

WP: Hi everyone! Welcome to episode 6 of *Between the Lions*, the six-episode podcast series that features museum officers and shop staff members from the Bowdoin College Museum of Art. I'm Whitney, and I'm very happy to welcome Dan to the show. Thank you so much for joining me today.

DD: Thanks for inviting me.

WP: I'd like to start by asking how long have you been working at the BCMA?

DD: I've been working here for almost 18 years.

WP: Okay, wow. And what is your position here at the museum?

DD: I'm a security officer.

WP: What drew you to working at Bowdoin and the BCMA specifically?

DD: Well, I'm a working artist, and I was looking for a part-time, benefits-eligible job that would allow me to make some income and sort of survive as an artist. And get my insurance. And also sort of a win-win of being around art, and art is a good part of my day.

WP: My next question has some sub-questions, so I'll ask all of them and you can kind of interpret however you'd like. So the main question is could you describe your career pathway? And then the sub-questions are have you always been involved with the arts? And then what did you study in school, and how did that shape your career pathway?

DD: Okay, so my career pathway as far as my museum work or my career pathway as an artist?

WP: Both?

DD: So my career pathway as a museum officer started 18 years ago. I was part of the original staff that was hired post-renovation, so I was here when it opened after being closed for two years. And I've been a training officer. I like to think I've been a face of the museum for that whole time. A lot of people sort of come in and expect to see me or hope to see me. A lot of people ask for me, which is really lovely. And I've been involved with a lot of things sort of like behind the scenes. I help plan the holiday party and celebrate officers' birthdays when they occur. And [I] have developed quite a few, really good friendships over the years. It's a funny place to work because not only staff from like a temporary position—curatorial assistant or Mellon fellow—or from a student perspective, people don't stay around for long periods of time. And so I get to know people and then they sort of go off into the world, so it's great, but it's also a little bit kind of tricky when you really connect with someone and then they leave. I guess I'll talk a little bit about my art career. I've been pursuing my life as an artist for the past 25 years since I moved to Maine. I used to live in Massachusetts, and I moved here to really pursue my art, not work full-time for someone, and see how I can get my art out into the world. That has been working pretty well. I'm represented by a gallery in Rockland, Maine, had my first exhibit in New York City last year, and really feel like I'm part of the Maine art world.

WP: Congratulations, that's amazing.

DD: Thanks!

WP: And did you major in art at all?

DD: I didn't. I have a liberal studies degree from Framingham University. And at the time that I went there, they had a program where you could sort of create your own major if you could convince the powers that be that no course of study could satisfy what you

were interested in doing. And as a sort of option to a not straight artist career, I was leaning more toward creative careers. Advertising and marketing, and Framingham didn't offer something specific to that. So I ended up basically combining a bunch of majors to fulfill that. So I have a concentration in art history, I have a concentration in fine art, sociology, psychology, marketing, business, and I feel like I'm forgetting something else. But yeah, that's what I did.

WP: Yeah, wow. I mean, that's a lot of disciplines kind of combined together, so. And as a sociology major, I was happy to hear you mention sociology. In my interview with Paulla, she mentioned that your home was featured in *The Maine House* and brought up this idea of found objects. And I'd love if you could share more about that.

DD: Sure. Well, first and foremost, I had no idea *The Maine House* was going to turn out to be such a large coffee table book. Someone contacted me out of the blue and said that a gallerist had suggested that they photograph my house for this book project. [A] photographer came to my house, took a lot of pictures. Maybe a year and a half went by, I would get updates over time, and then eventually the book came out, and it ended up being this really significant, really popular coffee table book. I think the focus of the book was really to highlight artist homes that were not created with designers and architects but created by the artists themselves. And I believe in surrounding myself with things that I really love, and so my house is filled with a lot of art and a lot of found objects. I consider found objects art just like someone would consider a framed painting on the wall.

WP: And where do you find inspiration for your own art?

DD: I find inspiration for my own art through the material I work with. I work a lot with truck tire inner tubes, clothing, a lot of discarded clothing, a lot of fabrics, and materials, and clothing that contain what I call like material history or surface history. I'm not interested in working with nice, new, shiny material in most cases. And my recent work

has really been influenced by the political climate that we're in. So I'm thinking a lot about territories, and Greenland, and mining, and class. Yeah, to mention a few things that I'm sort of thinking about when I'm putting my work together.

WP: Sure, yeah. And I love the idea of, kind of the lives of objects and that they have histories, so.

DD: I'll just say one more additional thing about that. I'm most interested in showing people things that are not normally seen. So I'm interested in sort of like excavating coats, taking things apart, and showing you sort of the linings of things that we sort of take for granted as things that keep us warm or look nice. But we don't consider what goes on behind the surface or under the surface. And I think a lot about the people that actually made these. I've been working a lot recently with found vintage fur coats that I get at my transfer station. And when I take them apart, I'm given this sort of like new world of all these little, tiny animal pelts that were sadly sewn together for these beautiful fur coats that people could wear to keep themselves warm and look nice.

WP: That's really powerful. Thank you for sharing that. What is the most challenging part of your job here at the museum?

DD: That's a good question. Well I think probably the most challenging thing is we're sort of the rule keepers, right? And our job is first and foremost to protect the art, and the building, and the people in it. And we have sort of standard proximity rules that we ask people to operate within. And I'm pretty good after 18 years of finding an easy segue into delivering the regulations to the visitor that might be breaking the regulation. It gets tricky when they don't necessarily listen to you, and I would say that's the most challenging part of my day. If someone really doesn't respect the art and respect the institution. It sometimes can get a little tricky to smooth out.

WP: Yeah, I can imagine.

DD: There's never been anything, you know, no aggression or anything like that. But I don't like having to tell people twice.

WP: Sure, and just trying to balance the...

DD: Trying to keep them happy and not interfere with their experience.

WP: What is the most rewarding part of your job?

DD: Also a good question. I think the most rewarding part of my job is sharing information about something in the museum that people are really interested in learning about. Happens a lot with the Assyrian reliefs, granted there's pretty extensive labeling upstairs, but people really like to interact and communicate about those. And so it's nice to sort of like point out little things that the labels don't point out. Also just sort of connect with people that come in that maybe are from an area I grew up in, or we have something in common. You know, I always say my day goes by really fast if I have two really good five-minute interactions with visitors.

WP: What was your first impression of the museum?

DD: My first impression of the museum, so I came here before I worked here. And I just thought it was a really beautiful place. Really impressive collection. It's a jewel box, you know? It's this really amazing piece of architecture, and the variety of art and exhibitions is really extensive. So I just feel like it offers so much for so many people.

WP: How have you seen the BCMA change over the course of your time here?

DD: I thought you might ask me that question. I think the thing that I've seen change the most is our exhibitions have sort of become, in some cases, more complex and more

complicated. I think about, like Abigail DeVille last summer. I was here when the Hopper show, and the Wegman show, and the Prendergast show were here, which were all like major blockbusters. So that changed our attendance in a really significant way, which certainly changed the museum. I don't think much has changed besides that, but I would say just the exhibition pacing, it seems to be about the same. And yeah, the exhibits are just sort of, they seem to be a little bit more labor-intensive as far as putting them up is concerned.

WP: Do you have a favorite exhibit that has been on view at the BCMA or a favorite piece in the museum's collection?

DD: I thought you might ask this too. I'm going to self-indulge and say that the William Wegman *Hello, Nature* show was probably my favorite exhibit because I was granted this really lovely opportunity to recreate some of Wegman's imagery on the walls.

WP: Oh, wow.

DD: With our former director, Kevin Salatino, who was awesome. And it was just a really nice way to sort of be seen in a different blazer, if you will, while that show was up. And I got to know William Wegman quite well and still am friendly with him. And it was just a really, really fun experience. I would bring people to the exhibit not only to see the Wegman work but also to show them that I had participated in the, I would say, art direction of it.

WP: Yeah, I have the BCMA poster of the sailboat. It's one of my favorites, it was one of the first posters that I got, you know, it was hanging in my dorm room this past year, and I love it, so.

DD: Yeah, it was also just a really fun exhibit. I remember specifically we had some of the Hardly boys, the Wegman Hardly boys videos playing in the Media Gallery. And there

was always a line to get into the Media Gallery, it was so busy. And people were enjoying it to the point that I could hear them laughing at the video upstairs.

WP: Oh my gosh! That's amazing.

DD: It was a different sort of climate for the museum that summer, and it was really fun.

WP: Sounds like it.

DD: Yeah.

WP: Is there an interaction you've had with a visitor that is particularly memorable?

DD: Honestly, there's been so many. I just had an interaction with another officer, actually, and I think I'm particularly good at sort of like finding out where people are from and making [those] sort of small communications with people. And we basically discovered that a woman who was in recently was my co-worker's elementary school art teacher.

WP: Oh, wow!

DD: And he hadn't seen her, you know, obviously since elementary school, and he's in his 50s. And so it was just a really cool reunion where they both sort of realized that they knew each other many, many years ago.

WP: Yeah, it's a small world. Is there anything you would love to see or see more of at the BCMA?

DD: I'm actually a really big fan of, like, conceptual art. And I know that a decent amount of the population struggles with conceptual art. But I think really good conceptual art can

enliven you more than a really beautiful painting. When you come into a gallery or a museum, and you struggle with what you're looking at, and you're not sure what it is. And you then spend some time with it, and learn about it, and find out sort of what's behind it and what it's all about. And then you love that. It's a really cool experience.

WP: And my last question is how do you like spending your free time?

DD: I garden a lot. I have some sort of, like, side hustle landscaping jobs. I do a lot of work with my local land trust, I'm in charge of land acquisition. I go to my transfer station quite often, sort of scavenging for materials for my work. I spend time in my studio, I spend time with my partner, I spend time with our dog. I spend time with my family. Yeah, I mean, I'm fortunate to live in a really beautiful part of Maine, and so I really try to enjoy nature and also all the museums and galleries that are out and about. So I try to spend a lot of time with my artist friends, and do a lot of studio visits, and see what people are up to. So I'm pretty busy.

WP: Well, thank you again for taking the time to speak with me, Dan, and thank you all for listening! Feel free to tune into the other episodes of *Between the Lions*, out now.