

Conversation with
DAN BYERS,
Carpenter Center
for the Visual Arts,
Harvard University

I is for

Institute

What's in a name? This is the question underlying our investigation into ICA: how it came to be, what it means now, and how we might imagine it in the future.

In a field so often defined by precarity, this project is grounded in a spirit of collegiality, a looking outward that aims to facilitate self-reflection. As such, we have engaged colleagues primarily from small- and mid-scale contemporary arts organizations to discuss their institutional histories and how they understand the stakes of their work. The *I is for Institute* website acts as a repository for these ongoing conversations, as well as archival material relating to ICA's history. We thank our many colleagues for their generosity, enthusiasm, and frankness. Their thinking has in turn energized our own.

— Alex Klein,
Dorothy & Stephen R. Weber
(CHE'60) Curator, Institute
of Contemporary Art,
University of Pennsylvania

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Arts, Harvard University

Dan Byers is the John R. and Barbara Robinson Family Director at the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts and Lecturer on Art, Film, and Visual Studies at Harvard University, where he teaches curatorial studies.

With Alex Klein and Tausif Noor.

ALEX KLEIN:

We've had the opportunity to speak with colleagues who represent a lot of different organizational models. Some people have founded their own institutions, while others are directors, like yourself, who are rethinking the structures that they have inherited.

DAN BYERS:

I've really stopped to think about the different typologies of the institutions where I've worked. We are relatively young in this new incarnation of the Carpenter Center, with a curatorially-driven program—this version of the Carpenter Center is only about four years old. There's a lot of education I'm doing within the university and within the department where we are housed.

When I'm speaking about what we do, I'll often say, "in museums..." and then I stop myself because it's not applicable. We're not a museum, but there are certain qualities or characteristics of museum culture that I'm trying to instill in a place that is still quite unformed. I hadn't previously reflected on the terms "workshop" (I worked at the Fabric Workshop) or "center," (I worked at the Walker Art Center). When I worked for the Walker, that idea of a "center" was very important because it came out of the WPA art center movement of the 1930s, which has this incredible civic impulse. These were places where people could take classes, be exposed to progressive art, and really participate in the functions of a community civic center, which had art experience and

art education baked into it. That ethos has always been a part of the Walker in terms of its obligation to the public and to experimental art—it is sort of sitting or living with the tension between those two things.

When I arrived here in Cambridge I realized, “OK, we’re at the Carpenter *Center* for Visual Arts.” This is the typology of a college art center, which traditionally houses the studio art department, including the classrooms/studios, and then there’s usually a gallery. Sometimes it’s an *arts*-plural center and you have theater and dance as well, but we’re a “visual arts” center.

In these kinds of art centers, the gallery is usually kind of an add-on or it’s a place to see the work of faculty and students that occasionally brings shows from the outside. This is not who we are at CCVA. In some rather interesting ways, we’ve been that type of institution in the past, but we’ve moved beyond that and are much more interested in the model of having an ambitious program of artist-centered, commissioned-based exhibitions embedded within a department of studio art and film pedagogy.

AK:

What year was the Center founded and how did it come about?

DB:

The Carpenter Center was built in 1963.

AK:

The same year as ICA!

DB:

There was a university committee convened to address the arts at Harvard, and at that point, the department of which we are a part— formerly the Department of Visual and Environmental Studies, now the Department of Art, Film, and Visual Studies (AFVS)—did not exist and that actually was founded a few years after the Center was built. It was always built to house the university’s studio art and film programs alongside galleries and other spaces for display. But it very much came out of the Harvard Graduate School of Design, or GSD, which is the architecture school. The school’s dean, architect Jose Luis Sert brought on Le Corbusier to design the building.

We have always had a very close relationship with the GSD. Traditionally, there have been faculty who are appointed between the GSD and AFVS. The Carpenter Center is the only building in North America by Le Corbusier; there is a doctor’s residence by the architect in Argentina, but that’s it for the Americas. Though we’re a non-collecting institution, I always say our one collection object is the building. It’s visited by people from across the world.

We often find these pilgrims wandering into classrooms or getting lost in the Film Archive's offices.

Our main gallery space, the Sert Gallery, was designed from the beginning to be an exhibition hall. It's size and placement mirrors that of the painting studio, which sits across the ramp. Like most of the building, the walls of these spaces are glass, so there is a dialogue established between sites of making and sites of display. From the beginning, there was an idea that exhibitions and display would be a part of the curricular vocabulary here, and then immediately after the building was opened, they began to also use the first-floor lobby space as an exhibition space, which has continued to this day. Our third-floor space is very autonomous—it's the only part of the building that one can't reach by the elevators, and it sits on the other side of the "studio stack," divided by the ramp that cuts through the building. Our second space, on the first floor, is very public and functions as a social space as much as a gallery.

AK:

You mentioned that CCVA is a non-collecting institution, but did they ever think about having a collection?

DB:

Yes. There's a really interesting photography collection that was gathered at the Carpenter Center beginning in the 1960s through 2002. Then in 2002 it was put on permanent deposit at the Harvard Art Museums. Initially, the collection consolidated a number of photography collections at Harvard that focused on social documentation. Davis Pratt was the curator from 1965 to 1972 when he became the first photo curator at the Fogg Museum. It was a teaching collection, but also a radical contemporary photography experiment that was far ahead of its time.

Barbara Norfleet led this experiment and largely built the unique collections. Norfleet, who is now 95 years old, was one of the first women to receive a PhD from Harvard. She began as a social scientist, and became an artist, curator, and educator and created a photography program that equally privileged vernacular, found photographs alongside fine art photography, and was deeply committed to photography's function as both art and social document. She is a very interesting artist, but above all else I hope people look into her curatorial work, which was truly groundbreaking, and too little-known today.

AK:

I think of the Carpenter Center as being a contemporary art institution, but has that always been the mandate?

DB:

Harvard has always been more than slightly allergic to contemporary art. Especially when it comes to *visual arts and making* as a legitimate intelligence, or analog to scholarship. This is despite the existence of the Harvard Society for Contemporary Art, founded by students Lincoln Kirstein, Edward M.M. Warburg, and John Walker III, which showed early exhibitions of European Modernism in the US from 1929 to 1936. For many years, for instance, in the music department, you could study music, but you couldn't make music. There is no School of Art at Harvard, and no MFA program.

In any case, our department (Art, Film, and Visual Studies) was founded as a place to teach visual literacy, not visual art per se. There was an idea that Harvard's students should be educated not just in text-based, language literacy, but also in a literacy of the visual world and they should be able to think through visual problems and paradigms. So, the initial curriculum in the building came out of the Bauhaus and was very much centered on formal questions about perception and the mechanics of seeing. Photography and film were essential parts of the department because these were the mediums through which the world was recorded. A vital film department with a strong documentary tradition has helped define the culture of the Center from the beginning. Robert Gardner, who founded the Harvard Film Study Center, was a major force in the department. Despite very interesting exceptions through the 1970s, it wasn't until the mid-1980s that the curriculum, and then the exhibition program, turned to contemporary art as we would think about it now.

In terms of the exhibition program, the 1960s and 1970s saw many Bauhaus shows, and multiple Le Corbusier drawing shows. Every once in a while, there would be a David Hockney or Harvey Quaytman or John Cage show. But these were interspersed with Swiss graphic design shows, exhibitions of crystals from India, and Mayan sculpture, and early solo shows of photographers like Danny Lyon and William Eggleston, owing to Barbara Norfleet's involvement. But through the 1960s and 1970s there was almost no conceptualism, minimalism, post-minimalism, etc., or any "identity" based art of the 1980s. Things opened up significantly in the mid-1980s with contemporary art, postmodern architecture shows, exhibitions of non-Western art, and collaborations with writers and experimental filmmakers.

AK:

What was the Center's perceived relationship to the other institutions under Harvard's umbrella, such as the Harvard Art Museum, which is literally right next door?

DB:

In some ways, the founding of the Carpenter Center relieved the Fogg Museum from having to work with living artists. Despite being connected by the building's concrete ramp, in many ways there had been distance between the institutions. Harvard has a very strong art history program that was central to the development of the field in the 20th century, and the Fogg Museum trained many of the mid 20th century's museum directors. It was heavy on history and museum work, less so on living artists. The Harvard Art Museums actually comprises three museums consolidated into one building: the Fogg Museum, which collects Western art from the Middle Ages to the present; the Arthur M. Sackler Museum which focuses on art from Asia, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean; and the Busch-Reisinger, which is dedicated to art from German-speaking countries.

The most explicit way in which the Carpenter Center is related to the Art Museums is through the creation of the Fogg's Department of Modern and Contemporary Art in the 1990s. They had no space for contemporary exhibitions in the Fogg, so they rented the third-floor gallery of the Carpenter Center. For over a decade, the Fogg's contemporary program took place in our building. They installed the climate-controlled gallery within Le Corbusier's open plan space so they could show objects from their collection. They also installed a café adjacent to the Carpenter's charming terrace, as there wasn't one at the Harvard Art Museums at that point and was a very popular gathering spot. Basically, it was a contemporary program annex or outpost of the Harvard Art Museums.

Linda Norden, who was the first curator of contemporary art at the Fogg, did many of her shows here, including her important Pierre Huyghe commission, and the fascinating show *Extreme Connoisseurship* in 2001-02. Helen Molesworth, who followed Linda, did shows of Moyra Davey, ACT UP, Paul Chan, and Felix Gonzalez-Torres, among others, at the Carpenter Center.

AK:

And is that because the Carpenter Center had a director, but not really a director/curator?

DB:

Mostly, yes. Frankly, I'm still in the middle of trying to piece together the exact chronology of who programmed the Carpenter Center over the decades! Originally, the director of the Carpenter Center was also the Chair of the Department. The founding director, who shaped the curriculum along with the exhibition program was Eduard Sekler, a Viennese architectural historian and important voice at the GSD. Robert Gardner, the filmmaker and anthropologist and descendent of Isabella Stewart Gardner, was Director from the mid-1970s through mid-1980s, and again in the 1990s. There was a curator named Roger Brandenburg-Horn, who I admittedly don't know enough about. He was curator from 1968 to 1993, but it seems his main role was as an exhibition designer—there are some very beautiful and experimental exhibition designs from that era. He seems to have had a falling out with Gardner who converted the third-floor exhibition space to student studios during the 1990s. They did not return to being galleries until the Fogg occupied the space for their contemporary program.

Artist Ellen Phalen was Director and Chair in the 1990s. There was a spectacular rift between her and the university, which is chronicled in a 2002 *New Yorker* article by Calvin Tomkins called "Can Art Be Taught? How a Dismissal at Harvard Threw an Entire Field into Question." Phalen left in 2002, but during her time she brought in an incredible group of faculty members, including Glenn Ligon, Peter Schjeldahl, Sturtevant, Nayland Blake, Barry Le Va, and many others. She instituted a highly attended artist talk series, and many of the visiting artists were subjects of exhibitions in the first-floor lobby exhibition space. It is Phalen who worked with James Cuno, then director of the Harvard Art Museums, to bring back the proper gallery space, programed by his new department of contemporary art. My position—as a separate, endowed, curatorial director of the Carpenter Center—was created in 2013 by the department Chair, and Carpenter Director David Rodowick, a film studies scholar, who is now at University of Chicago.

AK:

Oh, so it's a new position. Was Jim Voorhies the first person to hold it?

DB:

Jim was the first one, yes.

AK:

Was there ever a requirement that the CCVA show student work or work of professors?

DB:

When I arrived we did two exhibitions for the department each year: the Visiting Faculty show in the fall, and the student Senior Thesis show in the spring. In my second year I eliminated the Visiting Faculty exhibition. My first summer, as we tried to nail down available works by artists like Elle Perez and Ken Okiishi who were teaching in the fall, it seemed like a tradition that had outlasted its usefulness. As a curator, it was frustrating to be working with these great artists, but in such a limited way (i.e. what was the easiest work we could locate to ship at the end of August). Traditionally it had given students the opportunity to see the work by faculty they might study with. Of course, now each artist has an extensive website for that purpose. There were many other faculty and student shows over the decades. Some of the best shows from the 1960s and 1970s are wonderful, experimental, collaborative student shows. While eliminating the faculty show has allowed us to plan and fund our exhibitions more professionally, I do miss the opportunity of working with artists who I admire who, for whatever reason, I might not have put in a show. But the Visiting Faculty program means that every year we have an interesting group of artists in the building who become a part of our community.

AK:

Do you oversee anything else in the building like the film program, or is it strictly the gallery exhibition space?

DB:

The Harvard Film Archive is not under my purview. It's a separate institution that is technically part of the library and is overseen by film curator Haden Guest, but it is an important part of the Carpenter Center and has an ambitious and diverse program of screenings many nights a week. Essentially, the building hosts three complimentary entities: an academic department of studio art, film, and visual studies; a contemporary art center; and a cinemathèque/ film collection.

AK:

Interesting. Who do you report to?

DB:

I report to the Chair of the department. It's a strange system because they're not evaluating the program, nor do they have any involvement in its organization. Mostly I keep them abreast of what's going on, and we have a monthly meeting with me, the Chair, and Haden Guest, just to coordinate

activities, and to formulate collaborations. The Chair position rotates every three to five years, so I end up having more standing conversations with the Dean of Arts and Humanities and the Associate Provost of the Arts at Harvard. The Dean is the one who will find more money if I need it, and who can advocate for the Center in the apparatus of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. Meetings with the Dean and the Provost tend to be more about the ambition of the institution and things like that. But programmatically, it's a very independent position and institution.

TAUSIF NOOR:

I'm wondering if the geographic locations of the Carpenter Center and the ICA/Boston—the distinction between Cambridge and Boston—have any impact on your curatorial and programming direction. Do you sense any kind of relationship between the Carpenter Center within the university, and the Carpenter Center in the larger contemporary art scene in Boston?

DB:

That's a really good question and it gets to the uniqueness of this city and region being a city dominated by large universities. There's a very different culture in Cambridge than there is in Boston, broadly speaking—culturally, socially, politically, and that's manifest in the art world here, as well. The ICA/Boston is very much the standard bearer of contemporary art in the city for a very broad public, and they are more like the MCA in Chicago or like MOCA in LA. ICA/Boston has a kind of obligation towards a very broad public, whereas, at the Carpenter Center, we're much more in line with the List Center at MIT, or the Renaissance Society in Chicago. The List and the Carpenter Center and the Rose at Brandeis form a kind of alternative to the ICA in Boston, meaning, the programs can be a bit more experimental, oriented towards research and cross-disciplinarity, and geared towards a contemporary art-interested audience rather than a very broad public. The ICA/Boston has more money and more visibility. We have, I would say, more freedom and more ability to take risks at CCVA. Then you have the MFA which has its own contemporary program that's ramping up. The Gardner museum has a contemporary program that's quite interesting and based in a residency model. The Harvard Art Museums has an eight-member Department of Modern and Contemporary

Art, yet a lot of their work is geared towards collections, rather than exhibitions. They operate much more slowly. But there's a pretty strong institutional ecology in the Boston area, not to mention all of the interesting art historians and artists who teach at the many universities.

It's interesting being here. It's a really good fit for me in a lot of ways and I'm having a great time, but what I miss most is the public, and that sense of conversation with a wider public. When I worked at the ICA/Boston it was complex; like many contemporary art museums, it wasn't the most diverse public, although that is changing now. And because the ICA/Boston is located far away from residential neighborhoods, at the time that connection to community could feel tenuous.

When I worked at the Carnegie Museum of Art and at the Walker, I recognized that these were two institutions that took their position as civic, public-facing institutions really seriously, and you would feel that your projects had an impact because a very diverse audience was seeing them. I understood that many groups of school children, and families that didn't seek out contemporary art would visit because we were somehow a part of the city like a sports team would be. The educational mission was oriented out towards the city and its residents. Whereas here at the Carpenter Center, my immediate constituency is students, faculty, and staff at the university, which is great because it's an audience that is looking to learn. They are looking to be exposed to new things and are expecting the kind of critical rigor that is in the other kinds of classes and programs at the university. But I miss the school groups, the groups of retirees, the longstanding members who saw every show, even if they didn't "get it." It's a tradeoff.

Harvard in particular is an elite institution with a pretty fraught past, and you could say present, in regard to the political and wealth elite in this country. It's not often oriented towards the public beyond its gates, and I see our contemporary art center as one of the valves between the public and the university. Ours is a site where the university's resources can be shared with the broader public and for us to welcome the public in.

We are one of the few spaces on campus that is free and open to the public, which we welcome in emphatically. One of my biggest accomplishments is a sign for the building, which it didn't have before. Our sign is explicitly on the street amongst all these bricks and white columns, and declares, "Free and Open to the Public." That message is, strangely, a radical thing. In these times, with real attacks on expertise and on universities, I think it's so important that we proclaim that we are free and care about the public.

AK:

That's a really great point that you make. At ICA Philadelphia we have a sign that says "Free

for All” on the outside of our building, but we’ve actually changed our marketing direction this season and decided not to do exhibition banners anymore. This season, we decided to just have banners that have “Free, Coffee, Art” on them because we want to message more broadly that ICA is a place that you can go and hang out. It’s a balance between communicating about our shows and welcoming a general, non-art audience into our space.

DB:

I’m all for that. Sadly, most people walking by won’t know who Renée Green is, for instance. On the street, I’d rather lead with the fact that you are welcome in, and then share a beautiful Renée Green show! We actually do have signs—one for the institution, and one on our ramp—that do indeed include the exhibition title.

AK:

For our generation, who grew up with institutional critique, I think that institutions have negative connotations with regard to mainstream power structures. On the other hand, there is a sense that when things are under attack, institutionalization is one way to keep things safe. It’s one way to protect the things that you value.

DB:

I think it’s the moment to rearticulate institutional value to publics. I think that’s why some ICAs or institutes struggle with explaining to people that they’re open to the public, like you said, and also that they’re not just places of elitism and high-level research. No one knows what an institute is!

AK:

Right, but it’s funny that an

institute is more alienating to people than a museum, because I feel like the institute was created in contradistinction to the museum, right? It was something that was symbolic of something else. I mean, you're a center, right? I'm curious how that language functions for you.

DB:

I've appropriated basically all the values of somewhere like the Walker Art Center and their lineage in the WPA. For me, it's a word that has a visual, spatial, sort of town square connotation. It's the center. It's where people come together. Center is a location. Having a building that's so iconic reinforces the physicality of that word, so it's where multiple actions and agendas literally intersect.

This building is bursting at the seams with programs that are often in, I would say, productive antagonism with each other: There'll be a silent film being screened and we'll have a super loud video installation, and the projectionist will run upstairs and say, "We're screening Charlie Chaplin and we can hear Sondra Perry!" and that is a problem, but it's also the beauty of this place. It's a small building. And all of its activities are felt collectively.

In addition to the two floors of contemporary art exhibitions, there are studio/classrooms with Nora Shultz and Karthik Pandian teaching in one and Matt Saunders teaching in another, Stephen Prina on the fifth floor, Annette Lemieux on the fourth floor, and Elle Perez teaching photography in the basement. They're artists of consequence and add their own practices to the energy in the building. Not to mention there's Giuliana Bruno and now David Joselit teaching theory seminars. And so, for me, when it's working, that's the most exciting thing here—you have this hum of activity, and then you have students coming through too.

AK:

When did you take over the directorship?

DB:

June 2017, which is a year ago.

AK:

Have you already had your one-year anniversary?

DB:

It's coming up in a week.

AK:

How many staff are there in the Center?

DB:

We are now a staff of six basically full-time people, and one part time person who is the gallery attendant on weekends.

TN:

The Carpenter in the Center's name—does that indicate an endowment to Harvard?

DB:

It's a person who gave a substantial amount of money to name the building when it opened.

AK:

What direction do you hope to see the center go in under your tenure as director?

DB:

Right, so, I don't fully know. It's been such a fascinating thing—as a curator at a museum or an institute or whatever, you show up and you're part of an apparatus, and you fit yourself into it and you make some changes, and obviously your shows are the way that you articulate a subjectivity within a place. This is very different. It's small and there are so few of us on staff that my behavior or my agenda or my mission has an outsized impact. On the one hand, my hope is very simple: I want this to become just like a fully-functioning contemporary arts center—meaning we do a few shows a year and a few catalogs a year. A lot of this has to do with me figuring out the right staffing and schedules, but also, we share a building with this department and with the film archive, and one of our gallery spaces is basically a lobby. There are a lot of specificities. Jim had this very concise mission that the Carpenter Center is dedicated to the synthesis of art, design, and pedagogy, and he was really good at articulating this mission-driven program. I'm still working on revising our mission and revising our program description.

AK:

Is there a new mission?

DB:

I've written a few grants this year which have different versions of it, but I haven't put it on the website yet because I'm still on a listening tour. I would say that in the ecology of Harvard and of Boston, we can contribute by being a place that is very much driven by artists. We are beginning to orient our program towards new commissions, so that most of our exhibitions give artists the opportunity to make new work, in a context that is staffed, budgeted, and "valued" to support work that is not yet processed or mediated. And because we're in a building that teaches studio art and because artists are literally work in this building, I want to model for students the different kinds of ways of being an artist, and different models of artistic practice, but also just, how do you live your life as an artist?

To that end, we've spent half of our budget, I would say, and half of our time devoted to public programs. That's been a shift for me as a curator, to really think about the curatorial as it relates to public programming and doing an excess of artist talks, and just having artists very present in our day-to-day. At Harvard, almost every single department has an artist in residence—the School of Government has artists, the Center for South Asian Studies has artists, the Philosophy Department has an artist-in-residence. And it's great that they do, but they are all working towards a kind of instrumentalized, or disciplinary-specific purpose, whereas the Carpenter Center is the place where artists can just be artists, and the work can breathe in that way, and create its own context and world, even as it inevitably relates to the social, political, cultural framework of our time. How can these new commissions, these major works be models for ways of being in the world? I'm kind of obsessed with models as objects and as ideas; for years I've been working on an exhibition about models, which I talk about with everyone!

AK:

Is there a model of the Corbusier building?

DB:

There are a few. There are two models which we keep on view at all times. One was made by Le Corbusier's studio and one was made more recently by GSD students. I think about this building as a model as well. It models behavior through its architecture, and proposes a model for ways to make art, and the ways the arts relate to each other; it's a recursive, meta kind of thing. I think about models physically, but we're also here to model artistic practice and artistic behavior, so how can I think deeply about modeling as our mission?

Our gestures are concise and yet, I also wonder, can an artist talk stand for something more? If a model is a teaching object that reduces either in size or in complexity an idea or experience that would be too large or complex to understand otherwise, then how might we think about a program representing more, but standing in for something else? For instance, we can't do a Dara Birnbaum show, but having her come and talk and then meet with students and be interviewed, how can that have ripple effects that make the experience last within the institution?

AK:

I think there's also this sense that within the US at least, art always has to justify itself, whether it's in relationship to the market or education, or other links to capital and institutionalization. It always has to perform something more than what it might actually be.

DB:

Totally. Especially in a university that has had a skeptical relationship to art, it's important to just sort of let it be, and define its own space and culture, and also, for students to feel like this is a place where they can be a part of that culture.

AK:

Do you teach?

DB:

I will teach next year. Next spring, I'm teaching a class that actually looks at collections around the university and thinks about the curatorial through collection building, and then, we'll be looking at artist-curated exhibitions and interventions into collections. It builds on my exhibition *The Artist's Museum* which I organized at the ICA Boston in 2016. Harvard's collections are incredible. The archives, the libraries, and the cultural patrimony of this place—and I'm sure Penn is similar—is just jaw-dropping.

A lot of these things are hidden. Jim had started this residency program where artists would look at the building and its history, and so, that is what brought Martin Beck and Renée Green here. I'm going to stop that program and refocus our residency program towards bringing artists here to look outwards into the university and to connect them with different collections and archives and libraries.

I'm hoping this starts a conversation between the Carpenter Center and the different collections. There are incredible collections —library special collections, the natural history and anthropology collections, the list goes on—that are not really shared with the public, and one way to get them out of there is to engage an artist and then either curate something with those objects here or make a work that in some way deals with that collection.

AK:

Right. We've done a similar kind of tiptoeing in that direction. There's been some liaising with the Penn Museum, for example. But I think that sounds amazing, and of course, in a place like Harvard, there are just so many resources that one doesn't even know exist.

DB:

Totally, and this is why I like my class. It's basically a way for me to go around the university and get to know the different archivists and curators and figure out who is willing to play. There are so many interesting curators and librarians who are in basements and no one's knocking on their door.

AK:

It's really interesting that you are relatively new, and everything is still kind of possible. I would love to pick up this conversation with you again in five years.

POSTSCRIPT:

It's June 21, 2020, and I am finally editing this interview more than two years after it was conducted on May 25, 2018. Much has happened over the last two years. I bought an apartment. I lost my mom. I haven't seen our galleries in over three months due to COVID-19. And this summer our country has witnessed a series of brutal murders of Black people at the hands of police, sparking long overdue discussions and change around structural racism and white supremacy.

Alex and I have continued to talk about institutions, during research trips to Berlin, Venice, Ljubljana, and Sicily, and around a talk Alex gave at the Carpenter Center. We devised, and almost launched a travel newsletter specifically for contemporary art curators called *Travel Budgets*. Most

germane to this text is that I've figured out a few things about the Carpenter Center.

Our program is now emphatically organized around single-artist exhibitions of newly commissioned work. We are working on some group exhibitions, including a two-person show with Diedrick Brackens and Katherine Bradford; a show focusing on the legacy of Barbara Norfleet; and, one day, the models and contemporary art show. But by and large, I've found the nature of the relationship, and the time allowed by single-artist conversations most productive and enriching for me and most generous for our community. We balance the single subjectivity of a solo show with a very active visiting artist program, so these public events can feature many different kinds of artists.

I've also found that this new commission model is best done in collaboration with other like-minded institutions. It's more fun too, and it gives artists more resources and multiple opportunities to think through an exhibition's installation. We collaborated with the Renaissance Society in Chicago to work with Liz Magor; with Participant, Inc in New York to work with Jonathan Berger; and with Goldsmiths Centre for Contemporary Art in London and the ARGOS Centre for Audiovisual Arts in Brussels to work with Tony Cokes. This is a model we will absolutely continue with going forward.

We are finally about to print our Renée Green publication. I "inherited" this project from my predecessor, Jim Voorhies, and working with Renée on her exhibitions, public programs, and now this major book has been a highlight of the last two years.

The artist residency program that engages artists with Harvard collections, libraries, and archives has rolled out more slowly than I thought it would. We need to be better staffed to do the research and help open doors for artists. It takes time. We've happily been working with Morgan Bassichis as the inaugural artist in this program, and I'm eager to see where we end up with Morgan.

We eventually did publish a new mission statement. It reads:

Free and open to the public, the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts is the center for contemporary art and artists at Harvard University. Through exhibitions, new commissions, public events, publications, and residencies, the Carpenter Center is dedicated to artist-centered programming and building a vibrant community around contemporary art. This community is defined by an ethos of experimentation, diverse perspectives, and making connections across disciplines and fields. Housed within Le Corbusier's only building in North America, the Carpenter Center's projects are enriched by the educational mission of the Department of Art, Film,

and Visual studies, and the cultural resources of a large research university.

Finally, a word about institutions: I've always been a believer. I've seen institutions as collections of people who make culture together. I believe in them as containers for ideas and for history, and as forms that bring together people towards common purpose. But that belief has been shaken by my own awakening to the ways institutionalized racism and structures of exclusion permeate all institutions, even those that seem the most progressive. I've learned a lot in the last month. I'm grateful for this opportunity to look inward, even as I acknowledge that this opportunity for me is the cause of so much pain for others. I truly hope that we are at a moment of undoing. Of remaking. Of transforming fixed forms and containers into provisional states, where they can be tested for equity, generosity, and political potential. I'm still a believer, if only for the ways that the Carpenter Center has created the forum for conversation and reckoning with my staff and given me a context from which to speak with my colleagues, and with artists, about how we undo, and how we move forward.
