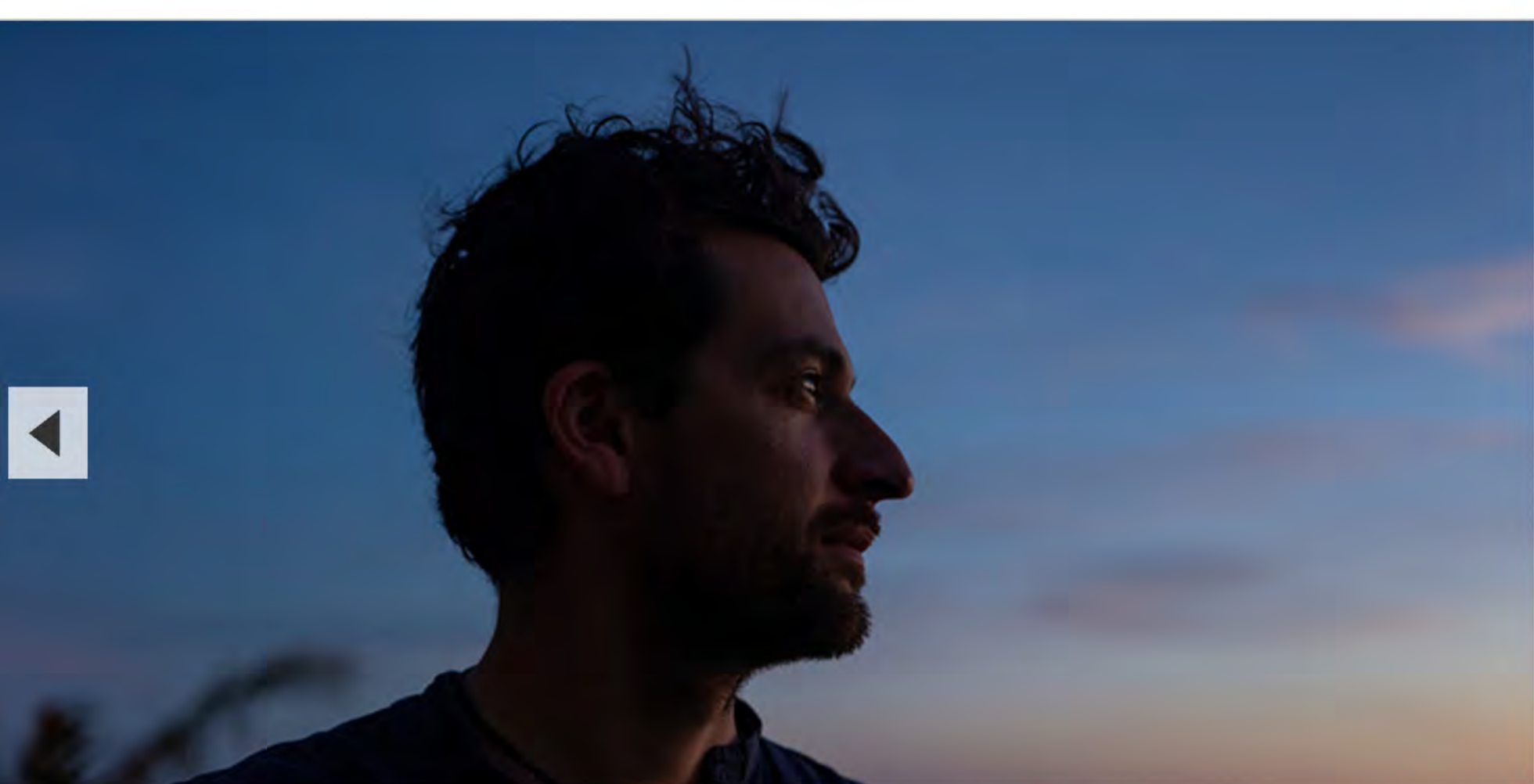
[Find more information about Public Programs](#)



Why I give back

Francis Collins

Spotlight Features



[Art Spotlight]

[A Different Kind of Intelligence](#)

In the Age of AI, Felipe Castelblanco Searches for a More Organic Form of Knowledge

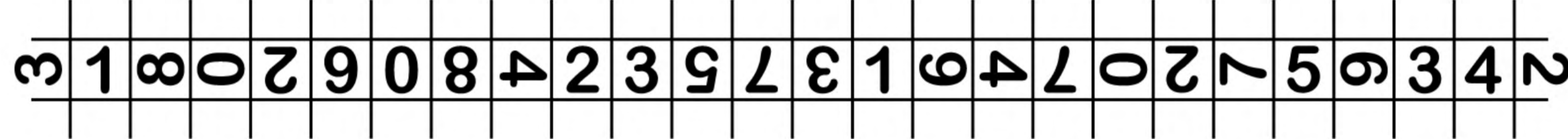
In Case You Missed It

[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 2018 inaugural magazine [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) >

College of Fine Arts Magazine

Publisher: Mary Ellen Poole, Dean, CFA
 Executive Editor: Pam Wigley
 Editor: Cally Jamis Vennare
 Editor / Digital Content Designer: Alexis Morrell
 Design Director: Mark Werle
 Designers: Rob Azarcon, Kelsey Stark
 Production Artist: Deborah Allen
 Project Manager: Kara Kessler

Writers

Harrison Apple
 Dan Fernandez
 Dan Green
 Elyse Howell
 Joe Lyons
 Meredith Marsh
 Caroline McKinley
 Jennifer Monahan
 Alexis Morrell
 Angelica Perez-Johnston
 Andy Ptaschinski
 Juliet Sorce
 Lauren Stash
 Gretchen Suárez-Peña
 Pam Wigley

Design & Production

University Communications and Marketing

Images

Mark Baskinger
 Matt Eich
 Melinda Johnson
 Jocelyn Mackay
 Graham Murtha
 Su min Park
 Louis Stein
 Emily Syes
 Cally Jamis Vennare
 Dylan Vitone
 ZGF Architects

CFA Leadership

CFA Dean: Mary Ellen Poole
 School of Architecture Head: Omar Khan
 School of Art Head: Charlie White
 School of Design Interim Head: 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



College of Fine Arts

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

School of Architecture

Studies of Stone

Gindroz Travel Prize Inspires in the United Kingdom

written by
Meredith Marsh

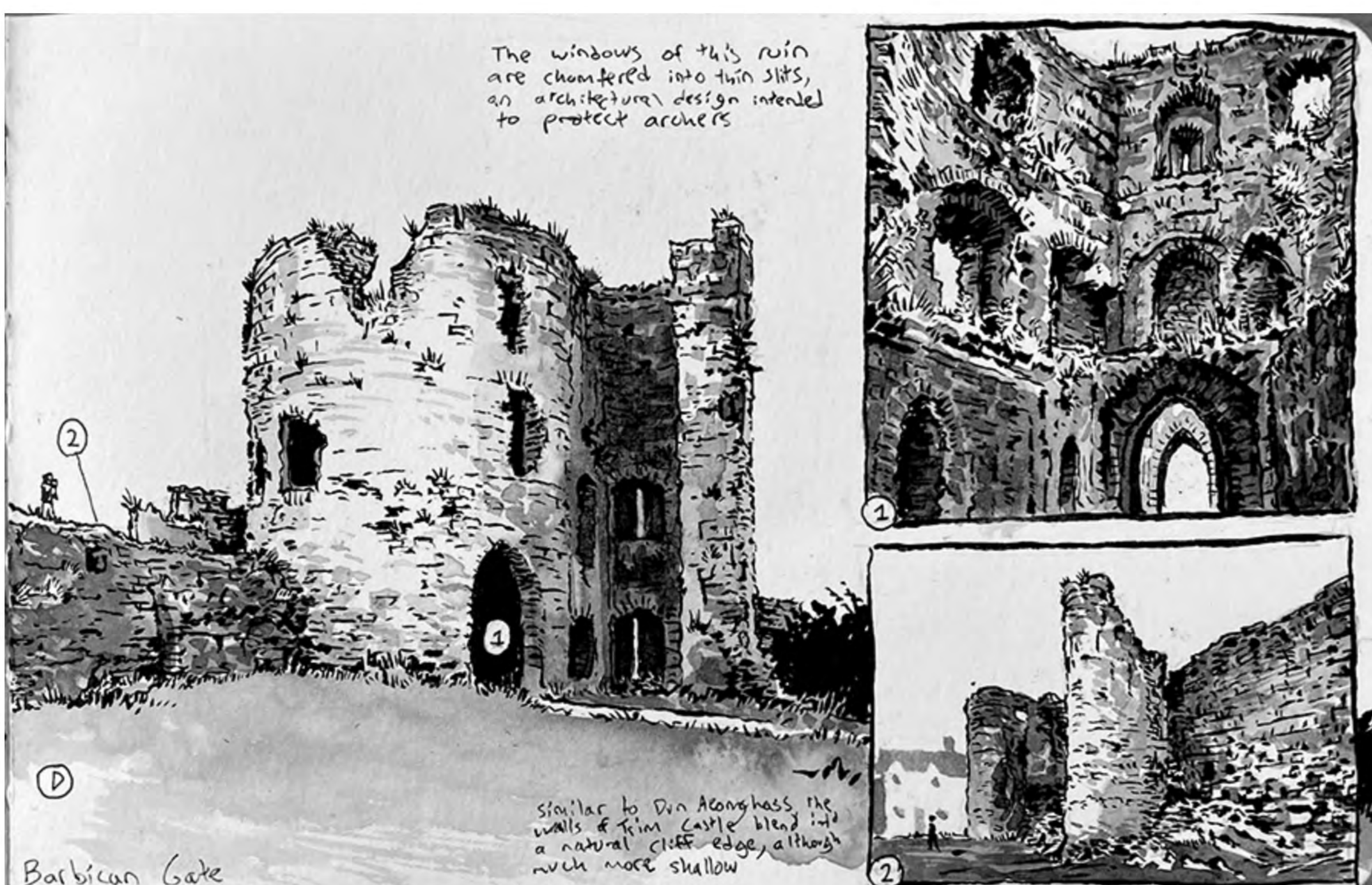
[School of Architecture](#) student [Graham Murtha](#) traveled to Ireland, Scotland and England this past summer as the recipient of a competitive travel scholarship, the [Gindroz Prize for Summer Travel and Study in Europe](#). He has returned to Pittsburgh with notebooks full of stunning hand drawings he created exploring stone architecture throughout the British Isles.



The Gindroz Prize was established by CMU alumni Ray and Marilyn Gindroz to enrich lives and enhance education through travel and the study of traditional architecture, urbanism and music in Europe. It recognizes the life-changing potential of becoming immersed in a culture, language and environment that is different from one's own. The prize emphasizes both intellectual and craft development. Ray, who earned degrees in architecture in 1963 and 1965, and Marilyn, who graduated with a degree in music in 1973, first met in Rome while studying abroad.

"Both of our lives were changed in dramatic and positive ways through travel," Ray said.

Over a period of six weeks, Murtha used the travel funds to study stone buildings throughout Ireland, including Dublin and Belfast; Scotland, including Edinburgh, Aberdeen and the Scottish Highlands; and southern England, including Bath and Glastonbury. Through the medium of perspective pen and ink drawings and loose watercolors, he documented in detail how this architecture has been both reused by people and reclaimed by nature. He also conducted numerous landscape studies in watercolor to identify key aspects of the landscape that support the preservation of these buildings.



"Whereas most contemporary architecture relies heavily on imported materials, my travels took me to see architecture that makes use of the natural materials provided by the surrounding landscape," Murtha said. "This region's re-use of ancient buildings and materials is entralling. The buildings grow and adapt with the people to accommodate their changing needs. The beauty and purpose of this honest reuse fascinates me."

"These experiences have helped train me to design future buildings better integrated with their landscape and local context."

Graham Murtha

The Gindroz Prize awards up to \$10,000 annually to both a School of Architecture student and a School of Music student. BXA Architecture students also are also eligible to apply. Applicants must submit proposals that combine European travel and independent study to support their interests and future goals.



featuring the following:

watercolor of Eilean Donan, an 800 year old castle and one of Scotland's most iconic images, by Graham Murtha

image by Melinda Johnson

ink drawing of Trim Castle's Barbican Gate, a fortress built for war that has not decayed naturally and shows signs of abuse from enemies over the years, by Graham Murtha

[◀ Back to CFA Magazine](#)

[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 Art

How to Get to Make Believe

A Mister Rogers-Inspired Exhibition Examines the Blurred Line Between “Real” and “Make Believe” in Today’s World

written by
Andy Ptaschinski

In the children’s show “Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood,” a trolley takes viewers from the “real world” to the Neighborhood of Make-Believe, creating a clear distinction between what is “real” and what is “made up.” But what happens when the distinction between real and imagined is blurred? In an era of artificial intelligence, misinformation and conspiracy theories, [School of Art](#) Professor [Isla Hansen](#) is creating her own take on the iconic show, updating its premise with both new aesthetics and new lessons, in an installation at the [Mattress Factory Museum](#) in Pittsburgh.

The exhibition, titled “How to Get to Make Believe,” will also serve as a set and studio for the creation of a limited episode television series. The show will be on view in the museum’s Monterey Annex from March 2024 through March 2025.



Hansen’s installation will recreate an apartment (“reality”) and a fantasy play land (“imaginary”) with a miniature electric trolley running between the two. Sculptures in the installation will include set pieces, puppet theaters and miniature models, all with underlying structures and forms referential to furniture, alluding to the Monterey Annex’s history as an apartment and the permanent Allan Wexler piece on the second floor. Hansen’s pieces will be made with wood, paper clay, fabric and a variety of other media that refer to familiar childhood craft materials, referencing play and making in a domestic setting.

“How to Get to Make Believe” is an extension of Hansen’s continuing interdisciplinary practice looking at the role of play. She recently completed “The Play Object Project,” a collaborative research project studying, making and supporting new forms of play for all ages, through CMU’s [Center for the Arts in Society](#). The project included workshops at [CMU’s Children’s School](#), an interdisciplinary course titled “Objects of Play,” and supported multiple Pittsburgh-based artists projects that involved creating playful experiences and objects.

For Hansen, one of the biggest strengths of “Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood” was its ability to confront serious topics in a simplified way, making them accessible for children. Accessible conversation about contemporary issues not only benefits children, says Hansen, it can benefit everyone. I’m interested in the question of “what it means to make contemporary art be for all audiences.”

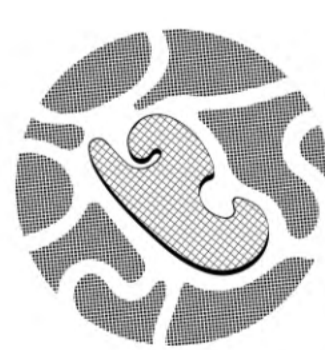


Hansen aims to focus on topics affecting Pittsburgh, such as climate change and the rise of new technologies, including artificial intelligence. Her host, a purple fuzzy puppet named Ratlet, will film segments talking with experts in various locations in a reference to “Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood.” Experts include both artists and non-artists, allowing an examination of issues from multiple vantage points.

Although the topics she selects may be controversial, she’s hoping that the children’s format provides a way to talk about difficult topics in a more nuanced and complex way than the polarizing formats of social media or cable news.

“The practice of play and creativity helps make connections between the ‘not real’ and the ‘real.’ This provides a way to talk about what we think ‘real’ means and what is ‘make believe,’ and to understand the impact that made beliefs have on reality.”

Isla Hansen
Assistant Professor, School of Art



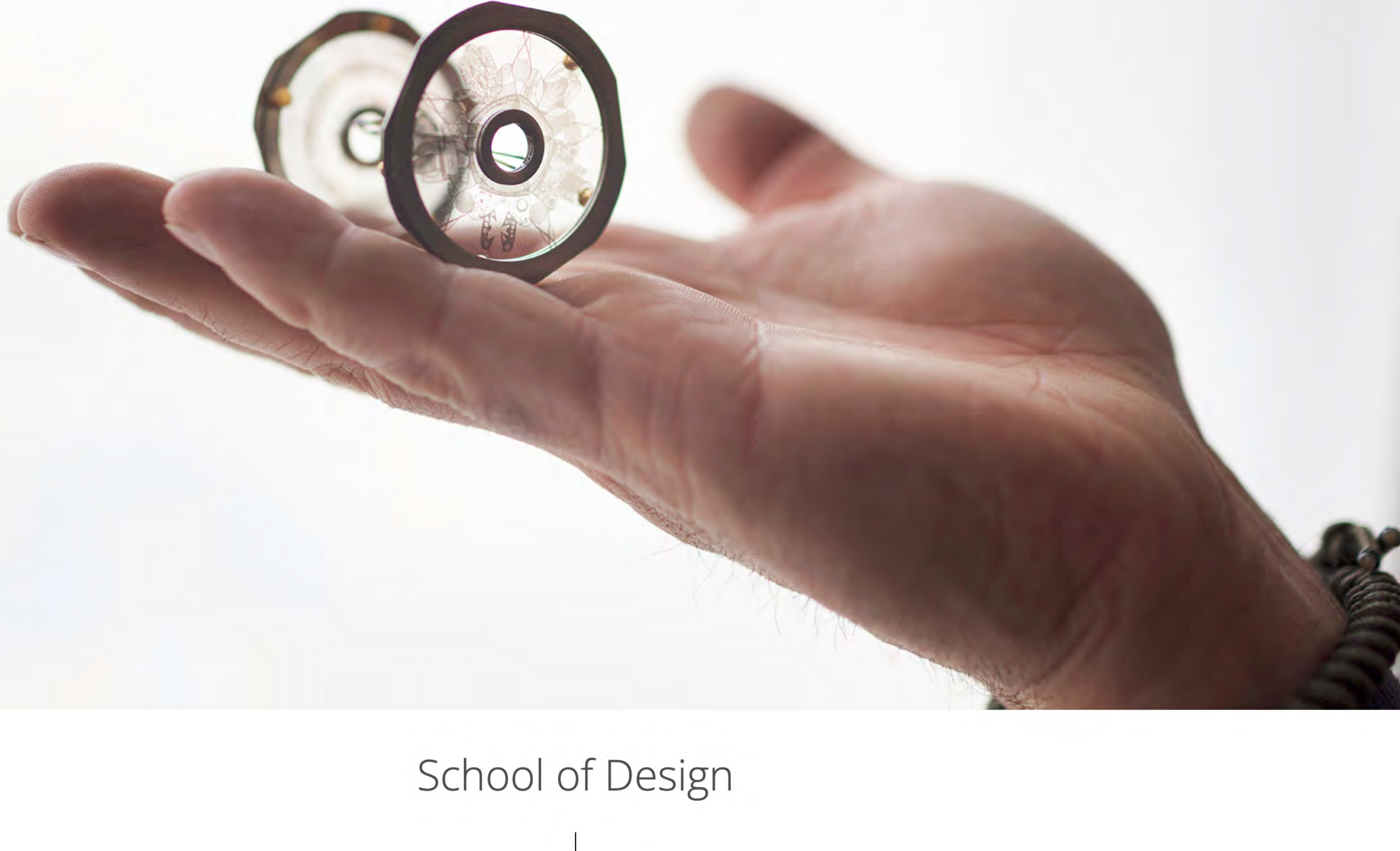
featuring the following:

work by Isla Hansen

Hansen’s work is supported by:

the Mattress Factory Museum, The Heinz Endowments Creative Development Awards, Carnegie Mellon University College of Fine Arts Fund for Research and Creativity, the Fred Rogers Institute, the Dedalus Foundation Fund for Past Fellows and Awardees

[◀ Back to CFA Magazine](#)



School of Design

There and Back Again

The Incredible Journey of the MoonArk

written by
Joe Lyons

On Monday, Jan. 8, Peregrine Mission One, the first privately funded lunar lander by Pittsburgh's Astrobotic Technologies, achieved lift off at 2:18 a.m. from Cape Canaveral carried by ULA's Vulcan Centaur rocket. On board the lunar lander was an assortment of payloads. From the scientific, including the Iris Rover from Carnegie Mellon University, to the commercial, to the deeply personal, Peregrine and its cargo was poised to be America's return to the lunar surface for the first time in 50 years — illustrating the viability of private delivery services to the moon as part of the NASA CLPS (Commercial Lunar Payload Services) program.

The MoonArk, a cultural marker that combined the arts, humanities, sciences and technologies to help tell the story of humankind, was one of the most precious and important payloads.

Spanning 15 years and containing the collaborative works of hundreds of international contributors, the MoonArk started its life as part of a larger Moon Arts research project initiated by Professor Emeritus and pioneering space artist Lowry Burgess in the Frank-Ratchye STUDIO for Creative Inquiry. Lowry and his team's vision was to put the first museum on the moon to elevate the conversation around humanity's expansion into the Solar System.



Comprising four independent chambers and weighing a total of 10 ounces, the MoonArk contains hundreds of images, poems, music, nano-objects, mechanisms and earthly samples intertwined through complex narratives that blur the boundaries between worlds seen and unseen. It is designed to direct attention from the Earth outward, into the cosmos and beyond, and reflect back to Earth as an endless dialogue that speaks to humanity's context within the universe.

Fabrication of the MoonArk has instigated the innovation and invention of digital fabrication techniques, ultra-high-resolution imaging, and other advances in material science, technology and the arts. It has also engaged colleagues across the world who dared to offer something beautiful for humans to discover in the very distant future. The project involved 12 units at Carnegie Mellon University, 18 other universities and organizations, 60 team members and more than 250 contributing artists, designers, educators, scientists, choreographers, poets, writers and musicians.



Intricate, complex and beautiful, the MoonArk is an engineering marvel. While it appears fragile and light, it was tested beyond its limits and proven to be able to withstand the rigors of space travel and endure the harsh conditions of lunar surface where it could reside for thousands of years. While never the intention, the MoonArk team became experts in the field of space art and cultural payloads. Their approaches and methods instigated new attitudes for the space art community and achieved implausible durability. Between Astrobotic's origins here, the Iris lander and the MoonArk, Carnegie Mellon University has proven their readiness to tackle projects aimed at the stars.

"The whole spirit of the project is about cooperation, celebrating our creative capacity and illustrating how we are moving forward together. It is highly aspirational to send a sculptural object to the moon to endure for hundreds of thousands of years, and it's also a very hopeful piece."

Mark Baskinger
Associate Professor, School of Design
Director, MoonArk

"Context is such an important part of deconstructing art, and when you remove those contexts you have a whole new set of challenges," added Professor and MoonArk Project Manager Dylan Vitone. "We wanted to build a narrative off of our universal experiences that's moving to people now, but also 1,000 years down the road."



After all these years of work, development and multiple tours to museums all over the world, the MoonArk finally took flight.

Sadly, seven hours into the mission, a problem was reported with the propulsion system on the lander. A gradual propellant leak had compromised the mission and while the lander would go on to achieve its goal of reaching lunar distance, an actual soft landing on the moon was going to be impossible. The MoonArk's goal of being a cultural marker to inspire wonder a thousand years into the future was unfortunately out of reach.

For several days after the incident, the MoonArk reached about 242,000 miles from Earth while the team at Astrobotic used the time in cis-lunar space to collect data, run tests and learn as much as possible before the lander would have to make its return to Earth. That return to our atmosphere would also mean the end of the lander, its payloads and the MoonArk. On January 18, the MoonArk, aboard Peregrine, entered into the South Pacific along the Tropic of Capricorn.

"The MoonArk joins the small pantheon of space art projects," said Baskinger. "Our mission to the moon continues with current projects based on the incredible knowledge we've gained and experience in balancing creative vision with the material realities of space travel.

"We sent a gift to the moon. It wasn't there at the time to receive it, so we'll try again."

"The project for me was always about work, and the beauty of so many people from around the world focusing toward a greater, shared narrative of what brings us together as a planet. It is a little bittersweet not being able to look out at the moon and know what we accomplished, but I guess becoming a 'shooting star' is pretty poetic in its own right."

Dylan Vitone
Associate Professor, School of Design

While the fate of the moon-bound MoonArk is a tragic loss, the content of the MoonArk is not entirely lost. The MoonArk's identical twin remains in the permanent collection at the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum, where it is preserved for future discovery.

"I am so very grateful it ended up at the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum," Vitone added. "We spent the majority of the hours on the majority of the days on the majority of the weeks over the better part of 15 years dreaming up the MoonArk and making it real with a large group of amazing people. It's an honor to be housed in such an amazing institution. It is a museum that is about human triumphs in technology and large groups of people working together in aspiring for something greater than just the individual accomplishments.

"We hope in a very small and humble way that is what the MoonArk embodies."

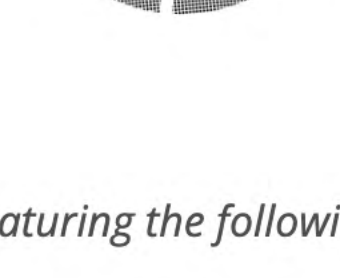


The Moon Arts Group at CMU is pursuing their next project, called "Lunarglyphs," a system of modular cultural components that integrate with spacecraft to continue telling the story of humanity.

"As we head further into the Solar System, we must consider that the vehicles and apparatus we use will become our cultural markers that will leave an indelible imprint on pristine environments humans have not yet touched."

Mark Baskinger

"MoonArk brings this into focus for critical conversation today and should inspire more ambitiously beautiful creative practice that expands our perception and our reach."



featuring the following:

MoonArk images by Dylan Vitone

engraved murals image by Mark Baskinger

Pompidou installation image by Dylan Vitone

MoonArk team install image by Jocelyn Mackay

◀ Back to CFA Magazine

School of Drama



The ColLABo Project

A One-of-a-Kind Laboratory for Theater Makers

written by
Gretchen Suárez-Peña

Rivka Rivera made rice rain in the Rauh.

It's an alliteration that tickles the tongue and sparks an image if you're familiar with the black box theater inside the Purnell Center for the Arts, home of Carnegie Mellon University's [School of Drama](#). Yes, this past summer, buckets of raw rice fell from the grid ceiling of the Rauh theater, an idea born from scenic designer Michael Ruiz-del-Vizo. The falling grain was used to mimic the sound, look, feel and symbolic intensity of a hurricane in a new play, "The Mourners," written by CMU alum, playwright Rivka Rivera, as part of the inaugural [ColLABo](#) project.

ColLABo is a new production development incubator hosted on CMU's campus during the summer break, and the brainchild of School of Drama Senior Associate Head and Associate Professor of Acting, Kyle Haden.

"ColLABo is a director and designer-led incubator for projects that are in the stop between reading and production. We're especially interested in developing new stories centering marginalized voices."

Kyle Haden
Senior Associate Head, School of Drama
Associate Professor of Acting, School of Drama

Haden and Rivera both agree that in the world of new play development, often the only opportunities are residencies, readings, workshops, or the big, time-crunched, high-stakes production. There is no time to really think through the technical elements that make a play theatrical, when a product is always needed at the end: a script, a performance, a show. ColLABo fills a hole in the American theatrical landscape. It gives playwrights the opportunity to work with directors and designers, as well as orchestrate the moments integral to the story that require specific design elements. In the case of "The Mourners," that moment is when Hurricane Maria strikes Puerto Rico.

"The Mourners" is about a multi-generational family on the eve of Hurricane Maria in 2017. This family is dealing with the loss of their daughter, mother and ex-partner. For Rivera, this piece comes from a real and personal place having lost her sister and experiencing the pain of seeing family deal with the aftermath of Maria both in and outside of the island.

Rivera is a self-identified "Jew-Yo-Rican": half-Jewish, half-Puerto Rican, and born and raised in New York. Known as Rebecca during her time at CMU (BFA Acting, 2010), Rivera performed in such shows as "The Mill on the Floss," "Richard the Third," "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest," and "A Boy Named Alice," the last written by Joshua Harmon (MFA Dramatic Writing, 2010). But, she says, it was after leaving school that she began to dig into her Jewish and Puerto Rican heritage.

"The industry really wants to put you in a box — what are you?"

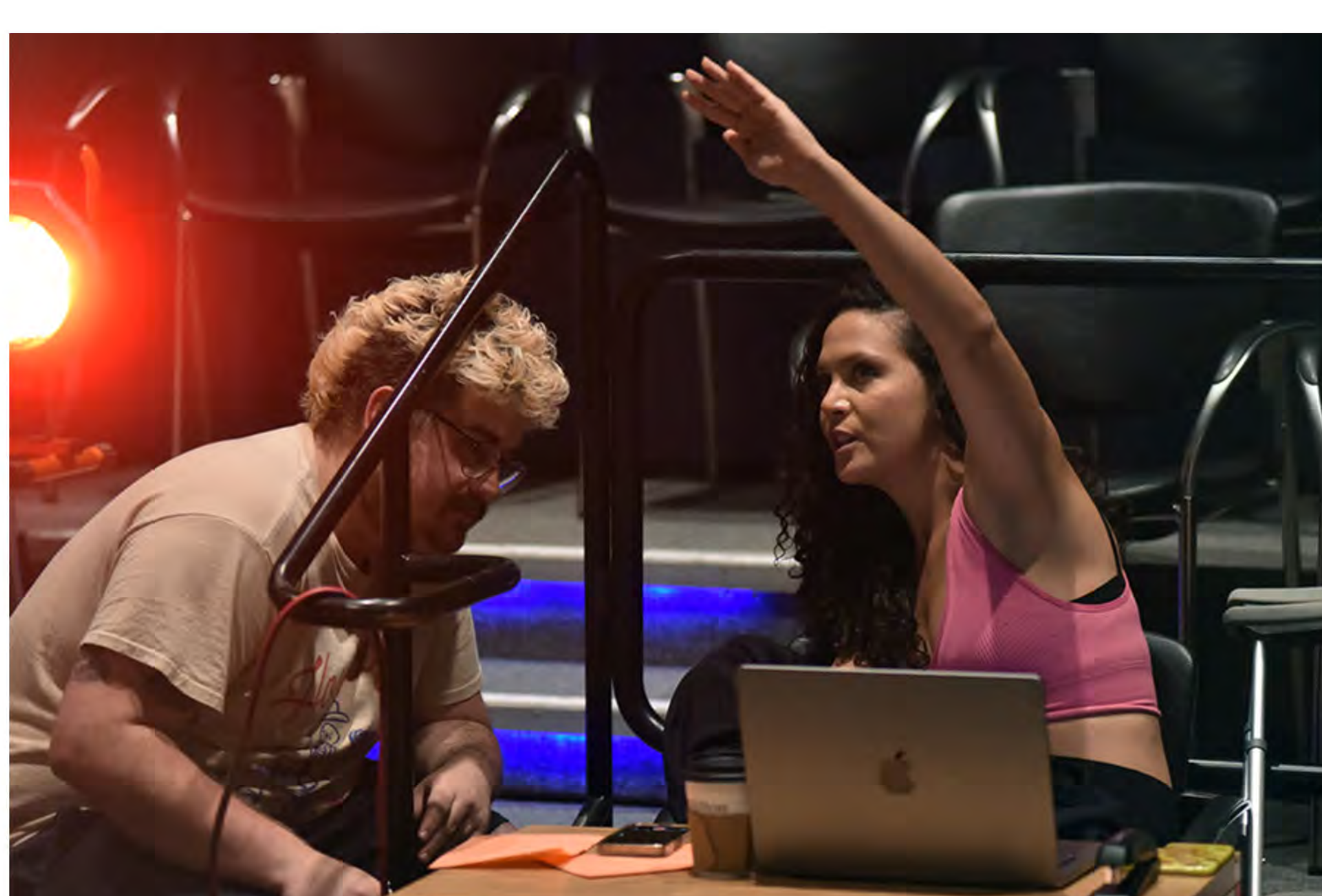
Rivka Rivera

"I started saying 'yes' to Latin roles and felt a deep shift to further explore and expand my identity ... the name Rivka came to me, and I changed my name without asking anyone's permission," Rivera said. Rivka is Hebrew for Rebecca. So being Rivka Rivera, "I was Jewish and Puerto Rican and could marry those two parts of myself." Rivera will not be put in a box! She says that CMU gave her the tools to explore her identity and helped her not only expand her career in acting for the stage, tv and film, but also in writing, facilitating workshops and even hosting a podcast.

Rivera felt that bringing "The Mourners" to CMU was incredibly serendipitous. As a high schooler, she attended a theater camp one summer at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, where both Haden and Juan Rivera Lebron — School of Drama alum, and now visiting professor, who also worked "The Mourners" during ColLABo — were instructing at the time. Haden was excited to have a CMU alum as part of the inaugural ColLABo. Rivera says that returning to CMU was incredibly healing; a full circle moment where she was able to work on this show centered around grief and deconstruct the notion of what it means to develop a play to its full potential.

Oh, and what potential! Rivera says that the best things about ColLABo were the resources it offered, time being the most valuable. CMU provided props, space, a stipend and even technical personnel, including Tate Abdullah, a third-year MFA Sound Design student. "We worked with Tate, who blew our minds about how we think about sound," said Rivera.

"We worked on building tension by creating these natural sounds with props within the space. The sounds began with the actors and then those sounds emanated outward. We even did some Foley work with flutes. It was all very organic. It was awesome to be part of something so new and experimental," said Abdullah of the ColLABo experience.



Putting the show up on its feet in this collaborative fashion gave Rivera the confidence to revise her script in specific and deliberate ways. That collaboration was built by a team comprised of director Francisco Rivera Rodriguez, scenic designer Michael Ruiz-del-Vizo, and producer Lana Russell, with actors Juan Rivera Lebron, Sam Marzella (BFA Music Theater, 2023), Bryanna Felipe (BFA Acting, 2023) and Moire Del Carmen Díaz (MFA Costume Production, 2024).

Rivera says that finding these moments in space, with technical pieces in place, made it very clear what story was being told and how it should be told moving forward.

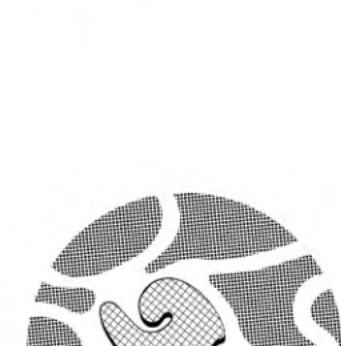
"We can now go to interested producers and say, 'Yes, this hurricane works with rice and fans and these props and these sounds, and this is how the actors work together on stage with all these elements because we've done it. It's not theoretical, we've seen it in action.'"

Rivka Rivera

This was Haden's goal all along, to help secure the technical aspects of a piece before going into costly productions. He recalled an experience that threw in design elements during rehearsals and how jarring it was. "If this had been done with designers a week before actors showed up, it would have been easier and safer for everyone to understand how working in this space changes how we navigate it and tell the story." It seems like an ounce of ColLABo is worth a pound of cure, given it can cut technical issues down the line by addressing them early.

"We forget that theater is a collaborative art. As an actor, sometimes it feels like you're just passing through the gates of the playwright, director, costumer, etc." says Rivera. She goes on to explain that working together in real space and in real time can help artists form that cohesive bond, which in turn affects the telling of the story. Rivera feels confident that after this experience her piece is more ready than it has ever been for production and hopes that other places with similar resources will replicate the model. "I didn't need another residency or reading. I needed this experience to show me what was tangible for this show."

ColLABo 2024 will take place May 27 – June 10.



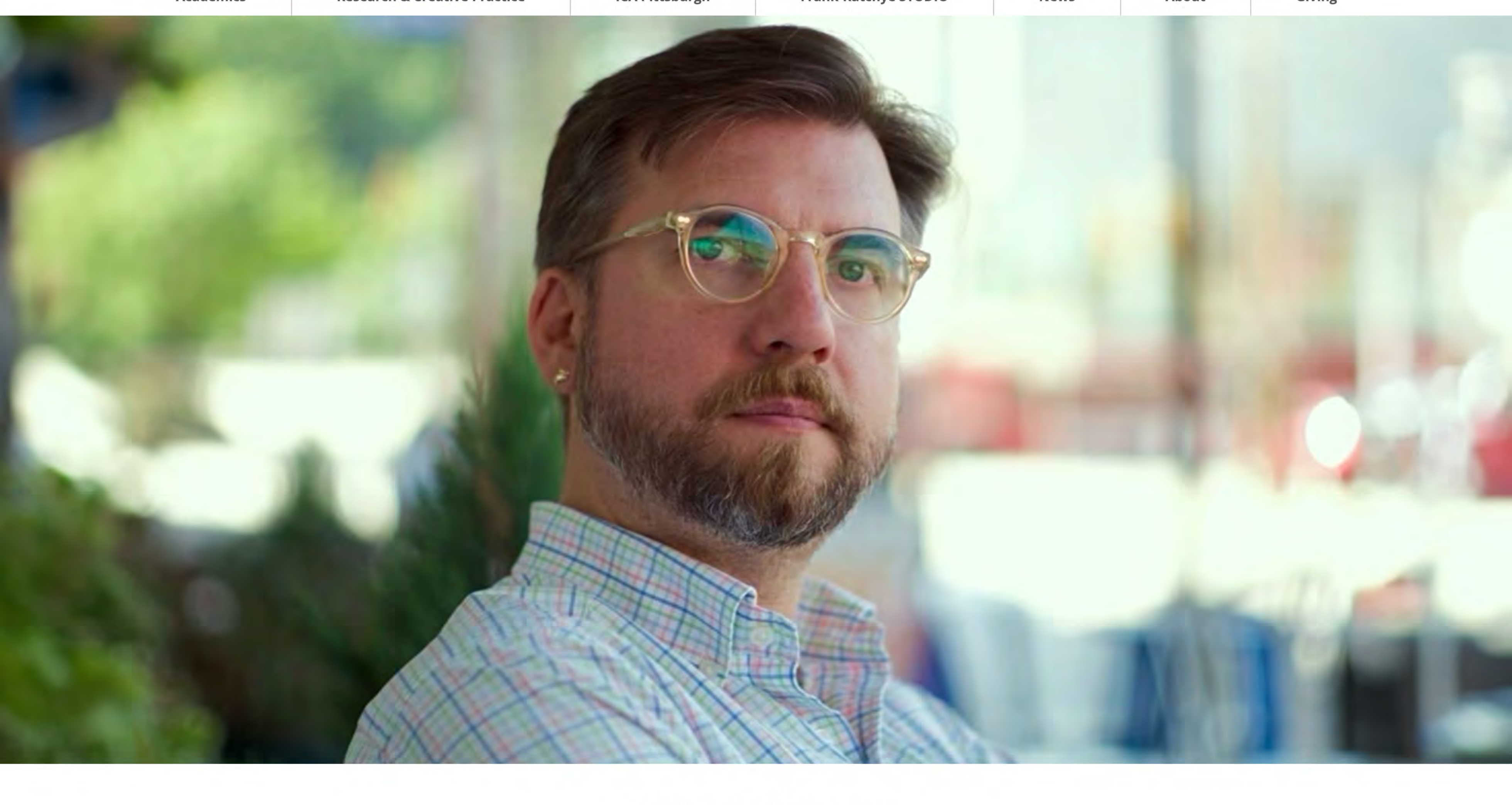
featuring the following:

images by Louis Stein

learn more:

[School of Drama ColLABo](#)

◀ Back to CFA Magazine



School of Music

The Art of Composition

Christian Kriegeskotte's Serendipitous Path to Music Success

written by
Cally Jamis Vennare

Christian Kriegeskotte (BFA 2003 and MM 2023, Composition) grew up in suburban Mount Kisco, N.Y., in a household with a deep appreciation for arts and culture. As a young child, he performed in school plays, took piano lessons and practiced the Suzuki method on his violin. But it was the bagpipes that captured his heart and attention after hearing a poignant performance by a family friend who was enthusiastic about exploring his Scottish heritage.

As his love for the bagpipes grew, so did his passion for music and composition. It superseded all previous career aspirations in his youth, including an initial desire to become an electrical engineer. One of Kriegeskotte's early mentors — his father — was an inspiration in both disciplines. An independent documentary producer and master machinist who built his own camera equipment, Kriegeskotte's dad instilled a sense of independence and resilience in his son that he carries with him to this day.

"Find a way to do something yourself; don't just buy it. Don't give up!"

Kriegeskotte's father

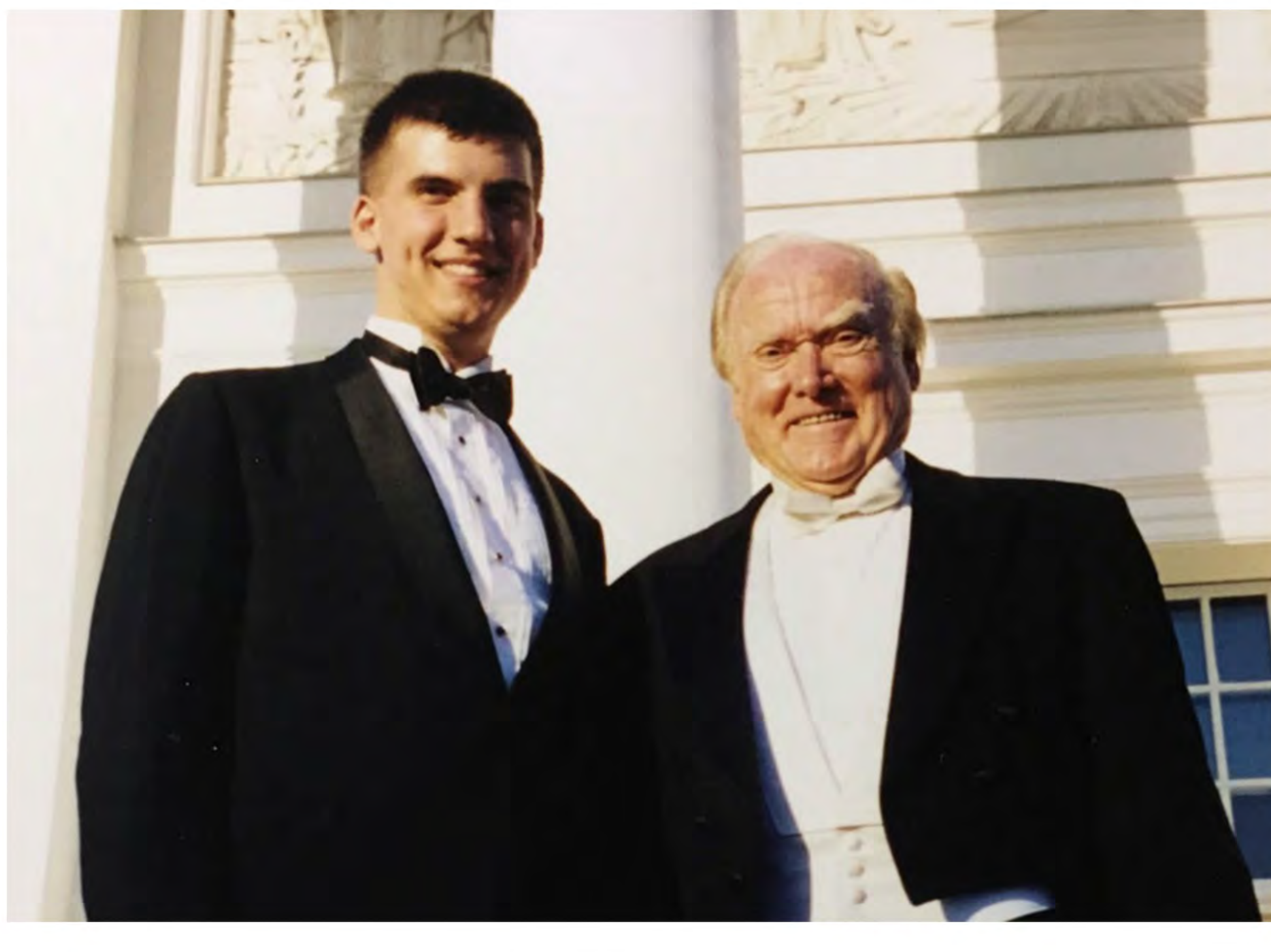
Kriegeskotte took that sound advice and never turned back when a fortuitous opportunity presented itself to study at Carnegie Mellon University. When he was still in high school, a talented former classmate returned from her first year of study at CMU. She encouraged him to apply and, to his surprise and delight, he got into CFA's [School of Music](#).

"There was a little bit of a mystery at work here ... like can this kid who is barely flunking out of math, who thought he wanted to be an electrical engineer, and spends all his time composing symphonies instead of doing his homework, can he really get into a school of this caliber? But I was determined, and bagpipes really were the key to the castle!"

The CMU key would, in fact, open many doors for Kriegeskotte throughout his successful career as a composer, arranger and arts executive.

After his freshman year studying Highland Bagpipe with two "rock star" musicians — Pipe Majors Alasdair Gillies and James McIntosh, MBE — Kriegeskotte decided to change his bagpipe major to musical composition. More doors opened in the form of veteran CMU professors and composers including Nancy Galbraith, Leonardo Balada, Fabien Levy, Reza Vahi and Robert Page. Under this esteemed tutelage, he honed his craft and established relationships that would guide him throughout his life's work.

Following completion of his BFA degree, Kriegeskotte serendipitously met fellow CMU alum Rob Marshall, who had just won his first Oscar for the movie *Chicago* with Richard Gere and Catherine Zeta-Jones. They found common ground in their interests and their mentor, [Robert Page](#). Marshall kindly introduced him to Chris Montan, president of Walt Disney Music. Montan, in turn, helped Kriegeskotte land his first professional job at as a copyist at LA-based Joanne Kane Music Service (JKMS).



"I met Rob Marshall because of Carnegie Mellon. I can't speak for him, but the connection may have been enhanced by the fact that we had the same teachers at CMU and, like most alums, support this secret CFA club."

"These are the moments in your life where you meet certain people and the trajectory from there is very, very interesting. And Bob Page taught me an important lesson: 'never say no to an opportunity that comes unheralded.'"

Christian Kriegeskotte

So Kriegeskotte packed up his mom's 1988 Volvo station wagon and headed to LA to work at JKMS in 2003. His first assignment: *Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith*. As the "copyist," he was responsible for taking the composer's finished orchestra scores and creating the physical sheet music for orchestras.

The work took on a number of different forms. For another feature film project, Kriegeskotte recalls "putting on headphones, taking a pencil and a piece of paper and, by ear, transcribing the composition." The "takedown," as it is called, resulted in a finished initial draft that is shared with the composer and the orchestrator for final edits before transcription into sheet music. Kriegeskotte credits the exceptional ear training he received from his teachers at CMU, including Bob Page and Colette Wilkins, for his unique ability in this task.

More opportunities at JKMS followed. Kriegeskotte prepared music for television shows like *The Simpsons*, *"King of the Hill," "American Dad"* and *"Family Guy"* and supported acclaimed composers like John Williams, John Debney, Danny Elfman and Marco Beltrami.



In 2006, Kriegeskotte moved back to his home state of New York to actively look for opportunities in classical music. He eventually landed at the storied classical music agency, Columbia Artist Management Inc. (CAMI). By "pure coincidence," he ended up working with the management team of Marvin Hamlisch, who was Principal Pops Conductor of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra (PSO) at the time. Kriegeskotte had met the maestro during his CMU days through his participation in the Mendelssohn Choir of Pittsburgh.

Which brings us full circle back to Pittsburgh and to CMU. In 2007, hot off the press from working with Marvin Hamlisch, Lorin Maazel, Betsy Buckley and other luminary CAMI clientele, Kriegeskotte returned to Carnegie Mellon on a full scholarship to pursue his master of music degree in composition.

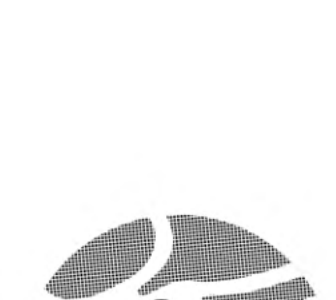
The completion of his CMU graduate work once again opened doors around the country. As a composer, his works were performed by Grammy-winning ensemble eighth blackbird, The Ethel Quartet, The Parker Quartet, Cuarteto Latinoamericano, The American Composers Orchestra, The New York Miniaturist Ensemble, IonSound Project and The Pittsburgh Opera. As an arts executive, he found work with Gotham Early Music Scene (GEMS NY) and The Orchard, where he quickly ascended to the position of director of digital integrations following its acquisition by Sony Music Entertainment.



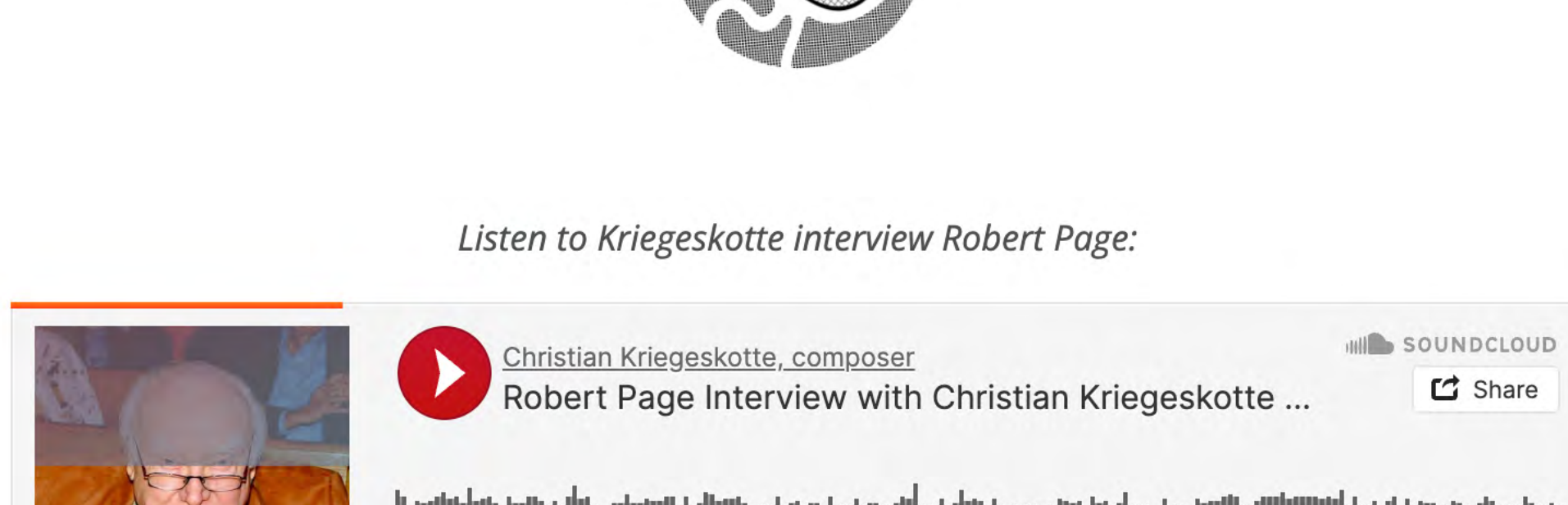
At present, Kriegeskotte serves as senior manager of popular programming for the Pittsburgh Symphony — [In Fall 2023](#), he garnered the critical acclaim as composer/arranger for a very special PSO concert — [The Glorious Succession of Frzy](#) — with the maestro recognized for a very special PPSO.

"When I mentor people now who are interested in following this pattern, who are razzle-dazzled by some of these stories I tell, the thing that I try to encourage them to hold on to is 'you always have to be observing where you are ... and leave room to be surprised.'"

Christian Kriegeskotte



Listen to Kriegeskotte interview Robert Page:



◀ Back to CFA Magazine

College of Fine Arts

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


BXA Intercollege Degree Programs

Honoring Heritage Through K-Perfumery

written by
Emily Syes

K-beauty products have a high global demand, but Su min Park (BHA 2011) and husband Wonny Lee noticed an obvious absence of Asian representation in the perfume industry. In response, they founded a premium, modern fragrance brand inspired by the centuries-old history of scent and culture in Korea that resonates with an international audience. The name [ELOREA](#) is a portmanteau of the words 'elements' and 'Korea.'

ELOREA began as online perfumery in 2021 and recently launched a flagship store in the summer of 2023, after raising \$750,000 in pre-seed funding and \$2 million in seed funding from investors. Located in Manhattan's SoHo neighborhood, the sleek boutique is not just a place to shop, but also build a community.



The Korean-American couple intentionally supports the work of other Koreans and Korean-Americans by exhibiting painting and pottery throughout the store. They have also formed a partnership to hold a café, offering artisanal chocolate and perfume pairings, as well as coffee and signature drinks, for a complete sensory experience.

"It's a deeply fulfilling journey because it allows me to reconnect with my roots, tell the story of my culture and bridge the gap between my two worlds, both as an immigrant and an artist."

Su min Park

ELOREA's fine fragrance, candles and hand care products are genderless. They are made in small batches, formulated using high-quality ingredients sourced from South Korea. True to K-beauty standards, the products are vegan and cruelty-free with no harmful chemicals.

There are two unique perfume collections. The signature eau de parfum line, The Elements, includes the fragrances Heaven, Earth, Water and Fire. Each scent is inspired by a trigram on the South Korean flag, which collectively represents the four elements of the world.

The Forgotten Words collection of fragrances is inspired by native Korean words that are rarely used in modern times. Each word is poetic and expressive, transportive to a moment, memory or emotion. In the collection, the beauty of these words lives on through scents named Inflorescence, Gentle Shower, Hazy Blue and Be By My Side.



In Korean, 'Hyang-soo' translates not only to 'perfume' but also to the 'feeling of deep nostalgia about a special place,' which perfectly expresses the sentiment Park and Lee want to convey through ELOREA. They conducted in-depth research into the historical use of scents in Korea discovering a rich and often overlooked connection between scent, wellness and self-expression in their culture. "The emotional connection to my heritage has been the driving force behind our authentic approach," Park states.

Park's education at Carnegie Mellon had a profound influence on her career. As a [Bachelor of Humanities and Arts](#) alumna, the combination of psychology, art and photography has provided a unique skill set. Before launching the first investor-backed Korean fragrance brand to market, she started as a fashion, beauty and still-life photographer with clients including Zola, Ann Taylor, Fekkai and more.

Park recognizes, "The interdisciplinary nature of the BXA Programs at CMU encouraged me to think broadly and it has been a significant asset throughout my career. It's given me the ability to combine different skills and viewpoints, which is especially important in the creative world I operate in."



featuring the following:

images by Su min Park

[◀ Back to CFA Magazine](#)

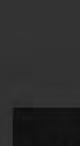
[Faculty & Staff Resources](#)
[Contact](#)

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

Design Unveiled for Expanded Institute for Contemporary Art in Pittsburgh

Miller Institute for Contemporary Art to be Renamed ICA Pittsburgh

*written by*Juliet Sorce, Caroline McKinley, Elyse Howell
Resnicow and Associates

In November 2023, Carnegie Mellon University unveiled the design for the Miller Institute for Contemporary Art's new 29,000-square-foot home, prominently located in the new Richard King Mellon Hall of Sciences at the crossroads of the university's campus and the city's iconic arts and cultural institutions along Forbes Avenue in Pittsburgh. Designed by ZGF Architects, the new museum will nearly triple the Miller ICA's current size, with galleries and public programming spaces that will foster cross-disciplinary inquiry and community engagement.

It was simultaneously announced that, upon its move, the Miller ICA will be renamed the Institute for Contemporary Art Pittsburgh (ICA Pittsburgh) in recognition of the critical role that it has played and continues to play in fostering artistic discourse throughout the city and the art world at large.

The ICA will continue operations under the name of Miller ICA while at its current facility in the Purnell Center for the Arts. Groundbreaking for the new building is expected in spring 2024, with a public opening planned for 2027.



An exhibition space within the new museum will be named "The Miller Gallery" in acknowledgment of Regina and Marlin Miller, whose foundational support helped launch the institution. Since first opening to the public in 2000, ICA has advanced the work of innovative artists — including Dara Birnbaum, Jacoby Satterwhite and Andrea Zittel, among many others. Its experimental and academically rigorous exhibitions and programs foreground global trends and uplift the work of Pittsburgh creatives, ranging from major thematic surveys, such as Impossible Music curated by Candice Hopkins and Raven Chacon with Stavia Grmani, to shows spotlighting the work of students and emergent practitioners. The new ICA Pittsburgh builds on this legacy and is supported by a lead gift of \$15 million from the Juliet Lea Hillman Simonds Foundation and Henry L. Hillman Foundation, two organizations dedicated to advancing civic and cultural leadership and infrastructure throughout the City of Pittsburgh.

"With a welcoming design and artist-focused mission, ICA Pittsburgh will serve as an advocate for new ideas and an aggregator of communities, providing new lines of inquiry about the most pressing issues of our time through the lens of contemporary art."

Elizabeth Chodos
Director, Miller Institute for Contemporary Art

"Our new name reflects the institutional growth and impact that the museum has had over the course of the past two decades, recognizing both the critical links we have to our audiences throughout the City of Pittsburgh, as well as the role we play on a national and international level as a nimble art institute," said Chodos.

In its new home, the ICA will be able to expand its programmatic offerings in dialogue with the Carnegie Museum of Art that it will directly neighbor, and better serve its growing audiences, including scholars, students and faculty, as well as visitors from throughout the region and country. Embracing unprecedented possibilities for interdisciplinary learning, the ICA Pittsburgh will be a key part of CMU's new Richard King Mellon Hall of Sciences — a dynamic building complex conceived to foster collaboration across the arts, sciences and technology, and that will house classrooms, laboratories and faculty offices for departments from CMU's Mellon College of Science and School of Computer Science, in addition to the new ICA.

"As the cultural and civic anchor of the Richard King Mellon Hall of Sciences, ICA Pittsburgh creates an important new gateway to the university campus."

Mary Ellen Poole
Stanley and Marcia Gumberg Dean, College of Fine Arts

"At the same time, it will amplify and extend the historic cultural offerings of Forbes Avenue, which include the Carnegie Museums and Carnegie Library, providing a continuum of cultural and artistic experiences for our university community and the public alike," said Poole.

*featuring the following:*

renderings courtesy of ZGF Architects

read more:[Design Unveiled for Expanded Institute for Contemporary Art in Pittsburgh \(full story\)](#)[◀ Back to CFA Magazine](#)[Faculty & Staff Resources](#)[Contact](#)**CFA**



Frank-Ratchye STUDIO for Creative Inquiry

A New Cohort for Live Visuals

LIVE! Art&Code! Brings Live Visuals to the Region

written by
Harrison Apple

When Nica Ross joined the [STUDIO](#), heralding the first [School of Drama](#) faculty to direct the renowned center for interdisciplinary creative research, they drew on their wide breadth of experience in theater, academia, film production, community organizing and nightlife curation to plan the sixth iteration of Art&Code dedicated to live performance, live visuals and open access skill sharing.

With their team, including Associate Director Harrison Apple, Business Manager Linda Hager, Program Administrator Bill Rodgers and Financial Assistant Carol Hernandez, they crafted a National Endowment for the Arts Media Arts application through the office of Creative Research, led by Jenn Joy Wilson and supported by Sara Deroy, Ashley Papale from the Office of Sponsored Projects and Aaron Martin, associate director of Institutional Partnerships. Their collective efforts secured \$25,000 from the [National Endowment for the Arts](#), one of only 1,300 projects awarded from that round.



Taking on the challenge to uphold and reinterpret the festival/conference that was originated by the STUDIO's previous director of 13 years, Golan Levin (School of Art), was no small accomplishment. Ross and the STUDIO designed a three-month program that would transform this former arts library turned creative research lab into a publicly accessible and eagerly anticipated center for skill sharing and community building among Pittsburghers engaged in all levels of nightlife and live performance.

LIVE! Art&Code realized a collective hope to support Pittsburgh's own scene of experimental media makers who have been DIYing immersive environments in clubs, galleries and theaters. This series of talks, workshops and performances built desperately needed new bridges across artistic communities, institutional resources and commercial partnerships.

A dynamic new experimental cohort emerged out of events celebrating the visiting artists and makers behind VDMX (David Lublin of NYC), Touchdesigner/Derivative (Zoe Sandoval & Matthew Ragan of Los Angeles) and Live Coders (Sarah Groff Hennigh-Palermo of Berlin, Olivia Jack of Berlin, Char Stiles — a CMU Alumna (BCSA 2018) — working in NYC and Boston, and Dr. Kate Sicchio of Richmond). Working with Pittsburgh-based artists Jules Malice (aka Malzof) — a CMU alum (BHA 2012) — and Cornelius "Neil" Henke III (aka ProjectileObjects), the STUDIO recruited a participant base of local artists working in live visuals, interested in expanding their knowledge and learning from each other.



Having ramped up excitement over the first two weekends, LIVE! Art&Code's finale (Dec. 1–3) gathered this community outside of CMU's campus for a live projection performance stretching across Forbes Avenue and South Bouquet Street, projected through the windows of Viva Los Tacos (the former beloved "O" Hot Dog shop in the Oakland neighborhood). In partnership with the Oakland Business Improvement District's GLOWLAND festival, our final four guest artists engaged the in-person audience with interactive live code visual tools to light up one of Pittsburgh's busiest corners. This final weekend of LIVE! Art&Code was anything but an ending. It unlocked curiosity and motivation across the Ohio River Valley for LIVE! Visual performance. Don't fret if you couldn't join us in person this time around, the STUDIO has documentation to share what we've learned and a bright future with public programming.

Sorry

This video does not exist.



◀ Back to CFA Magazine

College of Fine Arts

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


Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Reflections

Angelica Perez-Johnston Reflects on DEI within CFA

written by
Angelica Perez-Johnston

In July, I was welcomed and embraced by the College of Fine Arts community, and I quickly went to work! Within a month's time, the office hosted the annual Diversity, Equity and Inclusion retreat. Without the dedication and attention to detail our Program Coordinator, Britney Yauger-Limtham, provided, the retreat would not have been as successful as it was. Britney has consistently gone above and beyond to ensure that the quality of our programming exceeds expectations. I am extremely fortunate to have Britney as part of our team.

During the retreat, I introduced to the community the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), a tool we have implemented to begin to identify the ways that we intentionally engage in conversations as they relate to intercultural engagement, awareness and interpersonal capacity to grow.

The IDI is a measure of cultural competence, which can be defined as the capability to shift cultural perspective and appropriately adapt behavior to cultural differences and commonalities. It is essential for transcending ethnocentrism and establishing effective, positive relations across cultural boundaries both internationally and domestically.

We will be utilizing the IDI as a college to level set and develop an understanding of our starting point for DEI strategic planning moving forward.

The IDI has been met with great success! To date, we have had over 160 of our community members register to complete the IDI with 131 completed inventories and 123 completed debriefs. I have truly enjoyed meeting with each of you and engaging in reflective work and sharing in discussions of how this information can be utilized and what growth can be achieved when we begin to recognize how we engage with intercultural awareness.

I am beyond grateful to those of you within the CFA community who have sought out the guidance and support of our office for a variety of reasons. Please continue to utilize us as a resource, a support and a space in which you can receive guidance on the difficult topics that you may be working through in terms of diversity, equity and inclusion. Through our office, we have had the opportunity to develop and implement educational opportunities tailored to the unique needs of each situation or circumstance. In addition to the support that we have been able to provide to our faculty and staff, we have shifted our priority model in order to be more intentional in meeting the needs of students, faculty and staff.

As a result, Britney has developed and implemented some amazing signature events, namely the Queer Art Market in the fall and, in the spring, we look forward to the second annual Global Arts Ball. These events are designed to support students while including our faculty and staff in a collaborative way.

In addition to the support, guidance and consultation from our office, we also held our first DEI Council meeting in the fall semester. The DEI Council is comprised of delegates from each area within CFA. This council is charged with being the voice of change for their respective schools, providing insight into the strengths of each school and helping to identify ways in which we can shift our processes toward more equitable solutions to meet the needs of our CFA community.

I am beyond honored to serve as your associate dean for DEI, and the beginning of this journey has been so extremely rewarding and encouraging. The desire and drive to create sustainable equitable change across all areas within CFA affirms our continued commitment to creating spaces within our community where everyone feels as though they belong. I look forward to our continued successes!



[◀ Back to CFA Magazine](#)

[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](#)

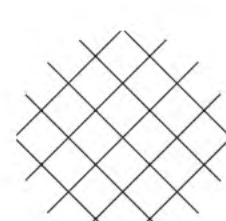
Master of Arts Management

From Infantry to Civic Arts Leader

Samir Bitar's Journey to Transforming Los Angeles

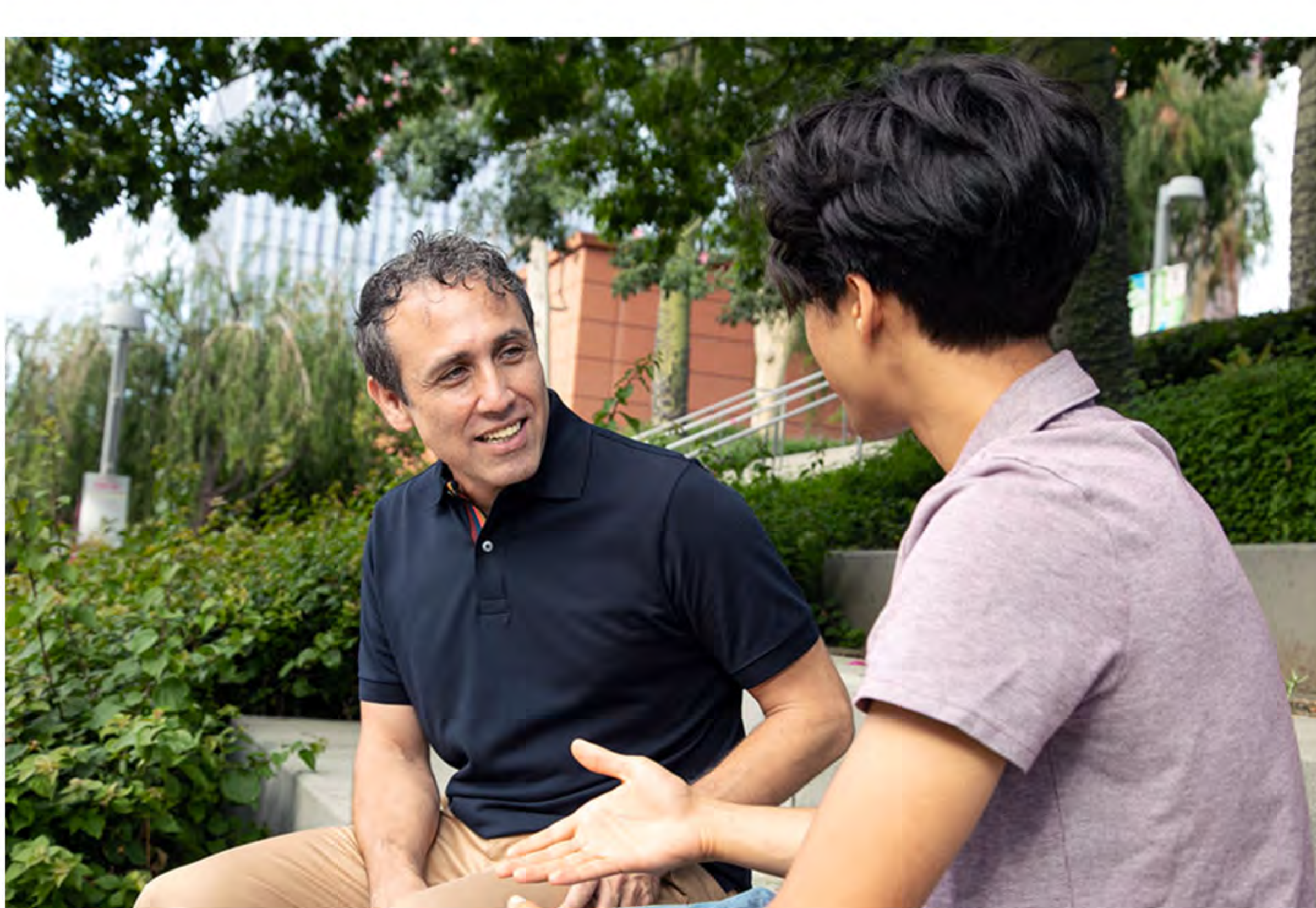
written by
Jennifer Monahan

Samir Bitar (MAM 2007) is a civic leader who has also served as a museum director, arts industry consultant, professional dancer and infantryman in the U.S. Army. He recently announced his candidacy for Los Angeles City Council, District 14. We spent some time with Bitar to find out what led to this next iteration in his journey and how he hopes to contribute to the Los Angeles City Council, if elected.

**Heinz College: Tell us about the community that you hope to serve, if elected to represent District 14 on the Los Angeles City Council?**

Samir Bitar: Geographically, it runs from Eagle Rock through El Sereno and Boyle Heights into Downtown, Skid Row, Little Tokyo and the Arts District. It includes a diverse set of lifestyles, environments, neighborhood histories and needs.

We need to do some work on the economy for these areas. For example, Downtown's Historic Broadway Theater District is one of LA's gems — not only is LA one of the creative capitals of the world, but we also have the highest density of historic theaters in the country. Yet the district is still designated as an underutilized business zone. There is enormous community support from a broad spectrum of stakeholders for the revitalization of this theater district. But efforts stalled during the pandemic, and current leadership has done nothing to kickstart this economic engine. This is just one of the many corridors within CD14 that need to be revitalized to attract jobs and improve quality of life.

**HC: In your platform, you talk about your passion for using the arts to make communities better and to heal the city. How do you envision leveraging the arts to address social issues and create positive change in Los Angeles?**

SB: This is personal for me. I grew up poor and with a lot of trauma. Art saved my life.

I went into the Army, and then was the first in the family to go to college. That's where I found art — specifically dance. It wasn't until later that I started seeing all this research about art being used as therapy. I look around the streets where I live and talk to people who are homeless or struggling with mental illness or have family members in prison. There's evidence to show that art therapy could help.

Similarly, art and culture play a powerful role in civil discourse in a democratic society. We need to support our cultural institutions because of the role they play in fostering conversations of important topics in a safe, non-confrontational kind of way. In today's politically polarized America, museums are some of the few public spaces remaining where we can convene critical conversations of our time; they're spaces where we can engage in civil, democratic discourse — because they draw a broad cross-section of Americans.

HC: Your journey from being an infantry soldier in the U.S. Army, to your years at the Smithsonian, to your current role as a candidate for Los Angeles City Council is remarkable. How have those broadly varied experiences influenced your approach to public service?

SB: The through line is integrity. The oldest son in every generation of my family that I'm aware of served in the Army, so that's what I did. I'm very proud of my military service, which is one kind of public service. However, my enlistment turned out to be an unintended political act, as I joined before President Bill Clinton's "Don't Ask Don't Tell" policy.

I came out of the closet during my service, at the height of the AIDS crisis. I was personally impacted by the AIDS epidemic and also beaten up several times for being gay. These experiences lit a political spark. I didn't necessarily see that as leading to public office at the time, but I chose to march in parades, attend rallies and become politically active in other ways, which is another kind of public service. It's always been about the pursuit of what is good and just, and about having integrity.

My career as a civic leader, as a veteran, as an artist, then literally as a public servant, as a federal employee, working for nonprofits, sitting on boards of nonprofits — it's all driven by a deep commitment to improving communities.

I believe in the American experiment; it's a noble experiment. Particularly for my brothers and sisters in the LGBTQ+ community, increasingly, we are allowed to be who we are in most parts of this country. There are humans in other countries who can't be who they are or are killed for being who they are. We're not perfect in America. We have a long way to go. But this belief in America is why I serve, why it's so important to me.

HC: How did your time at the Smithsonian prepare you for the challenges and opportunities of running for public office?

SB: As the director of Visitor Experience for the Smithsonian Institution, I was the chief advocate for the 34 million annual visitors. To advocate for the needs of others, one must have empathy for others.

HC: How does your work as chair of the Downtown Los Angeles Neighborhood Council Planning and Land Use Committee (PLUC) align with your vision for urban planning and development if you were elected to the City Council?

SB: I love Los Angeles; I'm a proud Angeleno and Californian. That said, LA wasn't planned very well. We're addressing this now. I've been heavily involved in drafting new building code that will redefine our urban landscape. One example is a public art mandate — large development projects are required to add public art or contribute to a fund for public art.

HC: What qualities do you think local government leaders and public servants should have?

SB: You have to be in it to serve others, much like a religious leader, a nurse or a teacher. When you think about the best people in those professions, you just sense this certain vibe of service. You don't get that same feeling from politicians. But you should. As politicians, we should bring a desire to serve our constituents, to serve the public, and to serve the common good, over our own career ambitions.

“The hardest classes for me were in quantitative analysis — numbers, stats, financials. But the academic culture encouraged me to double-down on these types of classes in a way that helped me build real proficiency. And, when I graduated, these were the skills that gave me an edge, certainly in the world of cultural organizations and museums.”

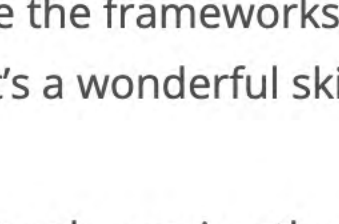
Samir Bitar

HC: How did your time at Heinz College prepare you for the work you've done so far and how has it prepared you to serve in elected office?

SB: Within a year of graduating, I was working at the Smithsonian. Had I not gone to Carnegie Mellon, especially as a dancer, that would not have happened. The hardest classes for me were in quantitative analysis — numbers, stats, financials. But the academic culture encouraged me to double-down on these types of classes in a way that helped me build real proficiency. And, when I graduated, these were the skills that gave me an edge, certainly in the world of cultural organizations and museums.

Then there's also the tech; we had to code in some classes. That background helps tremendously when you bring in vendors and contractors presenting software or apps, to be able to engage, ask the right questions and have the capacity to lead complex projects like software development. Heinz taught me the frameworks, the concepts and, in some cases, the actual programming language, and that's a wonderful skill set to have.

CMU encouraged and allowed me to take classes in other disciplines. So, it wasn't just Heinz, it was this campus that facilitated critical thinking and inquiry and nurtured who I was. CMU gave me skill sets and abilities that continue to distinguish me in my board and public service today.



this interview has been edited for length and clarity

[◀ Back to CFA Magazine](#)[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

Taught from the Inside Out

John Harrison and Ed Lammi Collaborate on Course Work for TV and Film Production

written by
Dan Green

Master of Entertainment Industry Management (MEIM) students are getting their fair share of hands-on training in their second year of the program in Los Angeles. One example is the way the class, Production Management, is being taught. The class covers a day in the life of the writer/director and the production side of how a film/TV studio works.

College of Fine Arts School of Drama MFA graduate, John Harrison (who is an accomplished Emmy-nominated director/writer), was approached years ago to teach television production to the second-year MEIM students in Los Angeles. It was Harrison's suggestion to team-teach the course with one of his best friends, Ed Lammi (also an Emmy winner), who happened to be the executive vice president of **Sony Pictures Television**. The two met on the stage floor of famed **WQED** in Pittsburgh and became fast friends.

"The mandate was to make the class more applicable and a thorough examination into the real-world of physical production ... not just theory or telling stories about the way things used to be," said MEIM Program Director, Dan Green. Green convinced Lammi and Harrison that they could be great teachers.

"The years of experience that these two bring to the classroom is tremendous and touches on just about every facet of the industry."

Dan Green

Program Director, Master of Entertainment Industry Management

Both friends started out in Pittsburgh, and both cut their teeth in the film industry working for and with famed horror director, George Romero. Harrison began his career directing rock videos and collaborating with Romero on several films, most notably "Creepshow" and "Day of the Dead," for which Harrison also composed the scores. Lammi, a Penn State grad, worked in a variety of production capacities such as production manager, associate producer and producer and also worked on "Day of the Dead."



Their background was perfect for a class that illuminates what it takes to produce film and television. Harrison has written and directed multiple TV episodes for U.S. Networks (HBO, NBC, TNT, Netflix among them) and has written and directed world-premiere movies for the USA Network and Starz/Encore. His 6-hour miniseries adaptation of Frank Herbert's monumental bestseller, "Dune," which he directed, was an Emmy-winning success for the SYFY Channel and ProSieben. His adaptation of Herbert's "Children of Dune," which he also co-produced, was another Emmy winner.

Since the late 1980s, Lammi has supervised production of live-action and animated series, including Sony primetime comedies, dramas, reality and non-scripted programming, telefilms, game shows and talk shows. The two certainly know what they are talking about in the classroom, Green said, and both now have other reasons to celebrate.

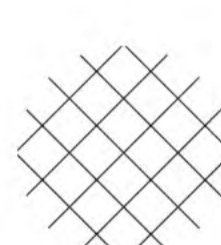


Harrison's Supernatural Thriller

Harrison had his supernatural thriller, "Passing Through Veils," published this fall. The novel centers around a brilliant retired high-powered attorney who has just been released from an institution after a nervous breakdown. She moves into a rundown Georgetown townhouse near Washington, D.C. In restoring the house, she begins to find mementos of the woman haunting her house, a victim of a cold case murder from 30 years ago.

As with many of his stories, Harrison had this one percolating in his mind for a while. As he noted, "If the story continues to stick [with him], I should do something about it." This is his second published novel. The first was titled, "Destiny Gardens," a story about disenfranchised kids in Pittsburgh who form their own family in an abandoned warehouse. He has a few other books permeating his thought — one of which is a dangerous, creepy urban tale that will be published next year titled, "Residue."

Beyond the novels, Harrison has been keeping busy. He started a new podcast with Fangoria centering around an anthology of creepy tales called, "John Harrison's Sinister Stories," set to be dropped in 2024.



Lammi Set to Retire from Sony After 36 Years

In spring 2024, Sony will lose their confident captain of production, as Lammi has decided to retire from the studio after 36 years. Lammi has certainly seen the changes in the television industry. He started under Columbia Pictures Television, which was then purchased by Sony and has since moved away from the licensing model to a more complex streaming world.

Lammi has always been a well-respected leader in the television industry working on various shows such as, "The Boys," "The Blacklist," "S.W.A.T.," "Outlander," "Better Call Saul," "The Goldbergs" and "Cobra Kai." He was often sought out for problem-solving in the changing business of television. One of the biggest challenges was related to how COVID completely shut down filming throughout the television industry in 2020. Lammi successfully helped Sony be among the first to be back up and running with COVID protocols during the pandemic. This was a huge acknowledgment of Lammi and his department's ability to lead with the support of upper-level management.

As he takes a step back from the industry, he will continue teaching the Production Management course with Harrison. After class, the two friends and fellow musicians usually meet at Lammi's house to create music with a few other friends. Lammi feels that as much as he is the teacher, he is also learning a lot from the students through the high level of interactivity and diverse interests in the classroom.

"Our philosophy is to give students the vocabulary with which to converse ... so that when they do talk [in interviews or on the job], they know what they're talking about."

John Harrison

Despite the ever-changing industry, and recently settled strikes, Harrison believes that new opportunities arise just like anything else.

"Television didn't kill film, and streaming [won't] kill television," he said. "There's all kinds of new media that storytellers can take advantage of."

Lammi agrees.

"People don't tune in because of the technology with which it was recorded. They tune in for the stories and the actors ... I think that will always be the case."

Ed Lammi



[◀ Back to CFA Magazine](#)

College of Fine Arts

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

Equal Access to Creativity

Alumnus Francis Collins and Wife, Erin, Provide Essential Supplies for First-Year CFA Students

written by
Lauren Stash

It's a simple idea with a huge impact: When students have the right tools to succeed, opportunities and possibilities increase.

For those in the arts, the cost of supplies and materials adds up quickly and can be a significant barrier to creativity.

That's why the partnership with the College of Fine Arts and alumnus Francis Collins, along with his wife, Erin, may look unassuming, but its impact is invaluable.



The Collins Family Fund provides first-year students in CFA's School of Art with essential materials and tools to complete instructional assignments for their required foundational courses.

"Students should be able to create and have fun. I'm giving to CMU because I know it's helping students do that."

Francis Collins

Francis built his success in CMU's backyard. He grew up in Pittsburgh's South Oakland neighborhood, attended high school at Central Catholic and enrolled at Carnegie Tech to earn his bachelor's degree in fine arts.

"I wanted to stay close to home, and Carnegie Tech had painting and art," Francis says. "I was actually the first graduating class in 1967 when it became Carnegie Mellon University."

An adventurous spirit, he traveled westward after graduation where he met his wife, Erin, when they were both studying — for their master's and bachelor's degrees, respectively — at the University of California, Berkeley. As someone who liked to work with his hands, he went from making art to a career in residential and commercial construction.



Nearly 60 years later, he's reconnected to his Pittsburgh roots to support the talents of CMU students.

"I really liked being at CMU and had a great experience," Francis says. "I also remember the times I had to borrow money to make it all happen, and now that I'm older, I can give some back."

The Collins Family Fund makes possible the School of Art's "Material Fee-Free Foundations Year," which is in a three-year pilot. It's the perfect complement to the new holistic curriculum in the School of Art, which is in its second year.

Imin Yeh, director of foundational studies and associate professor in the School of Art, is grateful for the transformation in culture the fund fosters.

"We are a small school, and a gift like this lets everyone figure out what they love."

Imin Yeh
Associate Professor of Art
Director of Foundational Studies

"The fund allows the whole department to be more collaborative and careful in our curriculum and to ask questions about what is truly needed and what materials can serve multiple purposes," Yeh says.

Artistic industries are seeing a return to learning through making, and with the Collins Family Fund in place, CMU students will be uniquely positioned to excel.

Students in the School of Art come from a wide range of backgrounds, and the goal of the new curriculum structure is to give them exposure to all mediums while ensuring equitable access. The idea is that if students are required to try a number of new things, they should have access to the same quality and availability of materials. Shaping the foundation year in that way gives them exposure they may not have had previously and allows them to jump into their coursework on an even playing field with their peers.

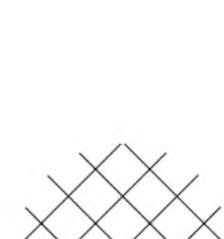
Head of the School of Art Charlie White says that Francis brings a unique perspective to his philanthropy and a much-needed resource to students.

"He's giving money to students who are like the student he was," White says. "Today's supply costs didn't exist in his time, so he's helping students who are in a situation that is familiar to him."

Francis agrees and is pleased to have the chance to support the momentum of innovation similar to the one he and his peers were a part of 60 years ago.

"It's the process of life. People help you, and if you get to be successful, you help others along the way. It's that simple."

Francis Collins

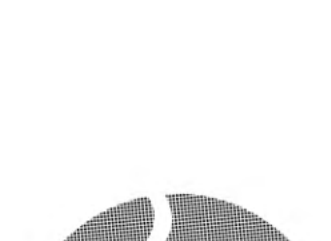


The Collins Family Fund shows that gifts of any size can add up to big changes for Tartans. School of Art students share how Francis and Erin Collins' support has impacted their CMU experiences.

"I think it makes students really happy to feel like the school is willing to invest money in us. Not only does it make things more accessible but it makes students feel valued — like CMU really wants you to succeed."

"(The Collins Family Fund) helped me think big and do things I've never done before. I've never had access to so many supplies at once to make my art practice larger and better than it ever has been."

"At many points in the semester, I was afraid to explore more material-consuming ideas in my art because I felt hindered by the limited resources at my disposal. I greatly appreciated the drawing pads that were given because of their versatile utility. By not having to worry about whether the logistics of an artwork will succeed, I am able to truly exercise my skill to its fullest potential."



featuring the following:

image of alumnus Francis Collins and College of Fine Arts Dean Mary Ellen Poole in Francis' studio with his sculptural work

images of Francis and Erin Collins: skyline and marriage photos

◀ Back to CFA Magazine

College of Fine Arts

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


A Different Kind of Intelligence

In the Age of AI, Felipe Castelblanco Searches for a More Organic Form of Knowledge

written by
Cally Jamis Vennare

While most people have their attention turned toward artificial intelligence, [School of Art](#) MFA alumnus Felipe Castelblanco is interested in another, non-human form of intelligence. He recently conducted a three-month research trip to remote jungles of Colombia to investigate plant intelligence.

“We’ve been looking at intelligence only through the human lens and through a cognitive process,” Castelblanco says. “There are other intelligences that are more felt. Plants have such a complex biochemistry that responds to changes in the environment and that also fits into our brains, making us sick or healing us, for example.”

Rather than approaching the concept of plant intelligence from a purely scientific standpoint, Castelblanco uses artistic research to uncover knowledge. His work involves photographing plants at night, as well as working with indigenous communities to understand their complex ways of relating to plant intelligence.

The area of Colombia where Castelblanco was stationed, a stretch of land that connects the highlands of the Andes with the lowlands of the Amazon, is a critical ecosystem under duress due to mining, drug trafficking and intensive farming and fishing. All this extractive industrial activity has both destroyed sensitive ecosystems and disrupted indigenous communities.

“I’m interested in how human and vegetal communities interact, cooperate or form an alliance. And how these alliances also develop into resistance movements [to extractive industry],” he says. “Plant intelligence is a way to open new channels of dialogue and thinking around a cultural shift towards the natural world, using art as a vehicle or a catalyst for this conversation.”

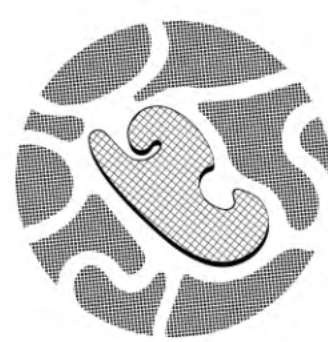
Castelblanco came to CMU with a focus in social practice and his conception of the purview of what social practice can mean has expanded since. His work not only deals with human-to-human relationships, but eco-social and bio-cultural relationships; in other words, human-to-non-human relationships and vice versa. He recently completed a Ph.D. in artistic research at the University of Arts Linz and Academy of Art and Design Basel.

While a CMU student, Castelblanco started the Para-Site School, an ongoing project that uses the resources, people and infrastructure of universities to serve those excluded by these institutions. In 2010, he was introduced to a group of “Dreamers,” undocumented youth raised in the United States. At the time, the DREAM Act, which would have provided legal status and a path to citizenship for these young people, had recently been defeated in Congress.

This group told Castelblanco that their dream was to go to college. He told the students, “Let’s enact this dream now and invent a course together,” which was an introduction to video. He says he thought, “I’m not a lawyer or an activist, but one thing I do hold is the keys to the university as an MFA student. I can check out equipment and book rooms, plus I have experience teaching.”

Despite pressure from the university to supply contact information for the group of students, which were sensitive details since the group was undocumented, Castelblanco managed to teach this group clandestinely for a year-and-a-half.

Since leaving CMU, Castelblanco has continued with different iterations of the Para-Site School in Cuba and the Royal Academy of Art in London, among other locations. Most recently, the project channeled money intended for a residency in Basel, which could not be completed due to COVID-19 lockdowns, to indigenous land defenders in Colombia in the same region where Castelblanco conducted his research in plant intelligence.



featuring the following:

image by Matt Eich

learn more:

[Trailer AYÉÑAN: Territorios de Agua \(2023\) \[Vimeo\]](#)

[◀ Back to CFA Magazine](#)

[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](#)


Take It with You



Alumna Liz McDonough Releases Line of Upcycled Bags for Urban Outfitters

written by
Cally Jamis Vennare

[Liz McDonough](#), a Master of Arts in Design alumna of Carnegie Mellon University's [School of Design](#) (MA 2022), recently designed and released a line of upcycled bags through Urban Outfitters. McDonough, who currently serves as the experiential marketing manager for Urban Outfitters, launched the line of bags, made from 500 square feet of used vinyl signage, on Earth Day 2023.

The idea for this line came from McDonough's work as experiential marketing manager, overseeing the creative direction, planning and execution of Urban Outfitters' branded events, which range from hype events celebrating the launch of new products, meet and greets with musicians, and cultural tentpole moments around festivals like SXSW and Coachella. At a great deal of these events, the Brand Marketing Team would typically create giant stage banners that could be as large as 20 feet tall by 12 feet wide.

McDonough's inspiration for the line of upcycled bags came from a large banner that was used for an Urban Outfitters music event in 2022.

"As we were wrapping the event and breaking down the stage, I watched the vinyl stage banner being rolled up and I saw an opportunity," said McDonough. "It was a huge cut of colorful, patterned, durable material, but not something we had a use for beyond the event. I felt strongly it shouldn't be thrown away, so I shipped it back to my apartment while I ruminated on how best to upcycle it. I am sort of notorious for this and often find myself bringing discarded objects and materials home — both to do my small part in disrupting the waste stream, but also because I love an upcycling project, especially one that allows me to experiment with unexpected/found materials.

"The banner sat in its box for a few months until one night in January 2023 when I was struck with the inspiration to transform it into different styles of bags," continued McDonough. "I had seen this done while working for the Sundance Film Festival from 2013-2015 and the concept has always stayed with me. I spent all night building prototypes and brought them into the office the next morning to pitch the idea. One conversation led to another, and I began piecing together a team of incredible collaborators spanning across the URBN organization from Brand Marketing and Buying teams to Production & Sourcing, Sustainability & Social Impact, and beyond. The unrelenting support and enthusiasm from these amazing cross-functional partners helped bring the concept from vision to reality in just over 3 months."

In April 2023, Earth Day, Urban Outfitters launched a 100 SKU collection of one-of-a-kind bags, all made from vinyl signage from past events. The collection launched online and in key Urban Outfitter store locations in New York (Herald Square) and San Francisco (Union Square).

The collection sold out online in 72 hours.

For McDonough, she attributes much of her knowledge and passion for circularity and sustainability to the School of Design, in particular Jonathan Chapman's courses, often referencing notes and texts throughout this process.

"I have always been interested in recycling and reuse, and I came to CMU fresh off working at an e-comm retailer and certified B-Corp with sustainability as a key brand pillar," said McDonough.

"I thought I had a pretty solid understanding of the term, but after diving into the curriculum at CMU, I realized there was so much more to learn, and I soaked it up. Analyzing our relationship with the physical world and understanding the consequences of material waste, along with themes of circularity and systems thinking were present throughout, especially in Jonathan Chapman's courses, Design Minds and Design That Lasts. Upon graduating, I knew I wanted to implement this knowledge into whatever role I pursued, and the vinyl bag project happened to be an actionable opportunity from where I sat.

"Throughout the design process for the collection, I found myself referencing notes and readings from these two classes — refamiliarizing myself with circular mechanisms that brands have successfully acted on, the value and importance of highlighting the past life of the material, design details to engage the user that reach beyond the tactile," continued McDonough. "I feel strongly about these considerations for the obvious reasons — most notably, the current state of the environment and the role that broken recycling streams, an overabundance of material waste, and single-use objects have played in its demise, and I want to do my small part to disrupt these systems — but I also love the challenge that comes with designing with strict parameters, and allowing found materials to generate ideas. My best ideas are realized when I have little to no resources. And in the case of the vinyl bags, this type of product allows individuals to engage with upcycling and circularity through the lens of a ubiquitous object that they understand and use every day: a tote bag. I believe there's something very powerful in that."

Now that the collection has sold out, McDonough has plans for another run of bags in the near future.

"The intention moving forward would be to fabricate the bags directly after the event from which they came as a way to extend the experience and offer something special to those who attended," said McDonough. "This also allows us to share the event with those who were unable to attend, injecting some inclusivity into the experience."

Along with the upcycled bags, McDonough will be partnering more closely with the Sustainability & Social Impact team at Urban Outfitters to explore opportunities to recirculate off-cut fabrics from their own production process. But McDonough's passion for sustainability doesn't end at Urban Outfitters

"Personally, I am on the cusp of launching my own design studio and aim to showcase a fabrication process I explored at CMU in the IxD Studio Course," said McDonough. "I'm interested in disrupting the cardboard and paper recycling streams and turning these materials, along with a little flour and water, into furniture and home decor. Many corporations are moving to plastic-free solutions and in turn, reaching for cardboard and paper alternatives — while paper and cardboard decompose faster than plastic, the recycling stream for these materials is equally problematic."



[◀ Back to CFA Magazine](#)

[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](#)


Triple Threat

Alumnus Nate Bertone Directs, Designs and Writes

written by
Pam Wigley

The multi-talented Nate Bertone (pronounced Bertoni) is one of those people who meets success in each area in which he works. As a designer and director, he has created world premieres of new plays, musicals and ballets across the country; but right now, he is focused on his personal writing projects, and for good reason. Bertone ([School of Drama](#), BFA 2016) is grabbing the attention of Broadway producers and investors with his new play, "The Seaview Nursing Home for the Newly Deceased."

Becoming an interdisciplinary artist (writing, directing, set designing) was a journey of self-discovery for Bertone, a Salem, Mass. native who fell in love with set design at a very young age. In the basement art studio at home, he and his late grandfather created scale model replicas of famous ships that sailed the world, which sparked a fascination for looking at the world from a different perspective.

During a recent visit to his hometown to design a regional production, Bertone was watching the Tony Awards (in the same room he watched them growing up) and was surprised to be mentioned in an acceptance speech by his mentor and friend, Beowulf Boritt. The award-winning designer (2023 Tony, Drama Desk and Outer Critic's Circle Awards) recognized Bertone for his contributions to Susan Stroman's production of "New York, New York."

"All of us were, at one point, that kid who watched the Tonys and were in awe of the community and art that was created there," Bertone said. "I've gotten to experience what it means to be part of the Broadway community thanks to Beowulf. At the core, I love to tell stories — whether through directing or writing. Using theater, in general, to move people through a moment is my passion. I've always known I want to use art to heal, and that's my top priority post-pandemic."

During his time at CMU, his commitment to helping others move through difficult moments stood out. At a 2013 new student orientation, Bertone was invited by Vice President of Student Affairs and Dean of Students Gina Casalegno to give a speech to incoming students. Casalegno continued to be an inspiration to him during his time at CMU as did Director of the Center for Student Diversity and Inclusion Shernell Smith, with whom he presented a new musical, "Polkadots: The Cool Kids Musical," as part of a multicultural and diversity initiative. School of Art Professor Charlee Brodsky also supported him in the creation of "We Wore The Masks," a photo-journalistic exploration of the masks we wear to protect our vulnerabilities.

Drama faculty member Anne Mundell was another huge inspiration in his interdisciplinary journey. "She pushed me to do what I wanted to do. She ignored the boundaries of standard collegiate limitations. There was an openness and excitedness about what I could become." All of these women, he added, helped him to believe he could do whatever he set his mind to do.

Bertone pursued his first mission as a freshman: The School of Drama's Playground Festival. He submitted a 30-minute play, "Letters From War," and later learned that drama faculty member Barbara Mackenzie-Wood had been sitting next to his roommate during its performance and asked if the writer was an MFA student. Freshman Bertone was elated and used that inspiration as a catalyst to take as many writing classes as he could, both at CMU and abroad at Central Saint Martins in London.

He continued to explore writing, but also delved into set design and directing. Of all these things, Bertone said he dreamt of being a writer "more than any other role I've done. I want to tell stories that help people move through life's difficult moments."

Bertone's current project is one of the hardest, yet most cathartic stories Bertone has told. It is, in effect, a love story — a tribute to his mentors, Karen Nascembeni and Steven Richard. Nascembeni, the general manager of Bill Hanney's North Shore Music Theatre, gave Bertone his start in the industry as a professional designer while he was studying at CMU. Shortly after the COVID-19 pandemic began, both Nascembeni and Richard contracted the disease.

"Karen was in a coma for 31 days and, thankfully, survived, but Steven lost his life to COVID-19 very early on," Bertone said. "I was inconsolable."

It prompted Bertone to write his newest work, "The Seaview Nursing Home for the Newly Deceased." The two-act play tells the story of six people who have recently passed and appear to be stuck on earth in an abandoned nursing home. Unaware of their passing, they all discover that they are deceased when they meet a divinely-connected real estate agent on a mission to sell this property. Before their time on earth runs out, each must figure out why they are stuck in this "in-between" in order to pass on to "the great beyond."

The play, said Bertone, "Aims to bring healing and catharsis. Facing loss, especially after the pandemic, with laughter, levity and heart, is already proving to help those who have shared their feedback with us thus far."

Fellow CMU alum and set designer, Christian Fleming, called the play "an example of art rising from the pandemic." Fleming attended an industry backer's reading after a sold-out debut at North Shore. The reading, on May 9 and 10, 2023 at Open Jar Studios, was picked up by Showtown Theatricals as general management and is being produced by Nascembeni, with the support of Bill Hanney/North Shore Music Theatre, Haley Swindal, Greg Deluca, Laura and Marc Freedman, Proof Productions, and Greg and Jean Chastain.

Bertone is thrilled with the audience reaction to the play so far. "It's been the greatest joy of my life as I watch people respond to the play and openly talk about grief and loss." The play is currently in the next stage of development and is working toward a world premiere in 2024.

To those current students and recent alumni who have diverse interests, Bertone offered advice as they seek their place in the industry. "I think the reality is you have to want it," Bertone said. "To go to CMU, you have to be hungry for knowledge and growth. That's at the core of why I chose CMU. Your heart HAS to be in the work. To choose Carnegie Mellon is to invest in your worth as a human. The world is at your fingertips there."



[◀ Back to CFA Magazine](#)

[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](#)

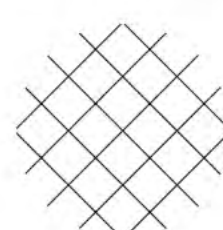
In Memoriam



Remembering Lance LaDuke, Douglas Ahlstedt and Mildred Miller Posvar

written by
Dan Fernandez

The [School of Music](#) lost three dear friends and colleagues in fall 2023 who are all deeply missed.



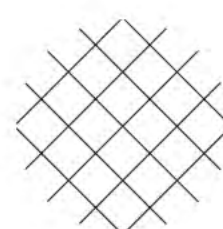
Prof. **Lance LaDuke** tragically passed away in December at the age of 56 from injuries sustained in a devastating fall. He was a professor, a euphonium player, an ensemble director, an advisor, an expert in entrepreneurship, a multimedia series producer and host, an avant-garde artist, and a friend to scores of students, alumni, faculty and staff at Carnegie Mellon.

Former Head of the School of Music Denis Colwell remarked, “For those who knew him, it goes without saying that Lance possessed an extremely well-developed sense of humor that enlivened every meeting he attended. Lance leaves behind a legacy of dedicated students, amazing entrepreneurship, compassionate care for colleagues and a too-short career of great musicianship.”

“Dedicated to the well-being of all students, Lance supported ideas and initiatives beyond his studio,” recalled Gino Mollica, a 2020 alumnus in vocal performance. “His creativity and innovation manifested in projects like the Modern Musicking Show and the SubSurface: Site-Specific Sight & Sound concert, showcasing his commitment to enhancing the student experience.”

LaDuke was an associate teaching professor in euphonium and music business, as well as coordinator of special and creative projects, director of the Tartan Tuba Band and the first-year advisor to undergraduate students in the School of Music. During his distinguished career, he performed with numerous outstanding ensembles including the Pittsburgh Symphony and Philadelphia Orchestra and taught at prestigious institutions around the world including the Juilliard School, the Royal Academy of Music and the Hong Kong Academy for the Performing Arts. He joined the CMU faculty part-time in 2003 and received his full-time appointment in 2012.

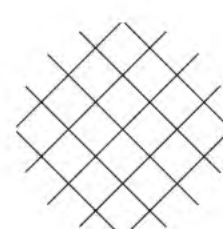
Jesse Stiles, associate professor of sound media, remembered that after founding the Exploded Ensemble with LaDuke in 2016: “Within a span of two years we went from having no experimental music group to having music critics hail our students’ efforts as leading the city in musical bravery. The work was never-ending, but it was filled with so much laughter and light that it all felt somehow effortless.”



Retired Professor of Voice, **Douglas Ahlstedt**, 78, passed away in November. An Army veteran who served in Okinawa in the 1960s, he went on to study at Eastman School of Music before he embarked on an operatic career at the San Francisco Opera, Deutsche Oper am Rhein and the Metropolitan Opera.

A tenor, Ahlstedt sang over 60 roles at the Met Opera in over 200 performances. He joined the faculty at the Carnegie Mellon School of Music from 1998 through his retirement in 2020 where he trained generations of singers and charmed his colleagues with his kindness and generosity.

“Doug Ahlstedt was not only a dear friend to me,” recalled Associate Teaching Professor Roseanna Irwin, “but he was also my mentor at Carnegie Mellon. He was never too busy to share a cup of soup or make a cup of espresso for me ... Doug was kind, positive and a good listener. He was proud of his students and would have done anything for them to help advance their careers.”



Mildred Miller Posvar, retired artist lecturer in voice and one of the leading operatic voices of the 20th century, also died in November at the age of 98. Her incredible career included 23 consecutive seasons at the Metropolitan Opera where she sang in 338 performances, including a record-setting 61 outings as “Cherubino” in Mozart’s “The Marriage of Figaro.”

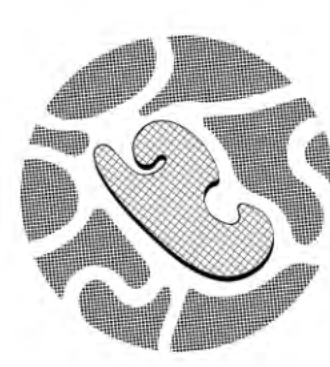
Born in 1924 in Cleveland to German immigrant parents, she studied at Cleveland Institute of Music and New England Conservatory of Music. A mezzo-soprano, she went on to perform at every major opera company in the United States as well as the great European houses, was a regular on radio and television (including “The Ed Sullivan Show”), and performed with such luminaries as Leonard Bernstein, Plácido Domingo, Leontyne Price and George London.

Miller married Wesley Wentz Posvar, a former high school classmate of hers, who went on to become the chancellor of the University of Pittsburgh. As the First Lady of Pitt, she was a major booster of Pitt athletics and played host to an array of functions and events in that capacity. She was a civic leader who supported many cultural organizations in Pittsburgh, including the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra and Pittsburgh Opera.

She founded the Opera Theater of Pittsburgh, now known as Pittsburgh Festival Opera, in 1978 with Helen Knox, and was heavily involved in nurturing new artists through both Opera Theater and the annual Mildred Miller International Voice Competition. She taught voice at Carnegie Mellon for over 20 years, only retiring in 2020 at the age of 95.

Mark Carver, associate teaching professor of collaborative piano, remembered that, “Millie was one of a kind ... artist, teacher, friend. I remember taking her to dinner on her 90th birthday; her comment to me was, ‘Beethoven and I share the same birthday ... but he’s a little older!’”

Marianne Cornetti, artist lecturer in voice, took over both Miller’s teaching studio at CMU and also artistic leadership of the Pittsburgh Festival Opera. “Millie loved, adored and nurtured young opera singers; it was her passion. She is the true meaning of a legend in Pittsburgh and the operatic world! She touched many, many singers and gave them their start. She will be missed, but never forgotten.”



[◀ Back to CFA Magazine](#)

[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](#)

Leading with Style

Joanna Lovering Champions Women at Work at Copper + Rise

written by
Cally Jamis Vennare

When [Joanna Lovering](#) (BHA 2004) enters a room, people sit up and take notice. She exudes confidence, dynamism and high energy. In addition, her vibrant personal style — grounded in her strong maternal roots, her flowing red hair and colorful eyewear — is dramatic and impactful.

As the founder of [Copper + Rise](#), Lovering helps companies engage, develop and retain their pipeline of women leaders at every stage of their growth by serving as a leadership and presence consultant.

Carnegie Mellon had an “enormous” influence on the entrepreneur’s career trajectory. “I attribute my winding road of a career to the interdisciplinary programs that I was a part of,” said Lovering. “It was absolutely foundational.”

[The BXA Intercollege Degree Programs](#) — which operate at the intersection of disciplines, innovation and curiosity for undergraduate students — enabled Lovering to immediately fuse multiple passions into one by integrating her love of drama with psychology.

“I always knew that show business wasn’t for me. I love the art form but not the business aspect of show business. And at the same time, what always interested me about digging into a script was the human element ... bringing the characters to life and thinking about their motivations, their decision making, who they would be in real life. There’s a lot of psychology that goes into that thought process. And I have always been fascinated by the human condition — people and learning about how they think. For those reasons, I thought that I’d become a drama therapist.”

But the BXA programs changed that thinking. As did her three BXA advisors — a degree program advisor, drama directing advisor and psychology advisor — who taught Lovering important lessons about the confluence of drama and psychology and how these seemingly disparate disciplines could blend together.

“Looking back, CMU and the BXA programs taught me that the vertical-only route isn’t the sole process towards a career. Every day, our world is becoming more and more interdisciplinary. And so, this program and the processes that a student encounters — building your class schedule, creating a capstone project, managing the tactical or pragmatic pieces of the BXA programs — were essential to helping me realize the way that my brain works and the way that I could exist in the world.”

Lovering followed her BHA degree with an M.A. in social-organizational psychology from Teachers College, Columbia University, which put her on a track of leadership training and coaching at companies including JetBlue, Citi, L’Oréal USA, Tiffany & Co. and smaller startups like Daily Burn.

“But I didn’t leave all of that theater training in the dust. My familiarity with the stage lent itself to teaching corporate management courses in front of hundreds. Even now, as a consultant, I do in-person and virtual speaking events where I’m on a literal stage. Thank goodness for that training!”

But, in addition to all of that stage work, Lovering’s newest creative outlet is fashion styling. And yet again, as her BXA degree program taught her, she’s been able to seamlessly integrate her love for wardrobe into an essential part of her business.

What started as shopping excursions for friends who needed suits for their post-graduate interviews eventually evolved into Copper + Rise, Lovering’s executive presence firm that teaches transformational leadership skills like confidence and self-advocacy that most people think are unteachable. The business has two strategic arms: consulting with companies who are investing in their pipeline of women leaders and working with ambitious women through 1:1 coaching.

Over the years, Lovering has realized that leveling up in your career isn’t just about what you know. You also have to look, speak and act like a leader — and that’s where executive presence comes in. She defines executive presence as “the style and substance of who you are.” Lovering’s background in psychology, leadership development and fashion styling is the trifecta she brings to this work.

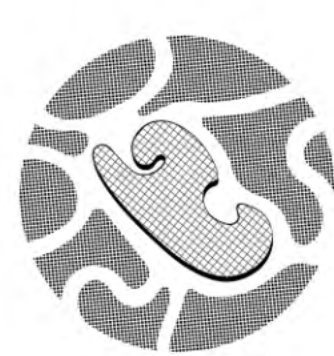
“What I’m really passionate about is the person I’m dressing, more so than the clothes themselves. I ask questions like, ‘How do you want to present yourself to the world? How do you want people to feel when they just look at you?’ Many of my clients are on television and speak in front of thousands of people. Like it or not, their audience is making a judgment about them just by what they see. So, why not optimize those data points for them so that they’re received and heard? And the real work is developing their sense of style that feels authentic and influences their audiences positively.”

Whether it’s style, stage presence or leading teams more effectively, Lovering has helped thousands of ambitious professionals navigate their world of work. Her ultimate goal is to encourage more gender diversity in C-Suites and boardrooms through authentically differentiating oneself to make the greatest impact.

Lovering was actively involved in resident and student life at CMU where she honed her leadership skills as a resident assistant (RA) and community advisor (CA), participated in Booth and Buggy for Fringe, played intramural sports, and performed in a rock cover band named Idiot Boyfriend and CMU’s production of “The Vagina Monologues,” to name only a few highlights. She is excited to once again offer her time and talent as the incoming president of the [Carnegie Mellon Alumni Association Board](#) in 2024.

As she is in life and work, Lovering is passionate about this newest leadership role and about staying connected with CMU’s inspiring and accomplished alumni community.

“Carnegie Mellon students are beautiful humans in so many ways, but mainly because the majority of them are people who are very, very smart in multiple disciplines. That may seem scary to many people ... it did to me! Truthfully, there were times I felt like some sort of alien amongst brilliant people who seemed to know exactly what they wanted to be when they grew up. But I’m here to say, ‘use me as an example.’ My career and my life are a patchwork quilt of lots of different strengths, passions and energizers. I somehow have been able to cultivate the majority of those things to build a career and now a business out of it. And it truly started with my BXA degree program.”



◀ Back to CFA Magazine

[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](#)

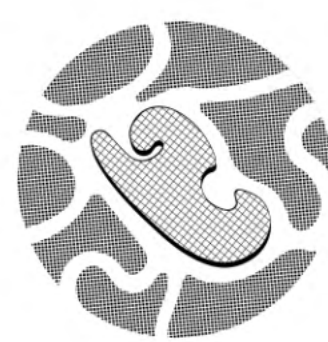
From e-Waste to Exhibition



"Data Dump" Exhibition in the STUDIO

written by
Harrison Apple

On Dec. 12, the [STUDIO](#) celebrated the end of the third original course taught in its flexible laboratory since the open application process began in 2022. Daragh Byrne, associate professor in the [School of Architecture](#), taught "Data Dump" — his advanced course focused on the flow and recapture of e-waste as part of a creative practice. Over the semester, the STUDIO hosted guest lectures, e-waste recapturing and creative reconstruction to showcase the creation of projects ranging from shredders turning into mycelium-based plastic decomposers to philosophical game design on the limits of agency in environmental activism and conspicuous consumption. Daragh's students exhibited their work in the STUDIO and CFA's Great Hall, drawing a large crowd of spectators and guest reviewers. They also brought unique and challenging inquiry to the STUDIO, supporting a teaching program that gives a vital budget and direct equipment access to faculty who wish to use it as their classroom. The STUDIO looks forward to hosting Olivia Robinson and Melisa Orta Martinez in the new year for "16224 IDeATe: Re-Crafting Computational Thinking with Soft Technologies" in which students will work across robotics and textile design to connect computer programming and matrix mathematics to tactile material.

[◀ Back to CFA Magazine](#)[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 are a few that came through last time!



[School of Architecture](#) alumnus **Gary Li** (2017) was promoted to principal from associate architect at [Kostow Greenwood Architects](#) (KGA) in September 2023. Li was one of two new principals named, and the move establishes equity ownership for both across the leadership team as they expand their practice, building on core proficiencies and successes.

Li joined Founding Principal Michael Kostow and colleague Lena Dau-Ping Fan, the latter of whom also was named principal for the promotion announcement.

"Lena and Gary step into their new roles prepared to continue the evolution and growth of our firm," Kostow said. "They have proven themselves as architects and as leaders and, together, we're shaping and creating a business to meet our clients' evolving aspirations and to expand on our successes."

Fan and Li each have considerable tenure with the firm and have expanded their responsibilities with proven successes. Li is a member of AIA and is a LEED Green Associate, NCARB. He joined KGA in 2017. He is a juror for the international WAN Awards and a volunteer on NCARB's Examination Committee. His recent speaking engagements include being invited to present the James Earl Jones Theatre Annex project at the League of Historic American Theatres National Conference in Kansas City. Li resides in Brooklyn.

Image: (from left to right) Michael Kostow, Lena Dau-Ping Fan, Gary Li. The principals, equity partners and leadership team at KGA. Photo credit: Jeremiah Hadi Go.

[School of Art](#) alumna **Shana Moulton** (2004) will present a site-specific installation at the Museum of Modern Art from February 17 through April 21. The installation, titled "[Meta/Physical Therapy](#)," employs the artist's signature blend of spiritual imagery, medical technology, popular culture and references to high art and dollar-store kitsch.



[BXA](#) alumnus **Stefan Romero** (2019) is the artistic director of "America's Tapestry," an exhibition celebrating America's 250th Anniversary in 2026. Composed of 13 embroidered panels, this modern interpretation of the Bayeux Tapestry visually narrates stories from America's 13 colonies.

Each panel depicts a figure from a historically underrepresented group in each colony who displayed an act of courage or ingenuity during the creation of our country, according to Romero.

"The panels will be designed by me in collaboration with historical organizations representing each of the original 13 colonies," he said. "The execution of the embroidery will be completed by needleworkers within each state from 2025 to 2026. An appropriate gallery space will be designated to house the completed tapestry in 2026."

Image: representative of what the mural may entail; it was used to help secure funding for the exhibition.



[School of Art](#) alumna **EvaLu (Damianos) Spears** (1957) exhibited her watercolors in the PWS Aqueous Open 2023 International, an online exhibition that appeared Oct. 7-Nov. 30, 2023.

Image: Spears shared a watercolor that was part of the exhibition, titled "Sky Prism."

[School of Architecture](#) alumnus **Donald Tellalian** (1959) retired after many years of practice in the Northeast.

"Many of my projects were with Tellalian Associates Architects & Planners, LLC, Boston," he said. "I do continue to be involved with Parcel 13 on the Rose Kennedy Greenway that runs through downtown Boston. Until very recently, I served for 15 years on the Newton Historical Commission."

Tellalian and his wife, Barbara, share time with their two children and eight grandchildren, who all live near the couple. He noted that "we are both healthy and hope the country and the world manages to settle down in peace and community."

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

[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

