

WP: Hi everyone! Welcome to episode 3 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 Jonathan to the show. Thank you so much for joining me today.

JP: Hi. Good to be here.

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

JP: Almost two years.

WP: And what is your position here at the museum?

JP: Shop assistant.

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

JP: I actually went to high school in Brunswick–Brunswick High School, when it was over on McKen Street–and after school always made my way to Bowdoin College. It was always a part of my early life and then, you know, life happened, moved away, kind of did whatever, and came back, and I was like, oh, I'd like to get a part-time job somewhere where I could focus on other things that are going on in my life. But just something part-time. And Bowdoin had a part-time position at the museum, and I got hired, and grateful for that.

WP: Could you describe your career pathway?

JP: Can you be more specific, like my career pathway, as in at the museum? Or in life in general?

WP: I would say...

JP: Because this position is a casual position, so it's not a quote unquote career.

WP: Sure, absolutely.

JP: I do have a career outside of the museum, but...

WP: Yeah, I'm interested in hearing, I guess, generally, so I have some sub questions. The first, I'm wondering what you studied in school and how you would say that influenced your career trajectory. And then I'm also curious as to if you've always been interested in art and museums or if that was kind of a more recent development.

JP: Well, I'll answer that last one first.

WP: Sure.

JP: I think museums are my jam, right? Quiet, a lot of history, right? And whenever I travel abroad, I always go to the museums. I'm not a beach goer. I always enjoy the museums, art, history, botanical gardens, all that. I think it's the quiet that I like. So for the career, is that the first part of that question, was the, you know, career trajectory, or the college, right?

WP: Yes, yeah.

JP: So I got my first degree at Franklin Pierce College. It's in Ringe, New Hampshire, and I originally went to school for archeology, and, for one reason or another, I switched to criminal justice and that kind of brought me into the military. So I did the military for my eight years, and after that, I had jobs here and there. None of them kind of satisfied me. So I went back to school using the Post GI, 9/11 GI Bill, and I went to USM. I got a

bachelor's degree in English. And then I went to Stonecoast, which is their low-res MFA program, and got a master's in poetry. And so that, I think that almost full circle back to like, the museum and that creative aspect of my poetry.

WP: Yeah, great. I definitely relate to what you said about traveling, kind of being drawn in by museums when you're, I guess, abroad domestically or internationally, 'cause I also haven't been to the beach in a while. And, yeah, I also love kind of exploring the local museum institutions and stuff like that. So, glad you said that. What is the most challenging part of your job at the museum?

JP: Yeah, so I think being a mostly introverted person is to be quote unquote on all the time, right? As a shop assistant, shop attendant, we're the first people that patrons see when they come in, right? So smile, greet, make them feel welcome, wanted, right? Even if you are having a bad day or things are going on in your life, it's very important to make the patrons feel welcome. I think that's the most important first step that we do.

WP: And what would you say the most rewarding part of your job is?

JP: Almost the same thing, right? Where you have wonderful people coming into the museum, and, not always, but most of the time, people are coming in with a mindset of visiting a museum. So they're already in that like, I don't want to say creative, but like, there's this energy, right? It's not like meeting somebody at the grocery store or at the mall, right? You're intentionally coming to the museum for a purpose, whether it's to kill some time, look at some wonderful art. People are very enthusiastic, especially when they come back out. They tell some stories. Yeah, the patrons are the best part, I think.

WP: Yeah, it seems like when people are coming to the BCMA, they're ready to be inspired by the galleries and the art. Exactly what you said.

JP: Exactly, yeah. Yeah.

WP: What was your first impression of the museum when you started?

JP: When I started?

WP: I guess, well, yeah, I suppose you said that you've been aware of it for a while, so kind of however you'd like to interpret.

JP: I was actually more interested in the Peary-MacMillan [Arctic Museum], when I was younger, obviously. But I really got into the museum, the art museum, when I got back from Kansas. I was out and in the military out at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. And when I got back, I think art and being in a quiet environment and looking at extraordinary artwork is what I needed. So that's, you know, that's the first step.

WP: How have you seen the museum change over the course of your time working here, if at all?

JP: I don't think it's changed. I mean, obviously things do change. People come and go, wonderful people that you meet leave and go on to do other things, right? Different artists come and go as their exhibits are showcased. But it all, I don't want to say is all the same, but it is. It's all under this umbrella of the creative, I guess.

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

JP: That's a good question. I always enjoy the René Magritte, I think it's called [*Le Banquet*]. It's a forest scene, I think dusk, and a very red, full sun imposed in front of the forest, the trees, which, you know, he's a surrealist. I always go up, whenever I'm up in the galleries, I always go and gaze at that for a little bit. For the exhibits, there was this really interesting, okay, two, if we have time.

WP: Yeah!

JP: Two, there was this great exhibit called *The Ivory Mirror*. It was curated by Professor Perkinson and just amazing, small, delicate ivory pieces carved and obviously, you know, skulls, and kind of death. and memento mori, and just really cool. The other thing, I don't remember the exhibit name, but it was upstairs where *Hello, Stranger* is right now, and it had chimes or bells, or...I can't think of the exhibit name, but that's all I remember. And this was probably, I don't know, seven years ago or more. It was a while back. And you just go into the exhibit hall, and that's all you hear. It was [these] wonderful bells. It was amazing.

WP: Sounds amazing. I'll try to try to track down what that exhibit was. Do you have a favorite piece of shop merchandise?

JP: Since I put out all of that stuff...I think I would say some of the books, you know, just because I'm a writer and poet, but I don't know which one. They're all, you know, we have some great local writers that we, have their books, which is always nice, and some Bowdoin alumni. They're always great stuff. Yeah, I don't know if I have necessarily a specific one, but the books I think are my favorite. Yeah.

WP: Yeah, yeah, and I mean, you set up great merchandise displays as well, I have to say.

JP: Thanks.

WP: I've seen you in action. Is there anything you would love to see or see more of at the BCMA?

JP: Well, the first thing that comes to my mind, obviously, is something that deals with poetry, right? Which we already kind of, each April, we do something for National Poetry Month. We've done it twice already. We host a poetry reading for the students of mostly The Quill and The Nightingale Society, but any students who want to recite poetry, whether it be their own or something that they've loved. So, yeah, I would like to see more poetry stuff. And there, you know, there are exhibits that are poetry adjacent. We had the Mina Loy exhibit, which was amazing and definitely poetry adjacent. The Jim Dine, although none of the artwork was poetry, he also had some poetry books. I'm trying to think. Oh, the new one. The Gordon Parks exhibit. When I saw that we were having the Gordon Parks exhibit, I, just by chance, went to Twice Told Tales, which is down on Maine Street. It's the local used bookstore, and I saw Gordon Parks' poetry book. I picked it up, and it was wonderful. It was really, really cool.

WP: That's amazing. I didn't realize that Parks wrote poetry. I knew from looking at the Gordon Parks Foundation website that he was involved in writing, and music, and film, and kind of did everything, but I didn't realize that he wrote poetry as well.

JP: So much! Yeah, the poetry book that I got was one of the last things that he wrote before he passed, and it was so introspective and meaningful. That's something that you can't write when you're younger, right? I think so, yeah. It was great.

WP: Yeah, I'll have to look into that as well. My last question for you is how do you like spending your free time?

JP: Poetry, poetry, poetry. Reading and poetry. Yeah, that takes up a lot of my time. Not [in] a bad way, doesn't take up my time. I want it to take up my time, so, yeah.

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

