



**A Painter's
Perspective**

The Art
of Illusion

Opera
in Its
Next Act





ON THE COVER: Photo of Richard Raiselis by Sasha Pedro

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@buarts Photo by Tom Tranfaglia



A NOTE FROM HARVEY

He wanted to be a painter. As I walked down Commonwealth Avenue with Richard Raiselis, the esteemed artist-educator told me his story.

Professor Raiselis entered college on a premed path. It was one that would have taken him to medical school and life as a physician. However, he found himself increasingly enamored with art—and the joys of a creative life—as he enrolled in elective courses in painting. This newfound passion was consuming. He changed majors late in his college years. He blazed a new trail for himself.

His story stayed with me. In reviewing the college's curriculum (which is one of the things that deans do) with School of Visual Arts faculty, we realized that we were denying ourselves the opportunity of reaching, educating, and graduating students who, like Professor Raiselis, found their calling after starting college. In addition to our existing BFA degree, we designed a second undergraduate degree, a BA in Visual Arts, to meet the needs of transfer students as well as those interested in double-majoring. The new degree, an immediate success, brought a new stream of exceptional student-artists to our college. More important, it gave those students the opportunity to chart a new path.

You won't encounter this story in the feature article on Professor Raiselis. His positive impact on BU is far-reaching. Ana Valdez, in her California studio, told me about her process—from how she mixes colors to how she signs the back of her canvases—before pausing to say, "I learned that from Richard Raiselis."

Within the College of Fine Arts, several hundred exceptional professional artists are united by their deep commitment to mentoring the next generation of scholar-artists. The impact of their teaching as well as the words that they share in passing—including to a dean on the street—can be profound.

What is a piece of advice from a BU faculty member that shifted your thinking or led to a great breakthrough? I would love to hear about it. Email me at cfadean@bu.edu.

Harvey Young, Dean of CFA

WRITE: Share your thoughts on this issue—and anything else CFA-related—at cfaalum@bu.edu.

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Natasha Moustache

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OPERA EVOLVES

New initiatives. More diverse stories. Is opera in its strongest era yet?

SHOWCASE

*Mosaic Excavation
with Carpets (2024)*
Egg tempera, acrylic
gouache, and India ink
on panel; 36 x 60 in.

THE MUSEUM OF THE MIND

Inspired by objects unearthed on archaeological digs, James Gold paints artifacts of his own invention, from papyrus scrolls to woven tapestries to stone mosaics

By Sophie Yarin



The painting before you, *Mosaic Excavation with Carpets*, depicts two artifacts emerging from the mists of antiquity: a woven tapestry and a ceramic mosaic, the former partially covering the latter. Both objects are meticulously rendered—the madder dye, the weft weave, the patina of the fired clay. You can see the fibers within the textile’s frayed edges, the mortar that joins the mosaic’s pieces. No archaeological detail is too small, no attribute left out.

The painting is real. It hangs, five feet wide and three feet tall, on the wall of BU’s Mugar Memorial Library. The artifacts it depicts are not. They were born in the mind of the painter, James Gold.

“My work has to do with transformation, taking something real and then using intuition and imagination to transform it into something else,” says Gold (’24). “These objects have a past, even though they’re entirely fictional.”

Welcome to the museum of the mind.

DIGGING IN

How do you create an imaginary historical artifact so convincing that it wouldn’t seem out of place in an antiquities collection? The answer: lots and lots of research. Gold, who came to the School of Visual Arts for his master’s degree in painting after completing his bachelor’s at The Cooper Union, kindled a lifelong fascination with archaeology while growing up in Providence, R.I. His mother, a librarian, would often save for him books the library was planning to toss, including volumes on the history of design and accounts of famous archaeological digs.

“It’s always surprising, the little things that will come up in research,” he says. “I’m interested in how different interiors are made, what the different materials and trends were, the history of ornamentation, and how it applies through time.”

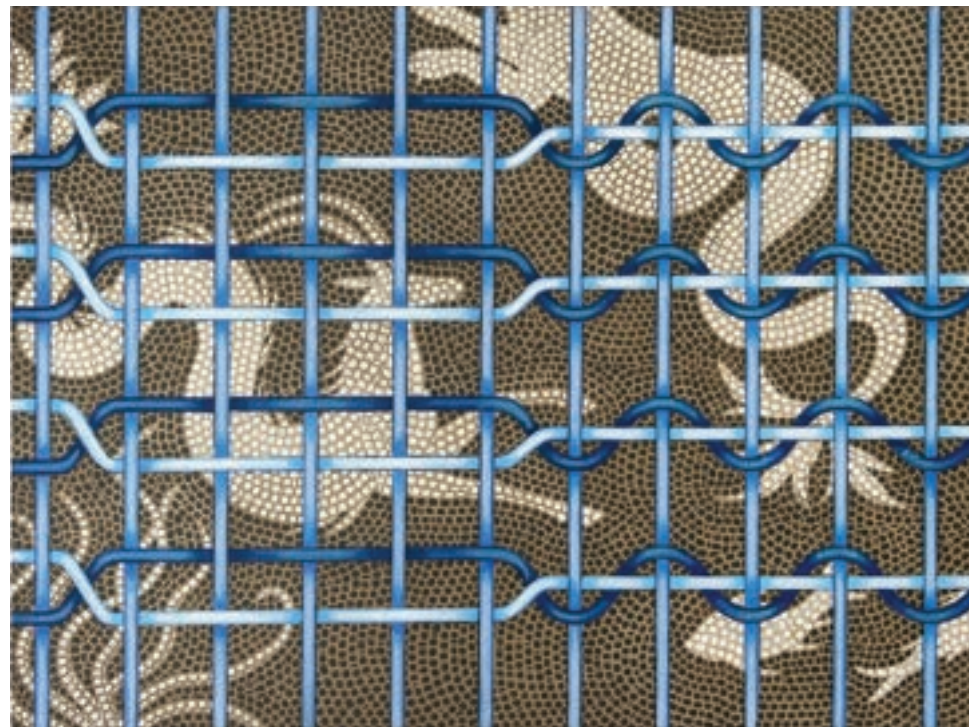
The books were a jumping-off point for Gold’s imagination: by collaging images he found compelling, he was able to compare a medieval European tapestry to an Ottoman

one, Byzantine mosaics alongside ancient Roman frescoes. The cultural and geological contexts would blend together, creating a new archaeological epoch in his mind—one with its own handicraft processes and aesthetics.

“I’ll put an ancient [artifact] next to modern art, or combine different historical bits or anything that just feels a bit incongruous,” he says, “But I’ll weave them together in a way that visually makes sense.”

While Gold claims not to favor any particular historical era, his most striking works, done in mixed media on large-scale wood panels, evoke the Classic civilizations of the Mediterranean: Greco-Roman, Etruscan, early Byzantine. His fondness for rich hues, sumptuous textures, and heraldry are evident in his *Night & Day* diptych, which features two sets of ancient symbols—twirling vines, crossed arrows, crescent moons, and astrolabes—one set rendered in deep indigo and the other in vivid crimson and gold.

“When I was at BU, I discovered this encyclopedia of heraldry, which included some of



Right: *Fluffy* (2024) Egg tempera, acrylic gouache, and India ink on panel; 26.5 x 23 in.

Below: *Wide Net* (2024) Egg tempera, acrylic gouache, and India ink on panel; 16 x 20 in.





Above: *Papyrus Scroll on Coral* (2023) Oil paint, India ink, acrylic gouache and pigmented gesso on fabric-wrapped panel; 30 x 47 in.

Right: *Heraldry Duo/Night & Day* (2023) Egg tempera, acrylic gouache, and India ink on panel; two panels, each 20 x 16 in.

the images I used in *Night & Day*—which also looks like an ancient Roman mosaic in some ways,” he says. “I make these artifacts by taking something from one source and transferring it through another, like heraldry into mosaic, or a mosaic into weaving. It’s a game to be played through painting.”

During his time at BU, Gold also felt compelled to audit an archaeology class taught by Andrea Berlin, a College of Arts & Sciences professor of archaeology and religion, and the James R. Wiseman Chair in Classical Archaeology at CAS. She picked up on his enthusiasm and, once the course had ended for the semester, secured him a spot on an archaeological dig in Larnaka, Cyprus—not a common occurrence for most CFA students. His job was to make detailed illustrations of whatever the researchers unearthed.

“It was a different way of approaching objects: rather than just describing the

textures and painting it free-form, or simply inventing things, it’s all about exact measurements on a one-to-one scale,” he says. “I’m holding this object in my gloved hand, trying to draw it like a photograph.”

Ensnared in the Larnaka Museum, Gold made his way through a backlog of finds, re-creating them with a Staedtler pen through an intricate process that showed each crack, divot, and warp more intimately than a photograph could. Working in such an exacting, scientific manner was a sort of boot camp for the artist, and it bore a lasting influence on his process.

“I’m trying to see how convincing of a texture I can get, how convincing of an artifact,” he says. “Does this seem like something that has always existed?”

CREATING SOMETHING REAL

“I think a lot about the sense of touch when I’m working on a painting,” Gold says. “If I’m

feeling a cool tile floor or the woven fibers of a textile, how do I translate that?”

The main tools in his arsenal are egg tempera, India ink, and acrylic gouache, which he uses in different proprietary combinations to recreate the velvety feel of papyrus or the smooth gloss of ceramic, at times layering medium on top of medium. Sometimes he’ll mix his own paints and gessos, adding marble chalk to give them extra granularity. He’ll also use sandpaper to slough away layers of paint and gesso to achieve roughness, or scratch at the surface with a stylus. The finished product has gone through layer upon layer of iteration to achieve realism.

“I feel like there’s a little bit of an alchemical or ritual sense to my process for each material,” he says. “People will say, ‘I can’t believe

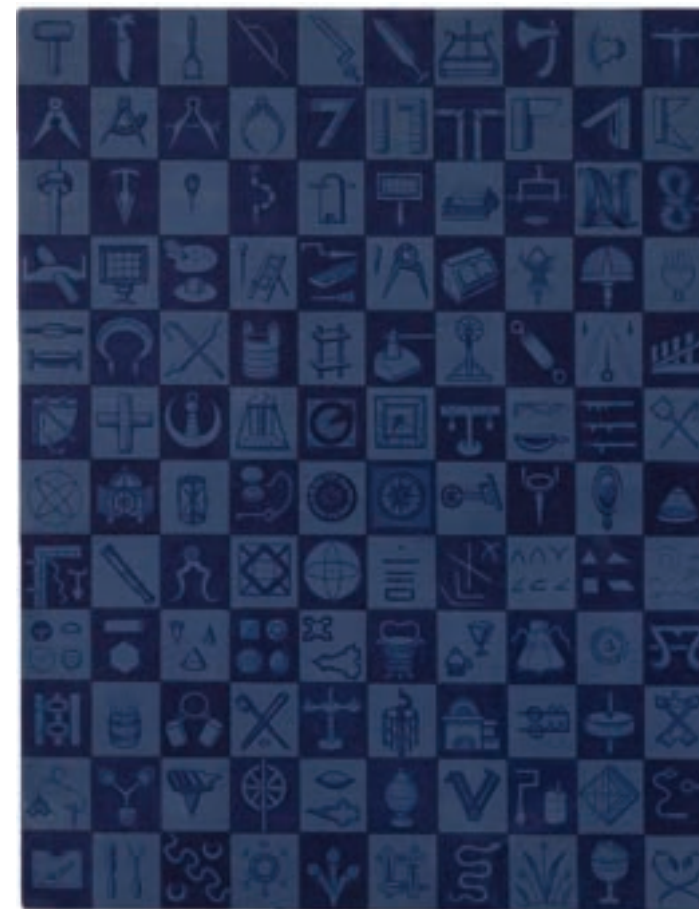
it’s not really a textured mosaic on the wall, or a textured carpet.’ I’m like, go ahead and touch it.

“I think about presentation a lot, and I do feel like I’m making an imaginary museum,” says Gold. “Each viewer has a subjective experience, too, in terms of what’s real or what’s invented. I enjoy all of the different reactions that I get.”

The museum of the mind was open for business in September, at Gold’s first solo show. Following a residency at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, he showed eight works at an exhibition at the Morgan Lehman Gallery in Manhattan.

“It’s fun to have a kind of control over what’s real,” he says, “and having this sense of illusion and play is definitely the driving force behind all of it.” ●

“These objects have a past, even though they’re entirely fictional.”



RISING STAR

Entrepreneurial Spirit

By Steve Holt

SHORTLY BEFORE graduating from BU in 2024, Sarah Coleman was getting nervous. In a few months, the acting major would step into her career in professional theater—a notoriously difficult industry to crack. And yet, she was determined not to let fear paralyze her.

“I’m really into manifesting, so I sat down one night with these feelings of anxiety and listed out things I wanted to see for myself, that I knew I could accomplish,” says Coleman (’24). “Booking a national tour was at the top.”

Achieving that goal took less than a year. After quickly landing roles in productions at the Forestburgh Playhouse in upstate New York (*Rock of Ages*, *Escape to Margaritaville*, *Rocky Horror Picture Show*) and New Jersey’s Axelrod Theatre (*Fiddler on the Roof*) in 2024, the New Jersey native spent much of 2025 on the road with the national tour of *The Addams Family* as the



saloon girl and understudy for Wednesday Addams.

In between near-nightly performances, Coleman finds time to run her photography business, which she started as a teenager, and post viral content for her 300,000 TikTok followers. Recent posts include dispatches from the *Addams* tour and updates on a family-owned Brooklyn brownstone she’s been restoring. Coleman says her primary motivation is to create an additional stream of income.

“I realized how profitable



Coleman as the saloon girl in the 2025 national tour of *The Addams Family*.

TikTok was and how I could monetize the thing that’s already so big in my life,” she says. “From there, I took brand deals, I make content, and I make money from that content.” She adds that an actor’s social media feed has other benefits: it can serve as an extension of their personality, info that’s helpful for casting directors.

CFA asked Coleman about her entrepreneurial spirit, her experiences on the road, and her advice for any young Broadway hopeful.

You’ve got a lot of side hustles! After I realized that [musical theater] was something I wanted to do, part of the whole stability thing for me was, how can I be a self-starter and make multiple streams of income so I don’t have to rely on theater. I was always told that you just don’t make money being an artist.

What’s your first tour been like?

It’s the hardest thing I’ve done in this industry so far. I’ve seen some cool places, but then I’ve also seen places in the middle of nowhere that no one would ever think to visit unless you’re going there for work. Being able to see those different ways of living and meeting all kinds of people has been very eye-opening and interesting. I’m seeing the whole country with the best people ever.

Dream role?

Katherine Howard in *Six*.

Advice for a theater kid who wants to be on Broadway?

Take the fear and turn it into fuel. With musical theater, it takes specific drive and motivation, because you are your own boss at the end of the day. You never stop honing your craft. It takes a lot of time, but as long as you’re interested and you keep going, that’s when you really blossom.

Ken Yatsukura Photography

Doug Levy (Deschanel), Cydney Scott (Opera); Tom Tranfaglia (Del Vecho)

FOR MORE NEWS AND EVENTS VISIT BU.EDU/CFA.

SOUND BITES

“These days, empathy feels like it’s in short supply. The world doesn’t just need your skills. It needs your perspective. Your patience. Your courage to understand before judging. So bring empathy with you. For everyone you will encounter. But also...for yourself.”

EMILY DESCHANEL (CFA’98, Hon.’25) addressed graduates at Commencement on May 18, 2025. The day before, she addressed CFA grads at the College of Fine Arts Convocation ceremony.

Hear more from Deschanel at bu.edu/cfa/news/articles/2025/bu-commencement-speaker-emily-deschanel



AWARDS

DISNEY PRODUCER PETER DEL VECHO HONORED

Peter S. Del Vecho (CFA’80), a producer at Walt Disney Animation Studios who has worked on major films including *Frozen*, *Frozen II*, *The Princess and the Frog*, *Raya and the Last Dragon*, and *Wish*, was honored for his leadership and contributions in the arts with a Best of BU Alumni Award in September 2025—the highest honor bestowed upon alumni by the University. While back on campus, he took some time to speak with CFA students and Dean Harvey Young in a fireside chat.



Michelle Johnson (’07) (right) and Juliette Kaoudji (’26) rehearse.

OPERA

(Re)Discovering a 100-Year-Old Forgotten Opera with BU Artists

One-act Cuban opera *El Caminante*, which premiered in 1921, was rediscovered and revived by Boston University faculty, alumni, and students, including David Guzmán, assistant professor of music, opera star Michelle Johnson (’07), and mezzo-soprano Juliette Kaoudji (’26). The opera had its (re)premiere in fall 2024 in a concert-style performance by Boston University Opera Institute and Symphony Orchestra. PARMA Recordings’ GRAMMY®-winning Navona Records label has released the recording, giving audiences everywhere the opportunity to experience it.

Scan the QR code to watch a video of the performance.



CONVERSATION



Ronna Kress

Patrick Strattnier

Tara Rubin

**RONNA KRESS
AND TARA
RUBIN DISCUSS
THE ART OF
CASTING FOR
THE SCREEN
AND STAGE**

By Steve Holt

Chris Sorenson

CASTING DIRECTORS MAY NEVER BE the most recognizable names in the credits, but every great film and stage director knows how vital they are to a successful show. Famed director Baz Luhrmann regularly turns to Ronna Kress ('81) to cast his films, which include *Romeo + Juliet* and *The Great Gatsby*. The pair spend months finding the right actors for each role, often holding hours-long audition workshops to nail the casting.

"I spend so much time on any movie I do to make sure relationship casting is right, because it doesn't matter what I do, you can't fake that," Luhrmann told ABC's *Good Morning America* in 2021. "You can corral it. You can curate it. But if you don't get that right...it's never going to work."

The first of Luhrmann's films Kress cast, *Moulin Rouge!*, won two Academy Awards in 2002 and was nominated for best picture. The pair are now working on *Jehanne d'Arc*, a biopic about the teenage saint, due to release in 2027. Kress' other credits—which total more than 100—include blockbusters like *Deadpool*, *Mad Max: Fury Road*, *Pirates of the Caribbean*, and *The Fast and the Furious*.

Casting for the stage is similarly crucial, and few have it done it more prolifically than Tara Rubin (CAS'77). The founder of Tara Rubin Casting (now known as TRC), her credits include a who's who of hit Broadway shows, including *Mamma Mia!*, *Dear Evan Hansen*, and *Six*, to name a few. In 2025, four shows cast by Rubin's agency picked up 31 Tony Award nominations and 12 wins.

Rubin, who transferred from CFA to the College of Arts & Sciences as a BU student, regularly speaks to and mentors students from the School of Theatre. "It means everything to come full circle in this way, and to have an opportunity to share what I've learned with actors who are just starting out," she says.

Rubin and Kress had never met before CFA invited them to discuss their storied careers and how big-time movies and plays are cast.

Tara Rubin: I was thinking about the cast of *Moulin Rouge!* and how the cast seemed like they had been born and raised in that production design; they fit that world so beautifully.

Ronna Kress: Thank you. Baz [Luhrmann] is really inspirational and works in a very different way than most directors. [Casting

"I had been offered an opportunity to cast a Stephen Sondheim Festival at the Kennedy Center... I remember thinking, well, if I never get hired for anything else, I will have met Stephen Sondheim."

TARA RUBIN

directors] usually come onto a project, work for three months, and then you are on to your next project. On *Moulin Rouge!*, I was casting for a year and a half. Baz is always writing and developing the material at the same time that he's casting. The casting process really influences the writing, and vice versa.

On *Moulin Rouge!*, we saw singers who wanted to be actors, actors who wanted to be singers. We were in New York and auditioning actors, and one night we went to see *The Blue Room* [on Broadway]. We were the last ones in the theater, and we both looked at each other and said, "Wait a minute, what are we doing? Why are we not talking about Nicole?" So, [Baz] sent her a note. He sent her a dozen roses. She came and auditioned twice, which was just incredible. She read and sang for us first, and then read with Heath Ledger and Jake Gyllenhaal. Baz worked with Ewan [McGregor] in London and we rolled the dice that he and Nicole would have great chemistry. It was this magical, unbelievable experience.

What made you go out on your own [as a solo casting director]?

TR: It was the challenge. I wondered if there was one more step for me in this field, and I wanted to see if I could take it.

I had been offered an opportunity to cast a Stephen Sondheim Festival at the Kennedy Center—six of his musicals that were going to be done in repertory the following summer. I remember thinking, well, if I never get hired for anything else, I will have met Stephen Sondheim.

RK: That's an incredible first job, and to have spent time with Stephen Sondheim. How do you oversee all of these shows simultaneously? For instance, finding all those kids from [2024 Tony-winning musical] *The Outsiders*. I saw on your website that you have a number of people who work with you, but you have to oversee all of that, right?

TR: Well, in January [2025], I sold my business to four of my colleagues. So it's now called the TRC Company, and they are officially the owners of the company. I am consulting and

casting and working with them. But up until January, I was always so fortunate to have an incredible team of people working with me. They made it possible for our company to work on multiple projects.

RK: And are you doing your auditions live or on tape?

TR: Live. You all are still doing everything on tape, right?

RK: I'll do a lot of the pre-reads either on Zoom or in person. [Baz and I are] are working on *Jehanne d'Arc*, and so first we watch everything on tape, and then we met a select group of actresses in London in June [2025]. Our auditions are like theater auditions. They're three hours long. Baz sees it as a chance to rehearse with the actors. He films the auditions, and so the experience is both auditioning for a film and rehearsing for a play. The only other person [I've worked with like this is director] George Miller on *Mad Max: Fury Road*.

TR: I do think there's that circuit of energy that happens when actors are auditioning in person.

RK: When I [worked] with [legendary casting director] Marion [Dougherty], she had note cards of actors, and sometimes she would sit with me and pull the notes out, and she's like, "Let me see, Robert De Niro: He could be good." And you're just like, "Oh, my God." Her generation were trailblazers for us. I feel like I've had some of that in my career in terms of finding people, but it's not like it was when these people were starting in our business.

TR: I'd love to hear you talk about casting action movies, which I find so fascinating.

RK: Working on *Mad Max: Fury Road* with George Miller—his audition process is very similar to what Baz does. Those auditions were four hours long, with two actors having to play reverse roles. And so many people that we saw came out of those auditions and now have careers, like Gal Gadot, Tom Hiddleston, Michael Fassbender, Jeremy Renner, Gugu Mbatha-Raw, and Ruth Negga. It was just an amazing group of actors who

"Our auditions are like theater auditions. They're three hours long... the experience is both auditioning for a film and rehearsing for a play."

RONNA KRESS

came through that process who weren't necessarily right for the film, but have emerged as the next generation of actors. It's so exciting to see that happen.

TR: It's just so fun to talk to another casting director. It's like being at a parent-teacher conference: an opportunity to speak in depth about a subject you love. Casting directors have forged such bonds by working together and through our professional organization, The Casting Society. Next year we have the historic occasion of a casting director receiving an Academy Award for the first time. Our casting directors worked so hard—people like Bernie Telsey, Lora Kennedy, and David Rubin—to make that happen, and that certainly is significant in our world.

RK: Oh, definitely. BAFTA and the Emmys have obviously started to recognize us and what we do. But in the film world, it's thrilling to see that happen, because so many of the people that came before us should have been recognized.

TR: It's a great legacy our generation can pass to the next. ●



By Marc Chalufour
Portrait by Chris Sorensen

Paul Tate dePoo III, founder and principal designer of Tate Design Group, creates fantastical sets for stage productions in all corners of the entertainment industry.



Paul Tate dePoo III brings a flair for illusion and a love of spectacle to his lavish set designs for Broadway and beyond

Evan Zimmerman for MurphyMade



here's an old story in Paul Tate dePoo III's family. They had gathered to watch the Buffalo Bills play the Dallas Cowboys in the 1993 Super Bowl. At halftime, Michael Jackson exploded from the stage. Accompanied by a 3,000-person choir, fireworks, and a giant inflatable globe, the pop star sang and moonwalked through a four-song set. Five-year-old dePoo (10) was transfixed.

"Who made that?" he asked.

"The football people," one of his parents responded.

"And I famously said, 'The football people did *not* make that.'"

That's dePoo's earliest memory of a true spectacle. Growing up in Key West, Fla., he was far from Broadway.

But childhood trips to see the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus and magician David Copperfield cemented his interest in entertainment. By high school, dePoo was designing his own elaborate magic show, which included making an airplane appear onstage.

Now the owner of Tate Design Group, the New York-based production design studio he established in 2012, dePoo has worked on a long list of plays and musicals, including *Sweeney Todd* and *Grand Hotel*, for which he received a 2020 Helen Hayes Award. He designed *Turandot* for the world's largest outdoor opera stage, in Vienna, Austria, and Usher's 2021–2022 residency in Las Vegas, Nev. He's designed restaurants, corporate events, and a TEDx stage. "It's all theater, it's all drag, it's all performance," he says.

DePoo's productions have ranged from the modest to the grand. His first Broadway show, *The Cottage*—directed

Evan Zimmerman for MurphyMade



DePoo dreamed of designing a theatrical production of *The Great Gatsby* ever since he read the book in high school. His dream came true in 2023, when his designs became the focal point of a *Gatsby* musical that soon moved to Broadway.

"I remember thinking that was one of the darkest books I had read because of how much there was beneath this facade of spectacle."



by Jason Alexander ('81, Hon.'95)—takes place in a living room. His designs for a revival of the musical *Titanic* achieve a very different tone and scale, dominated by massive criss-crossing trusses and walkways.

DePoo relishes using a magician's flair for illusion—but he's also inspired by the exposed rigging and structures of a circus tent. "The base of my style, no matter the scale of it, is that as you zoom further and further in, there's so much detail," he says. "It's intricacy and a very deceptively simple perspective."

There are projects that dePoo still dreams of designing—the Academy Awards, an Olympic Games ceremony, and, of course, the Super Bowl halftime show.

For the past four years he's been living out one of those dreams: bringing *The Great Gatsby* to Broadway.

GATSBY COMES TO LIFE

F. Scott Fitzgerald's classic novel has lived in dePoo's mind since high school.

"I wish I still had the book—I remember doodling what it would look like if it was a play," he says. "I remember thinking that was one of the darkest books I had read because of how much there was beneath this facade of spectacle. I've always been obsessed with it."

When dePoo heard that director Marc Bruni was working on a musical adaptation of *Gatsby*, he created



“The base of my style, no matter the scale of it, is that as you zoom further and further in, there’s so much detail.”

a series of renderings of his vision. After meeting with Bruni about another project, he pulled them out. “I’m usually not that up-front about asking for something,” he says. “But I would’ve regretted it if I didn’t.”

Bruni hired him as scenic and projection designer. DePoo reread the book multiple times and listened to an audio version on repeat, searching for clues about the story’s key locations. Each mention of billowing curtains or a rose-hued interior helped inform his elaborate designs.

Working closely with the lighting and costume departments, dePoo and his team designed almost everything on the stage. To create models of the sets they used 3D modeling programs, 3D printers, and laser cutters. The finished designs were shipped off to specialty shops where the life-sized sets are built. “We are the architects,” dePoo says. “We are also the interior designers and the personal shoppers.”

When *The Great Gatsby* opened at the Paper Mill Playhouse in New Jersey, in October 2023, a *New York Times* critic wrote, “More than once I wished I were sitting farther back in the audience because a production this lush...deserves, like the novel, the long view.” Before the move to Broadway in 2024, dePoo and his

team added even more detail to their scenes. There are elegant mansion exteriors, immaculate interiors, waterfronts, and two cars. With a video projection, they transformed the orchestra pit into a virtual pool.

The sets for the show’s 50-plus scene changes fill every backstage nook at the Broadway Theatre. They require 22 winches, plus tracks to move the sets on- and offstage. DePoo compares the behind-the-scenes choreography to a game of Tetris.

“The design team here has pulled out all the stops and achieved something nearly unprecedented in terms of scale and quality,” wrote Christian Lewis, a critic for *Variety* magazine.

DePoo takes pride in designing video projections as well as physical sets. They allow him to extend the scenery and animate surfaces with textures, movement, and light. Used well, they can bring static sets to life. In *Gatsby*, they play a starring role. When the actors are in a car, for example, projections create a sense of motion; when they’re on the waterfront, Long Island Sound ebbs and flows behind them.

“His projections are masterful, utilizing tiny details (rolling clouds, lapping waves) to transform what might



DePoo’s set designs for *Turandot* (left, opposite) in Vienna, and Usher’s 2021–2022 residency at The Colosseum in Las Vegas (below).

be painted backdrops into amazingly realistic backgrounds,” wrote Lewis in *Variety*. “Rarely has projection design been so expertly executed.”

Tate Design typically has multiple projects in the works. They’ve recently been working on *Immediate Family*, a play directed by Phylicia Rashad; a national tour of *Spamalot*; and a Los Angeles production of *Sweeney Todd* directed by Alexander. And, dePoo says, “*Gatsby* is multiplying.” They’ve built sets for productions in London and Seoul, and a US tour begins in January 2026.

A FLAIR FOR MAGIC

DePoo’s career may have gone in a different direction—if not for Hurricane Wilma. He was preparing an elaborate magic show in Key West, with about 20 high school classmates assisting, when the 2005 storm flooded the theater where they were working.

“I remember it being the biggest relief,” he says. “I knew that the show I had wanted to create in my mind I probably wasn’t able to do at that age. And I remember thinking, I wish I knew how to properly do this.”

After that realization, he decided to pursue design rather than performance. But dePoo has retained the



language of a magician, where illusion and sleight of hand and confusing the audience combine to create a true spectacle.

He still has a vivid memory of sitting in the audience at a David Copperfield show. “Thousands of people were on this journey to believe something that actually wasn’t possible,” he says. “I get a thrill in defining and creating the impossible.” ●

Jerzy Bin

Jerzy Bin; Brian Friedman (Usher)

YEVGENY KUTIK PLAYS FOR COMMUNITY

The violinist will return to CFA for a residency in February

By Joel Brown

Epiphanies can come at strange moments. For violinist Yevgeny Kutik, it happened after a really bad lesson at the College of Fine Arts with a favorite professor, Roman Totenberg.

“I didn’t play well, for whatever reason,” says Kutik (BUT1’00, CFA’07). “I remember packing up at the end of the hour, and it was just kind of awkward. I told him, ‘Look, Mr. Totenberg, I’m so frustrated, it’s just not getting better.’” Totenberg stared at him in silence, then offered a single instruction: “Listen.”

“I said, ‘OK, see you next week,’ and walked out fairly annoyed,” Kutik remembers. “But then, week by week, I was like, that really *is* the secret—to music, to art, to everything. You just listen. And in the listening, everything sort of comes together. It was very profound.”

Totenberg was a School of Music professor emeritus and former chair of the string department when he died in 2012, at 101. Kutik had studied privately with him as a teenager and says the professor was the main reason he chose BU over other schools.

Now a chamber musician, orchestral soloist, and recording artist, Kutik will return to 855 Comm Ave, briefly, as teacher. In February

2026, he’ll appear for a three-day CFA residency, which will include a talk titled “The Art of Creative Endurance: Building a Life in the Arts through Resilience and Ingenuity” along with a master class and a violin recital.

FROM BELARUS TO BILLBOARD

Kutik began his life behind the Iron Curtain. He and his parents emigrated to the United States in 1990, when he was five, leaving behind Minsk, Belarus, for a new life in Pittsfield, Mass. His father had played trumpet in the Belarussian State Philharmonic and became a computer programmer in the US; his mother taught violin in both countries. As a teenager, Kutik studied in precollege programs at Juilliard, the New England Conservatory, and the BU Tanglewood Institute, before earning a bachelor’s degree in violin performance at CFA and a master’s from the New England Conservatory.

Kutik made his big-time solo debut in 2003 with the Boston Pops and has played with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra and many other ensembles at the Kennedy Center, Tanglewood, and Ravinia. In 2014, he released *Music from the Suitcase*, which the *New York Times* praised for its “dark-hued tone and razor-sharp technique.”

The album features recordings of sheet music that Kutik’s mother brought with her in her luggage when the family emigrated. Some of the pieces, Kutik eventually discovered, were by great Russian composers, but all were influenced by vernacular songs—folk tunes enjoyed by everyday people. The album debuted at No. 5 on the *Billboard* Classical chart.

Recording *Music from the Suitcase* “was almost a cathartic experience,” Kutik says. “It helped me to better understand myself, and so I started going down that road, trying to understand the music that my family—and that other families—bring with them on their journeys in life. Music is so connected to who we are as people.”

For his *Meditations on Family*, released in 2019, Kutik commissioned works from contemporary composers inspired by their family snapshots. One of his ears was still attuned to his past.

“I grew up with my grandparents, my parents, and other relatives in this small little bubble in western Mass.,” he says. “At home, I was speaking Russian; in school, speaking English, trying to assimilate. At home, I had a completely different culture, and I kept hearing stories about antisemitism [in



Corey Hayes

Belarus], and I’m piecing together a whole life that came before me. One way that I ended up doing that was through music.”

“DO SOMETHING FOR YOUR NEIGHBORS”

“In the Soviet Union, everyone knew you were Jewish—it was printed on your birth certificate and passport, marking you in the public eye,” Kutik says. “There wasn’t one single incident that drove my family to leave, but a relentless accumulation of indignities and threats that became unbearable.”

As a small child, he was mostly unaware of the whispers from other parents and being excluded by fellow preschoolers. But his mother was dismissed from her

“I started... trying to understand the music that my family—and that other families—bring with them on their journeys in life. Music is so connected to who we are as people.”

conservatory job after they had “filled” their Jewish quota. Officials and colleagues frequently told members of the family to “move somewhere that actually wants Jews.” His great-grandfather was murdered by a factory coworker for being Jewish—a crime that went unpunished.

Kutik heard the stories and, along with his faith and music, they led him on a path of activism and community involvement.

“I am involved with various organizations to try to help raise awareness of antisemitism, and immigrants and refugees. Because I, myself, was a refugee.”

Kutik has played at Auschwitz twice for events commemorating the liberation of the concentration camp. For years he traveled the United States and gave talks at Jewish organizations raising money to support their local communities, including new immigrants of all faiths and others in need.

“One of the most impressive things that Jewish communities across the country are doing is not solely focused on Jewish [people],” he says. “They’re just local meals and resources for everyone.”

He and his wife, Rachel Barker, a writer and an educator, also give back to their community through music. They recently started the Birch Festival in and around Lenox, Mass., where artists perform chamber music for a week in the spring and fall.

“Do something for your neighbors and their neighbors, and then you work outwards,” he says, “But start there.”

His beliefs are also vividly reflected in his art. In April, Kutik will play the Newport Classical Music Festival with pianist Llewellyn Sánchez-Werner, performing a world premiere commission by Jonathan Leshnoff (BUT1’90). It’s based on a letter that George Washington wrote to the Jewish congregation of Newport, R.I. saying that Jews will have religious freedom in the United States.

The letter includes a famous line: “May the Children of the Stock of Abraham, who dwell in this land, continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other Inhabitants; while every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and figtree, and there shall be none to make him afraid.”

“It’s a very beautiful letter,” Kutik says. ●

A ROOM WITH A VIEW

Painter and teacher Richard Raiselis has made his career by seeing the extraordinary in the ordinary

By Marc Chalufour

Photos by Sasha Pedro

Two massive windows—8 feet high, 6 feet wide, 50 panes of glass combined—dominate the north side of Richard Raiselis' studio. The picturesque view from the third floor of 808 Commonwealth Ave. includes the intersecting paths of the Green Line, the BU Bridge, and the Charles River in front of a panoramic expanse of Cambridge. Clouds drift over this scene toward Boston Harbor. A podium holding a small blank canvas sits on one sill.

Raiselis has occupied this studio since 1990 and has painted elements of that scene dozens, maybe hundreds, of times. He has also painted from offices and classrooms in 855 Comm Ave, dorm rooms in Warren Towers and Clafin Hall, and the roof of the School of Law. He spent a sabbatical year painting from a Questrom School of Business deck that overlooks Kenmore Square. He likes looking down at the city, preferably through a window.

In Warren Towers, Raiselis says, "I had a nice rectangular picture window—the frame was already built in." Sometimes he holds up a yardstick at arm's length to decide on the dimensions of a painting. Along one side of his studio, a collection of cloud paintings rest on shallow shelves. Some are as small as 4 x 4 inches. Leaning against the opposite wall is *Independence Day*, which measures 76 x 105 inches and shows Nickerson Field in the foreground and the Boston skyline in the distance. An expanse of clouds fills more than half of the canvas.

"The light here in Boston is sensational," says Raiselis. "There's something about the weather, the climate, and the city of Boston—which is brick red, blue sky, Fenway green—that makes a beautiful kind of tapestry, a beautiful quilt."

Raiselis retired as an associate professor in June, after 36 years at CFA. Before moving out of his studio, he spent the summer and fall organizing a retrospective exhibit for 808 Gallery. The show opens January 2026.

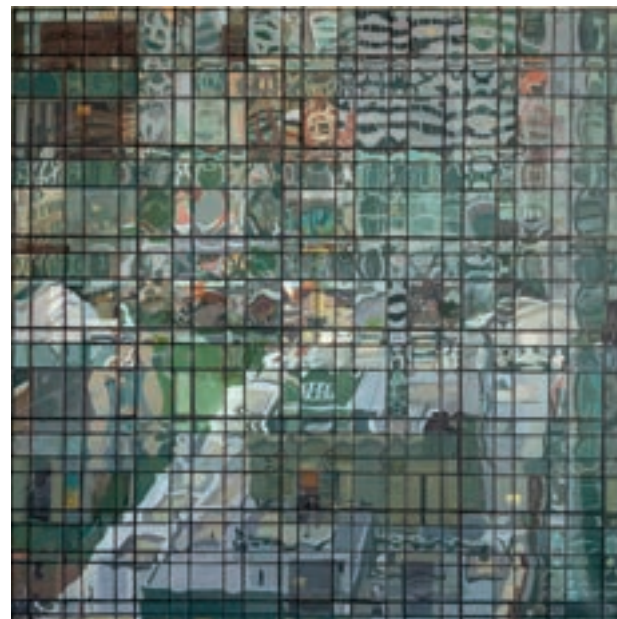


MAKING THE ORDINARY EXTRAORDINARY

Much of Raiselis' work can be divided neatly into categories and eras. There are the cloud studies he did in the early 2000s, his power lines from the 2010s, and trees from the 2020s. Urban landscapes and reflections have remained a focus for decades. A unifying trait across all of his work is the inspiration he finds in ordinary settings. Raiselis paraphrases 19th-century German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer to explain the challenge his subjects present: "The creative mind is capable of thinking something that no one else has thought before, while looking at something that everyone sees."

Before coming to BU, Raiselis spent two years teaching in Italy. He didn't set up an easel at the Vatican or the Colosseum. He painted from his apartment's balcony or the terrace. "I thought if I were any good, I could make something good happen with rather ordinary places," he says. "I think the ordinary is pretty extraordinary if you give it a few moments."

Raiselis' power line series perfectly encapsulates that sentiment. He came up with the idea while walking the family dog. "Coco would look down and I would look up," he says. "I found the power lines around the house, especially at dusk, just really beautiful." The paintings he made are as much about the sky as they are the crooked geometry of the poles and wires. Shades of blue and white-and-gray clouds mix to convey different types of weather and times of day.



Opposite: Raiselis in his third-floor Comm Ave studio, with *Independence Day* (1990), an aerial view of Nickerson Field.

Above: *Boston and the Harbor Islands* (2017) Oil on linen; 32 x 32 in.

Below: *Greenway* (2018) Oil on linen; 30 x 30 in.

More often, Raiselis has found beauty looking down from a high vantage rather than gazing up from ground level. Early in his time at BU, he got permission to spend a summer working in a Warren Towers dorm room, where he painted the view of Kenmore Square and beyond.

In 2006, with the help of an executive at a financial company, Raiselis got access to the unfinished floors of a building on State Street. He still remembers the first time he looked outside the window: "This VP said, 'OK, Richard—close your eyes,' and she raised the blinds. It



"The light here in Boston is sensational."

was a reflection of Boston in a wobbly glass building that just blew me away." He did this work off and on from 2006 through 2019 and created some of his favorite paintings.

From State Street and two other buildings, Raiselis produced landscapes of the city that stretch to the Boston Harbor Islands and kaleidoscopic paintings of the city reflecting off the facades of office buildings. Distorted urban landscapes and patchworks of color—the Boston reds, blues, and greens that he loves so much—look almost impressionistic. Criss-crossed by the lines dividing the window panes, they also take on the look of mosaics.

"That quilt of color is so intense when you're high up," Raiselis says. "It's such a surprise. It's such an unconventional way to look at the world."

GROUNDING IN THE BASICS

"There's something about painting a landscape when all of the colors are working in the right way," Raiselis says. "You get this dividend of not just an expression of the place, but an expression of the smell of the place, of the humidity of

the place, of the wind, of the sound. And one can aspire to that. I think I do. It's an elusive catch."

In the classroom, one of Raiselis' tenets was establishing the fundamentals, to prepare his students for the challenge of interpreting their subjects and seeing something that nobody else has seen.

Although he's taught courses at every level, including drawing, painting, and a graduate seminar on the history of color, "I taught foundation painting probably more than any of those," he says. In that course, he distilled the process to five elements: composition, drawing, color, technique, and subject. "I had a teacher who said there was no advanced painting because it all boils down to how those five areas are overlaid." Teaching that lesson provided a valuable reminder to focus on the basics in his own work.

As he packs up the studio where he's found inspiration for 36 years, he considers another tenet that's helped him time and again: "I've always felt that I could find something wonderful to look at wherever I might be." ●

Painting images courtesy of Richard Raiselis

FEATURE

In recent years, the art form has seen more diverse stories, exciting new initiatives, and renewed commitments to inclusivity. Is opera in its strongest era yet?

By Sophie Yarin

OPERATIVES



In May of 2023, Boston Lyric Opera presented *Omar*, the story of an Islamic scholar sold into the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

Olivia Moon Photography

EVEN BEFORE SHE BECAME THE NEW

artistic director of the Boston Lyric Opera in 2024, Nina Yoshida Nelsen was an acclaimed mezzo-soprano who was making an impact on the art form. Nelsen ('01,'03), a 2026 Grammy nominee for her performance in the opera *American Soldier*, had served as artistic advisor to the company since 2021, working with the BLO on issues like diversity in casting and what shows are being produced.

The BLO was already making strides in representation in its productions. In 2022–2023, the company co-commissioned and staged *Omar*, which tells the story of an Islamic scholar from West Africa sold into the trans-Atlantic slave trade at the start of the 19th century. The show went on to win the 2023 Pulitzer Prize in music. “It’s groundbreaking,” says Ishan Johnson ('06), a baritone, chief philanthropic officer at BLO, and member of Boston University’s Alumni Council. “When you learn of slavery, you learn it from a Christian point of view. Here, you learn that Muslims were enslaved too.”

Alums of the School of Music and BU Opera Institute are leveraging their experiences as performers and as arts administrators to open the world of opera to more people—on both sides of the curtain. In its next chapter—in which opera seeks to reach more people and uplift unheard voices—where will it take its audiences, both old and new?

“Opera has survived every World War, the French Revolution, plagues, slavery, the Holocaust, the Civil Rights Movement,” says Johnson. “Operas are being produced today during very tumultuous times. Opera is not going anywhere.”

DIVERSE VOICES AND STORIES

For decades, European standard fare—Verdi, Mozart, Wagner—has been cast with singers of color. But more companies are making commitments to staging new and reimagined works in addition to the beloved canon of Western composers. A 2024 report by the nonprofit OPERA America found new works—particularly those with experimental formats and those that foregrounded



Annie Kao

contemporary issues—were as attractive to new audiences as they were to veteran opera-goers.

Opera houses are also re-envisioning classics in ways that challenge outdated storytelling. In 2023, BLO staged a highly praised production of *Madama Butterfly*—a Puccini opera maligned by contemporary critics for its outmoded and Orientalist depiction of Japanese culture—in a 1940s internment camp.

The BLO’s Nelsen, who has sung the role of Suzuki in *Madama Butterfly* about 200 times—and who founded the Asian Opera Alliance to push for a wider variety of roles for singers of Asian heritage, among other changes—was the dramaturg for this production.

Above: Mezzo-soprano Alexis Peart as Brittomara in the Boston University Opera Institute’s 2022 production of *If I Were You*.

“The origins and heart of opera have always been rooted in community and conviviality. It was a social event. People talked through the whole thing, and they had a great time.”

ALEXIS PEART (CFA’23, MET’24)

“It was a *Madama Butterfly* that could, in fact, have happened,” says Johnson. “You left that opera with a very different view of the world.”

Alexis Peart ('23, MET'24), a mezzo-soprano, is an award-winning performer, a producer, and an advocate for Black performance and storytelling in the arts. She says that in order to better showcase diverse voices, opera companies must also be aware of blind spots and unconscious biases when it comes to their performers of color.

During the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020, she remembers, many companies began to look inward to “assess how artists [of color] were presented onstage, what that means for their storytelling, and the implications that it may have.” Some outcomes were tangible, like expanding makeup shade ranges and hiring stylists skilled with textured hair. The industry felt a deeper impact through its reexamination of casting practices and shifts in organizational culture.

“If you’re always casting a person of color in the villain role, what does that say?” she asks. “Are you aware of the subliminal messages that your unperceived bias is creating?”

According to Johnson, the world of arts administration is evolving at a similar pace.

“I didn’t meet another Black man in fundraising until about five years into my career, when I met other men who looked just like me,” he says. “I truly am focused on making sure that I am not alone in the spaces I am in—I didn’t always have the power and the influence to make something like that happen, but I can now.”



“THE PAY-IT-FORWARD GENERATION”

Change is happening backstage, too. When Peart was starting out as a professional singer, she was discouraged from participating in arts administration work, which can take the form of anything from producing shows to managing company schedules to soliciting donations.

“For a long time, there was this idea that if you had other interests, it meant you failed as a singer,” she says. “There was shame associated with people who did both.”

But singers who straddle both sides of the curtain have an advantage in the industry, Peart says. She notes that working in multiple areas of the field can provide performers with extra income and encourage them to take creative risks. In addition to her residency with the Lyric Opera of Chicago, Peart works across a range of arts institutions as an opera and contemporary theater producer, teaching artist, curriculum writer, and arts educator.

“I do a lot of guest lectures on different careers in opera,

and I always say that it’s really important to have a balance of skills that you can lean on,” she says.

The presence of singers in opera administration has a positive effect on how all performers are treated, according to Michelle Johnson (’07), a soprano.

“When I see an [administrator] who was a singer when I was growing up, I know they not only have the business background but they know what we need, as artists, to do our job well,” she says. “I’m looking forward to the next generation of arts admins, because it’s a whole new vibe. It is so refreshing.”

Johnson and her husband, Brian Major (’08, ’10), a baritone, take on informal mentorships of up-and-coming singers, offering them auditioning tips, industry advice, and words of encouragement. Johnson also offers voice lessons on a sliding scale, while Major provides professional advice on his social media accounts.

“We are part of the pay-it-forward generation,” Major says. “We had mentors, voice teachers, and coaches who

Duane Tinkey

Ken Yatsukura Photography



In 2023, Boston Lyric Opera staged a production of *Madama Butterfly* in a 1940s internment camp. “It was a *Madama Butterfly* that could, in fact, have happened,” says Ishan Johnson (’06).

knew we didn’t have anything financially, and they would still help us and give us opportunities to perform. Today’s generation gets its mentorship from social media, [and] finds its way through those platforms.”

A HUGE COMMUNITY

While opera welcomes many changes, other new initiatives are meant to embrace its past. Until the mid-20th century, opera was seen as a people’s art form—intended for all audiences, regardless of status—and not the rarefied medium it can sometimes feel like today.

“When opera was performed for kings and queens, they would sit in the good section, but there were townspeople who enjoyed it as well,” says Michelle Johnson. “It was high art, but it wasn’t just for the rich. It was a huge community of people.”

“The origins and heart of opera have always been rooted in community and conviviality,” says Peart. “It was a social event. People talked through the whole thing, and they had a great time.”

BLO’s community programs tap into opera’s popular history. Its Opera Stories series—condensed, participatory operas for young listeners—travels to local libraries and schools. Its summertime Street Stage, a truck that opens up into a mobile stage complete with piano, hosts free, open-air performances around the city.

In April, BLO opened its Opera + Community Studios in Boston’s Fort Point neighborhood. The company’s first-ever brick-and-mortar outpost not only serves BLO, but doubles as a much-needed rental space for a variety of uses, including rehearsals and performances.

“I did not know, when BLO brought me on, how hard it is to find a space to sing, to act, to dance, to write, to draw,” Ishan Johnson says. “It’s nice to be an organization that can provide that resource for so many people.”

“We hope folks understand that opera is not just on the main stage; it’s not just wigs, poofy costumes, and big orchestras,” he adds. “Opera helps to build connections across the cultural ecosystem—it is within the community, and you have access to it.” ●

Left: Soprano Michelle Johnson as Bess in *Porgy and Bess* at the Des Moines Metro Opera in 2022.

Above: Boston Lyric Opera’s highly praised production of *Madama Butterfly*, featuring Alice Chung and Dominick Chenes.

CLASS NOTES

1950s

Morton Gold ('53,'60) is the organist at St. George's Episcopal Church in Sanford, Congregation Etz Chayim in Biddeford, and Springvale Masonic Lodge #190, all in Maine. Gold has performed his music at the Springvale Historical Society and has guest-conducted the Strafford Wind Symphony in New Hampshire. A master mason for more than 60 years, Gold is mostly retired and happily lives with his wife in Springvale.

1960s

Fred Drifmeyer ('62) sings in the choir at First Presbyterian Church in Cartersville, Ga.

Laura Blacklow ('67) showed her book, *Vanishing Flora, Disappearing Jungle*, about the Guatemalan rainforest, in the 2025 Handmade Photobooks Exhibition at the Griffin Museum of Photography in Winchester, Mass., from July to September 2025. Two of her photographs also appeared in an exhibition at the 25th Julia Margaret Cameron Awards for Women Photographers at FotoNostrum Gallery in Barcelona, Spain.

Micaela Amateau Amato ('68) had more than 50 of her gouache paintings featured in *Zazu Dreams: Between the Scarab and the Dung Beetle*, a Cautionary Fable for the Anthropocene Era (Eifrig Publishing, 2017), a book praised by Bill McKibben, Noam Chomsky, and many others. She also created

a 100-foot book of stories that unfolds from the center into a large-scale cast paper portrait.

1970s

Edward Evensen ('71) continues to play clarinet in his Dixieland band and in the Temple Band, a historic town band formed in 1799; bass clarinet in the Hollis Town Band; saxophones and clarinet in the Moonlighters Big Band and in the East Bay Jazz Ensemble; and flute, piccolo clarinet, and saxophones in area musicals. Evensen enjoyed his 56th year conducting the Claremont American Band, which ties the longevity record with that of Arthur Nevers, founder of the Nevers' 2nd Regiment Band.

Barbara Marder ('73) had her artwork selected for WGBH Boston's Community Canvas initiative. The piece was displayed on WGBH's Digital Mural in Brighton, Mass., in March 2025.

Lesley Cohen ('74) showed her work in *Shift-Response*, a solo exhibit, at the Bromfield Gallery in Boston, Mass., in September 2025.

Joan Seidman Kent ('75) showed three pastel works in *Moments: Past, Present, Future*, a group exhibition held in the spring of 2025 at Till Wave Gallery in Watertown, Mass.

Tracy Burtz ('78) was a finalist for the 2024 Alexander Rutsch Award for Painting. In 2025, her work was featured in group shows—in Nyack, N.Y.; Pound Ridge, N.Y.; Ossining,

N.Y.; Middlebury, Vt.; and Nantucket, Mass.—and a solo show at Edgewater Gallery in Middlebury, Vt. She will have a solo show at the Painting Center in New York, N.Y., in March 2026. Learn more at tracyburtz.com.

Howard Kolins ('78) is in his 17th year as production supervisor of the Tony Awards and his 8th year as showcaller for the Webby Awards. He continues to work on a variety of corporate and nonprofit events. In October 2025, he helped produce the Atlantic Antic, one of the largest street festivals in New York, N.Y.

Jane O'Hara ('78) had her work featured in a July 2025 solo exhibition, *Animal Instincts*, at William Scott Gallery in Provincetown, Mass. In June 2025, Jane O'Hara Projects, a platform for curatorial projects, presentations, and publications, launched a website for her State of the Union—Animals Across America traveling exhibition project, supported by a companion publication, *State of the Union*. The inaugural exhibition took place at New Bedford Art Museum in June 2023. Learn more at animalsacrossamerica.org.

Julie Ridge ('78) reprised her one-woman show, *Bipolar & the English Channel*, off-Broadway in December 2025 under the auspices of the Actors' Equity Association. The show was about Ridge's zigzag swim across the English Channel, juxtaposed with how that unlikely trek has paralleled her life with bipolar disorder.

Sue Collier ('79,'82) was selected by the New York Foundation for

SHARE YOUR STORY!

We want to hear what you've been up to. Send us your news and photos at bu.edu/cfa/share-your-story, and we'll share the highlights here.

the Arts and David Rockefeller, Jr., as one of eight artists featured in *Tapestry of Imagination*, a group exhibit held at 45 Rockefeller Plaza in New York, N.Y. The exhibition explored the depths of human emotion—hope, loss, joy, and resilience—across a wide range of mediums.

Ed Wierzbicki ('79, COM'90) is executive producer and director of a national film and webinar series that trains therapists to better handle crisis moments in adolescent trauma treatment. Based on actual cases, the films are developed through collaborative theater improvisations, original monologues, and dramatic scene work cowritten by therapists and actors from across the United States and Puerto Rico. Wierzbicki is a Regional Emmy Award-nominated director for his 2023 film *On Stage/In Session: Shakespeare's Works on Mental Health*.

1980s

Cindy Gold ('80), a professor emerita at Northwestern University's theater department, starred as Gertrude Berg in the world premiere of *The First Lady of Television* at Chicago's Northlight Theatre, in the fall of 2025.

Julia Shepley ('80) had her work featured in *Transmissible*, a solo show at Boston Sculptors Gallery, in the fall of 2024. The exhibition featured graphic black ink drawings backed by reflective copper, visually translating her experience of light, shadow, and sound as



Kiss (Small Series 2)
(2022) Acrylic and brown paper, 13.5 x 13 in.

RUTH MORDECAI ('70,'80) showcased her work in *40 Years of Paint and Collage*, which ran from July through October 2025 at the Paul Dietrich Gallery at CambridgeSeven in Cambridge, Mass.

Courtesy of Ruth Mordecai

they move through space. Also on display was a sculptural shadowbox Shepley uses to capture enigmatic photographic images in which forms appear to be traveling through—and suspended in—pools of vibrant color.

Wynn Harmon ('82) played Orazio Gentileschi in the world premiere of Kate Hamill's *The Light and*

the Dark (The Life and Times of Artemisia Gentileschi), at both Chautauqua Theatre Company and in an off-Broadway production at Primary Stages. He also played multiple roles in *Billie Jean*, by Lauren Gunderson, at New York Stage and Film, and General Lew Wallace in *This Ghost of Slavery*, by Anna Deavere Smith, at Wesleyan Center for the Arts.

Michelle Mendez ('83,'90) is a professional artist member of the Copley Society of Art, Boston, the oldest nonprofit art association in the United States, with a history dating back to 1879. Visit copleysociety.org/user/michellemendez.

Michael Chiklis ('85) starred in Angel Studios' sports drama *The*

Senior, which premiered in theaters in September 2025. The film tells the true story of Mike Flynt, a 59-year-old man who returned to college football decades after being expelled from his team to pursue a second chance on the field.

Lyndon Moors ('85) is chair of the Lanesboro, Mass., town finance committee and president of the

trustee board for the Berkshire Music School in Pittsfield, Mass. After retiring from a 35-year career teaching music in Maine and Massachusetts, Moors is still active as a performer, having played his 15th show (*Camelot*) in the pit orchestra for the Barrington Stage Company and as a member of musical ensembles, such as the Flatbed Jazz Band and the Valley Winds.

Thomas Devaney ('86) and **Christine Theo Hungate ('86)** showed their paintings and sculptures in *Concentric Circles*, a two-person exhibition held at Gateway Gallery in Portsmouth, N.H., in April 2024. Hungate and Devaney first met at CFA, where their shared love of art forged a lifelong friendship. The exhibition marks the first time they exhibited their work together since their senior show at the School of Visual Arts.

Roy Conli ('87) is set to produce Disney Animation's *Hexed*, which will be released in the fall of 2026. The film follows an awkward teenage boy and his mother, who both discover that what makes him unusual may be magic.

Michaela Dempsey ('87) works alongside Mari Carmichael (Questrom'13) at their fast-growing start-up, Levelpath. They're always looking to grow their Terrier base and encourage alums to check out open roles at Levelpath.

Ellen Harvey ('88) appeared as Fraulein Schneider in the Broadway revival of *Cabaret at the Kit Kat Club* at the August Wilson Theatre in New York, N.Y.

1990s

Marcus Hogan ('92) spent the last four years writing *Capulet*, a six-part series and prequel to *Romeo and Juliet*. All six books were published in 2025.

Mark Robertson ('92) was concertmaster for the orchestral scores to several recent and upcoming films, including *Final Destination: Bloodlines*, *American Agitators*, *Rather, Rule Breakers*, *Your Monster*, and Pixar's *Hoppers*.

Paul Woodson ('95) was nominated for his first Audie—for his narration

of *Hamlet's Children* by Richard Kluger—at the 2025 Audie Awards in New York, N.Y. Woodson and his wife live in northern California.

Dave Shalansky ('96) had a supporting role in *Rosemead*, a feature film released in June 2025 starring Lucy Liu. He also had a large supporting role in *The Missing Peace*, a dramatic short written, directed, and produced by Michael Raymond-James and executive produced by Jason Momoa. The film won Best Short Film and Best Acting Ensemble at the 2024 Indie Short Fest in Los Angeles, Calif. It was also accepted into the New York Short Film Festival, which ran in November 2025. Shalansky continues to audition for series regular and guest star roles as well as plays and films. He is also a proud husband and father.

Michele Caniato ('98) was awarded a fellowship residency at Wilapa Bay AiR. His *Echoes and Refractions*—a composition for percussion quartet—premiered in June 2025 at the New Music on the Bayou Festival in Monroe, La. Caniato's choral composition, *Ao Viandante (To the Wayfarer)*, was released in August 2025 on Ablaze Records. He also attended the Society of Composers conference at the University of Orono in February 2025, where his *Half-Time (A Basketball Intermezzo)* was performed by saxophonist Andy Wen.

2000s

David Foley, Jr. ('00) played the role of Tom Keeney in the Boston production of *Funny Girl* at the Citizens Opera House in February 2025.

Ginnifer Goodwin ('01) starred as Judy Hopps in *Zootopia 2*, which was released in November 2025.

Kayla Mohammadi ('02) exhibited work in *Object Lesson*, a group show curated by Nancy Gruskin and held at Concord Art, in the summer of 2025.

Brent Wilson ('03), a Los Angeles, Calif.-based conductor and stage

director, is department chair of performing arts and director of voice, choirs, opera, and musical theater at Ventura College; director of choral activities at University of California, Santa Barbara; and chorus master and assistant conductor for Varna International Music Festival in Bulgaria. Wilson was assistant conductor and chorus master for Opera Santa Barbara for more than 20 productions and has appeared as guest conductor for the UCSB Orchestra and Opera, receiving top prizes for collegiate opera production from the National Opera Association. He has also worked with the Grammy-nominated ensemble Boston Baroque, the Handel and Haydn Society, Handel Oratorio Society, Long Beach Camerata, Santa Barbara Master Chorale, Boston Lyric Opera, Maine Grand Opera, Granite State Opera, Chicago Opera Theater, Lyric Opera of Chicago, and Opera Theatre Saint Louis. Wilson has been on faculty at the Boston University Tanglewood Institute, Augustana College, and Viterbo University; is a member of the National Opera Association, American Choral Directors Association, and National Association of Teachers of Singing; and has embarked on a project to rediscover and remount works by Gian Carlo Menotti that have been lost since their debuts. In his free time, he likes to compete in endurance sports, including 5 Ironman competitions and 14 marathons. Most recently, he ran a 75-mile trail in the Italian Dolomites in a weekend.

Coleen Scott Trivett ('04) published her second costume history book, *The Costumes of Hollywood* (Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2025). Trivett also celebrated tenure as head of the Costume Design and Technology Career Education program in the Department of Theatre and Fashion at Santa Rosa Junior College.

Chris Horn ('05), who lives and works in the suburbs of Philadelphia, is in his 20th year in the classroom. He directs the symphonic band, competitive jazz band, and pit orchestra, and teaches introduction to music theory, advanced placement music theory, and



AIJA REKE ('15,'26) (center right) participated in a 2025 volunteer trip to Moshi, Tanzania, with Daraja Music Initiative, thanks to a scholarship from the BU Women's Council. "Teaching beginner and advanced violin classes, leading a nature conservation class, and planting African blackwood trees was a truly life-changing experience," she writes. Daraja Music Initiative focuses on music education and conservation, using African blackwood for clarinets and violins. The economic challenges in Tanzania, including poor air quality and limited access to clean water, made Reke "appreciate the simple things often taken for granted. Despite these challenges, the kindness, hospitality, and peaceful lifestyle of the Tanzanian people made a remarkable impact," she adds.

digital audio production. During his tenure, he has more than doubled instrumental music enrollment, increasing participation from 34 to 86 in the marching band and from 51 to 104 in the concert band. He introduced unique musical opportunities for band students, such as performing alongside the Grammy-nominated rock/pop band Foster the People and for former First Lady Michelle Obama. Along with his staff, he created a competitive indoor percussion ensemble and was a featured presenter at the 2025 Pennsylvania Music Education Association's state convention, where he conducted a session titled "Elementary Instrumental Recruitment—How We Enrolled 80% of Our Kids." Horn is proudly married to a family medicine doctor, and is the father of two amazing boys, one of whom has an extra 21st chromosome. Horn is active in the Down syndrome community in Philadelphia.

John Beder (BUTI'03, CFA'08) is a documentary filmmaker whose latest film, *How to Sue the Klan*, won a

2025 NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Short-Form Documentary. The documentary is distributed by PBS and is available for streaming.

Erika Hess ('09) was named artistic director of Chautauqua Visual Arts, where she oversees the visual arts residency and lecture series for the Chautauqua Institution in upstate New York.

Chaerin Kim ('09) performed with the National Philharmonic Orchestra of Venezuela in May 2025, playing Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 2 and her own harp concerto, *Rendezvous*. The concert marked the first time in music history that a soloist performed two concertos on two different instruments (harp and piano) with an orchestra on the same stage. Kim became a Grammy Awards voting member in 2025.

Desiree Krebs ('09) is the owner/operator of Fowl Player Productions, formerly called the First Parish Players. Fowl Player Productions is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit theater

company that welcomes everyone regardless of age, gender identity, ability, and experience. Their goal is "to make theater with people who love theater," she writes.

2010s

Jeffrey Nowlin ('10) teaches foundation sculpture and foundation drawing at the CFA School of Visual Arts, while also leading the sculpture sections during its Visual Arts Summer Institute. He is a visiting undergraduate and graduate lecturer in the humanities and art education departments at Massachusetts College of Art and Design, where he also is gallery coordinator for its Arnheim Gallery.

Drew Tholke ('10) participated in the BU in LA program and started working in Los Angeles, Calif. after graduating from BU. As YouTube was starting to take off, his acting career transitioned into a producing career; he now works as a film executive for producer Andrew Panay. Tholke develops, creates,

writes, and produces studio-level feature films, such as the 20th Century Fox movie *Swiped* (2025), which premiered on Hulu in September 2025. Previously, Tholke worked on the unreleased *Wedding Crashers 2* and was part of the producing team for *He's All That* (2021).

Taylor Apostol ('15) had a solo exhibition, *Piles*, at the Boston Sculptors Gallery LaunchPad from December 2024 to January 2025, which featured recent ceramic and stone sculptures.

Benjamin Ducoff ('15), a filmmaker, joined the founding faculty of Motion Picture Technical High School, a new public vocational school in Queens, N.Y., dedicated to teaching below-the-line skills in film and television. As the school's work-based learning coordinator, he builds partnerships with industry professionals and places students in hands-on internships and jobs across active film and media productions. *Yaniv*, his debut feature film, has played at more than 50 film festivals across 10 countries, winning Best Indie Comedy of 2024 at FilmThreat's AwardThis! event and Best Comedy at the Boca International Jewish Film Festival. The film was the Centerpiece MidFest Film at the Boston Jewish Film Festival and played to a sold-out crowd at Coolidge Corner Theatre. *Yaniv* opened commercially in South Florida and Eastern Europe, with additional markets forthcoming.

Evan Morse ('15) designed the 2024 Brookgreen Medal, a two-sided bronze medal that is used in an annual series commissioned by Brookgreen Gardens in South Carolina, home to a botanical garden, zoo, several historical sites, and the country's largest collection of American figurative sculpture. In May 2024, Morse joined two international sculptors in New Hampshire to complete large-scale works in marble over the course of three weeks for permanent installation in downtown Nashua.

Padmini Chandrasekaran ('17), **Joshua Duttweiler ('17)**, **Sarah Cadigan-Fried ('19)**, **Molly Haig ('18)**, **Vaishnavi Kumar ('18)**,

Joe Seer/Shutterstock (Discepolo); Sipa USA/Alamy (Kim)

Courtesy of Aija Reke

Kristen Mallia ('18), and other members of Radius Collective held a group exhibition, *—graphies*, in the winter and spring of 2025 at the University of Massachusetts, Lowell's University Gallery. Radius Collective has been collaborating since 2019; each year, a theme is selected, artists produce work individually, and then develop a group exhibition focused on the initial idea. The collective has exhibited across the US and as far as Rome, Italy.

Patrick Murphy ('18) published "Funkeiros and criminal organizations in Rio de Janeiro's *Bailes de Corredor*" in Sage journals in July 2025. The article examines cultural interchange between criminal organizations and Rio de Janeiro's *bailes de corredor* (corridor events), which feature fighting between two groups of men separated by a space called a corridor, while DJs play Rio funk (a local electronic music).

Mark Stein (BUTI'09, CFA'18) is a lecturer in percussion studies at Central Connecticut State University. He has performed with the Houston Symphony, Houston Grand Opera, Houston Ballet, Louisiana Philharmonic, Hartford Symphony, New Haven Symphony, Boise Philharmonic, Springfield (Mass.) Symphony, Amarillo Symphony, and the New World Symphony. He has also performed during summer seasons at the Grand Teton Music Festival, Ravinia Festival, Caroga Lake Summer Music Festival, and at Tanglewood. He has performed on timpani and percussion for various artists, such as Roberta Flack, REO Speedwagon, Kansas, the Alan Parsons Project, and Little River Band. Stein can also be heard on the Houston Chamber Choir's recording of Bob Chilcott's *Circlesong*.

Bradford Morin Dumont ('19) was appointed assistant professor and director of choral activities at Bridgewater State University after completing a Doctor of Musical Arts in choral conducting at University of Hartford with **Anthony Trecek-King ('15)**.



FERNANDO GAGGINI ('25) won first place in the 21st Annual Khachaturian International Competition in the conducting category. Established in 2003 to mark the 100th anniversary of the legendary Armenian composer Aram Khachaturian, the widely celebrated competition seeks to discover young talent in the categories of cello, piano, violin, and conducting.

2020s

Sophonria Vowels ('20) and **Sébastien Garbe ('20, CAS'20)**, recently engaged, live in the San Francisco Bay area. Garbe works for the city's environment department, where he runs programs to support and promote sustainable transit, while Vowels teaches pre-K through fifth-grade theater classes at area public schools. Vowels is also substitute teaching while applying for single-subject English teaching credential and master's programs.

Jenna Riedl ('23) recently hiked the Appalachian Trail and discovered a passion for climbing up mountains—as well as a renewed appreciation for electricity and plumbing. Now back in Boston, she takes trips to New Hampshire to work on climbing its 48 4,000-foot peaks. Riedl is part of the MetroWest Writers' Guild.

Johnny Mok (BUTI'10, CFA'24) performed solo cello in Ernest Bloch's *Schelomo*, accompanied by the

Brookline Symphony Orchestra, at the Driscoll School in October 2024.

Lana Sage ('24) made her directorial debut at the Gene Frankel Theatre in New York, N.Y., in August 2024. She directed a one-act play, *The Beautification Committee*, by T. Marie, wherein the mean girls have grown up and now have more time on their hands to ruin lives. "It's about why we hurt people... and how the most beautiful things are truly ugly," she writes.

Tommy Vines ('24) started a multimodal production company, Breaking Motion LLC. Its flagship endeavor and first large-scale project is *Interloper*, a soon-to-be-released scripted television series. Vines is the executive producer, writer, and lead actor on the project, which was filmed in the fall of 2025. Vines credits the Kahn Career Entry Award with helping them to conceive Breaking Motion LLC.

Kevin A. Virgilio ('24) presented a lecture recital alongside **Richard**

Rivale ('25) at the Scandinavian Cultural Center and Library in Newton, Mass., in November 2024, as part of its fall lecture series. The event was a presentation of Virgilio's research on the development of solo trombone repertoire in Denmark in the early 20th century, and included a recital of works by Carl Nielsen, Launy Grøndahl, and Axel Jørgensen.

Yolanda Yang (MET'21, CFA'24) writes that she believes that art has the power to respond to and shape the spaces we inhabit, particularly in a postcapitalist landscape where interpersonal care is often fragmented. In her project *Behind VA Shadows*, Yang delved into the intersections of art and community, highlighting the creative expression of museum workers while reimagining how we engage with shared urban spaces. As the arts engagement manager at Boston's Pao Arts Center, Yang advocates for placemaking through art and cultural programs that honor the rich history and identity of Chinatown.

Courtesy of Fernando Gaggini

Courtesy of Reichert



ARTIST RACHELLE REICHERT IS INSPIRED BY HUMAN INDUSTRIALIZATION

By Steve Holt

MANY ARTISTS VIEW their materials—the acrylic paints, the sculpting clay, the canvas—as vessels for the beauty they create. For Rachele Reichert, the materials are the message. Reichert ('07), who lives in Oakland, Calif., and describes herself as a research-based artist, makes art inspired by natural spaces that have been affected by human industrialization. She studies satellite and large-scale land survey images for signs of human influence and even incorporates materials found at the sites into her work, including salt evaporated from around the San Francisco Bay.

Reichert has been making art with found materials since she was a kid. She studied painting at the School of Visual Arts and turned to more research-based works a few years into her career.

"I felt there were questions that I couldn't answer with painting and subjects I wanted to explore that I couldn't do with painting. I felt very limited," she says. "What guides me now is very much about place—it has a specific context that it's meant to speak about, and the medium is dictated by the conceptual needs. To be honest, that's a harder way of working."

From afar, many of Reichert's pieces are textured works inside a circular or cloud-shaped metal frame. Step closer, however, and you'll notice the frame is filled with salt that is occasionally interspersed with microplastics and tiny pieces of organic matter.

For these pieces, she used satellite images to determine the conditions of evaporation pools around the bay. She collects salt, sometimes grinding redwood branches charred from wildfires and adding it to the salt. To work out a piece's color and composition, and



Mother (2024)
Bronze, San Francisco Bay salt, mixed media; 42 x 9 1/2 x 8 in.

because the salt is so difficult to remove once it's placed inside the metal frame, Reichert first sketches her pieces in a notebook. She created a chemical process, with the



assistance of fine art conservators, to adhere the salt to itself inside the frame, which is sometimes powder-coated.

Commissioned salt works of Reichert's hang in Meta's Menlo Park, Calif., headquarters and at the Mandarin Oriental Ritz hotel in Madrid. Her pieces have been exhibited widely, including at San Francisco's Contemporary Jewish Museum and the Center for Contemporary Art and Culture in Portland, Ore.

Reichert wants viewers to glean whatever they need from her work, whether it's the aesthetic beauty of a piece or an interest in a specific location or material. For her, though, it's the questions—about the mess humans leave in their wake, about what she's capable of doing with a particular material—that drive her.

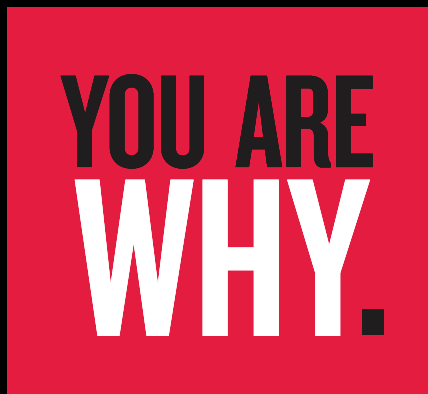
"When I'm making work about and with the natural world, it feels very urgent and important, not just to me—and that's something I find valuable in art," Reichert says. "I think I'm just creating the work I want to see." ●



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