

REWIND

rewind

REVIEW

review

RESPOND

respond

## final issue

Over six years, the students behind Rewind Review Respond (RRR) produced 12 volumes of articles, interviews, creative writing, and illustrations that celebrated and critiqued CCA's campus culture. This final issue was born from the announcement of CCA's closure, written while the college was still very much alive, and while the loss was still taking shape. This collection of personal stories offers a portrait of the college, complete with contradiction and complexity: what CCA gave, what it failed to give, and what it represented at different moments in time—to us.

This issue of RRR was edited by Bryndis Hafthorsdottir (Gallery Manager, Exhibitions & Public Programs) and designed by RRR's first editorial designer, Sarah Chieko Bonnicksen (MFA Design, 2021). It gathers essays from former RRR editors Katherine Jemima Hamilton, Liz Godbey, and Vanessa Perez Winder.

## Bryndis Hafthorsdottir

**Bryndis Hafthorsdottir**  
MA Visual and Critical Studies, 2016  
Staff Advisor

"What's at stake? Why should we care?"

It's 2016, and I'm sitting in the Visual and Critical Studies homeroom at California College of the Arts, staring at a heavily marked-up excerpt of my thesis. Across the table, Doctors Makeda Best and Jackie Francis exchange a glance. I feel my face flush and my eyes well up with tears—I'm desperate for approval from these formidable women, and "Because I care?" isn't going to cut it.

I crawl back home, sob into my Tecate and Cheerios, and fall into a restless sleep. The next day, I feel psychically spent, as if my mind has been wrenched apart to make room for a hard truth. My parents may be the only people to read my thesis cover to cover, but they're not who I'm writing for. I want my audience to be the general public: the makers, thinkers, dog walkers, and schoolchildren who wander into a gallery, lured by something that glimmers, and wander out again feeling unsettled, a little wiser, or newly fulfilled. And these folks won't care about my work just because I do. How can I make my passions inclusive?

I walk to the Presidio and sit next to a scrub-jay teasing twigs into a nest. Between CCA and the park, I slowly learn to build structures that nurture, rather than demand attention.

After graduation, I spent a few years in ethically murky for-profit spaces before deciding, once and for all, to become a professional "enabler"—someone whose superpower is clearing the path so artists can make work that matters, show it, and get paid. I returned to CCA as a staff member, managing the campus galleries where I got to mentor dozens of emerging arts professionals in the practical realities of life in the art world. They won't necessarily remember me, but they'll carry forward the skills we practiced together and use them for good.

I'm sure of this because, in 2020, my team of student workers was threatened with unemployment by the closure of the campus galleries. They were anxious, isolated, and flat broke. I put out a call to the group for paid "Arts Reporters" to archive the events unfolding on our virtual campus. I received an application from Katherine Jemima Hamilton—in her cover letter, she told me "how important it is, especially now, to notice your community's needs and how you, as a cultural producer, are serving them." Someone had already wrenched her mind open. Katherine became the founding editor of a new student publication, *Rewind Review Respond*, where she mentored Liz Godbey in editing, community building, generous communication, and careful administration. Liz mentors Emilia, who mentors Vanessa, who mentors Isaiah, who mentors Jasmine.

It's 2026, and my grad school buddy shares an Instagram post in our group chat: "10 individuals shaping the art world today." I scroll through the slides. "8. The person pouring your glass to the brim at an opening because you clearly need it." "4. Your friend who put you in the show they're curating because they know how desperately you need a win."

I halt on number 3: "Your art school advisor asking you 'What's at stake?' in the back of your head 12 years later."

Here's what is at stake in CCA's closure: a lineage of mentors creating mentors creating mentors, wrenching each other open to make room for good.



## Katherine Jemima Hamilton

**Katherine Jemima Hamilton**  
MA Curatorial Practice and MA Visual and Critical Studies, 2022  
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### A Tale of Unwavering Optimism

The iPhone I owned in 2019 is long gone, so I can't tell you exactly what I thought was important to document during my first year at CCA. I can, however, tell you about a feeling from that time: the ubiquitous sense of possibility. Not "anything can happen if you set your mind to it," but instead, the fact that things do happen, and you could do one of those things. People were around, spaces were free, and school authorities were relatively accepting of students' experimental tendencies. The conditions were ripe to do something—and most of us did, hopeful for a better future we would help manifest.

CCA's students and faculty embodied an ethos of optimism until there was no bright side alternative to look to. Perhaps this optimism was endemic to all California art schools that believed the rules of the Old New World did not apply to them: they were not making Greenbergs and Pollocks, but something else, man. You could dig it or dig a hole to the center of the Earth, and you would still wind up in California because that's where the future was going to happen.

A memory: It's 2019. Wei and I work at the Curatorial Research Bureau—a space in the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts programmed by CCA. We live in the same neighborhood in Oakland. After work, he invites me to take the bus with him. He types my address into his phone and says "ew" louder and louder until he is shouting "EW." We live one block apart. At first, I think he is horrified, but then he is actually delighted. He becomes my first and best friend in the Bay Area. He helps me pack my apartment when I leave during the COVID lockdowns; I help him pack up when he leaves for RISD. Since that bus ride, Wei has become a staple artist in the group exhibitions I curate; a foundational creative partner I turn to, years after his own dissociation from CCA, and will continue to do so in the years following CCA's dissolution. To me, that catalyst of friendship was a seed that eventually bloomed, embodying the possibilities CCA's extended community created. Moments like these were proof that the future was entirely uncertain, but certainly not empty.

I'm an optimist. Sometimes, when you are an optimist, you ignore large foreboding signs because you think you'll be able to deal with them later. Yes, I read the same articles about the shady real-estate deals you have, but I believe that CCA's ethos of unwavering optimism made strange and fantastic things possible and drove it to its current circumstances. CCA teaches you to believe in your agency, to trust that things aren't always bad, just changing; it teaches a belief in the ability to be both courageous and nimble, even if what is also needed is wealth and resources.

I do not think this is a cautionary tale. I think to be an artist, you have to hope because you have to believe one voice, one image, can move someone; you believe that failure in front of an audience is inherent to artistry. At least CCA hoped until the end.

## Liz Godbey

**Liz Godbey**  
MFA Fine Arts and MA Visual and Critical Studies, 2023  
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California College of the Arts is a constellation of locations, a web of people scattered across San Francisco, Oakland, and beyond.

My first semester of graduate school in the fall of 2020 was surreal, almost exclusively taking place over Zoom. Although I was technically a student at CCA, the college felt more like a virtual concept than a physical place, existing solely on my laptop screen. I'd attend classes and critiques from my apartment in San Francisco, with my classmates reduced to tiny rectangles on a grid. Eventually, we gained limited access to the graduate studios at the American Industrial Center in the Dogpatch neighborhood.

As I entered my second year, the school shifted to a hybrid setup, mixing online and in-person classes. My experience as a student spanned multiple campuses and disciplines. I took my Visual & Critical Studies course at the writing studio on De Haro in Potrero Hill, and my MFA critiques on Zoom or in the Dogpatch studios. I started gallery sitting for the college, initially on Hubbell Street, later in Oakland, and finally on 17th Street. I took my first ceramics class at the Treadwell studio on the Oakland campus and ignited a lasting passion for the medium, one that has continued and thrived long past my time at CCA.

My third year marked not only the final leg of my work towards my degrees, but also the closure of the Oakland campus. Spaces disappeared even as I was still learning how to inhabit them. It felt less like a singular ending and more like the continuation of an ongoing erosion: first dropping "Craft" from the College's name, then cutting the glass program, and eventually the curatorial program. By that point, the instability that had defined my experience no longer felt disorienting so much as expected. The geography of the school had always been shifting.

What remained consistent was the community moving through it. I think of my time gallery sitting where I watched the flow of people moving through. I would chat with professors from different disciplines, staff passing through, groups of CCA students, and even schoolchildren visiting the exhibitions. It offered me a different view of the institution, one much wider than just the programs I was involved in. I think, too, of late nights in the Dogpatch studios, separated by our individual studio walls but connected through making. We didn't always say much, but there was a sense of being held in that shared focus. I fondly remember the moments before my VCS classes began, cherishing those few minutes when we could share parts of our lives with each other or commiserate over deadline stress. Conversations spilled out of studios and classrooms into group chats, bars, and apartments. Ideas circulated between disciplines. The college felt less like a single site than a loose infrastructure for relationships: collaborations, friendships, shared labor, and shared frustrations.

Now that the institution is closing, the physical spaces may disappear or change ownership. The walls that once held the community will no longer belong to it, but the community itself is harder to break apart. For many of us, CCA was never one single place. It was a web of people learning, arguing, organizing, and working together across a scattered geography.

Institutions may close, but communities rarely end so cleanly.

## Vanessa Perez Winder

**Vanessa Perez Winder**  
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Dear CCA, I loved you, and then again, I hardly got to know you.

I don't remember when I became so dead-set on going to CCA, but at some point the decision fixed itself. A lover of art writing and theory, yet simultaneously a hater of Art History™ and entirely unprepared for a PhD, I looked to the Dual MA in Visual and Critical Studies and Curatorial Practice as a kind of salvation. There are—were?—so few programs in the U.S. that treat contemporary art as a field of decolonial critique.

By the time I was filling out my application in late 2022, the Curatorial Practice program had been placed on indefinite hiatus. Still, a certain stubbornness—paired with the desire to commit to the arts—carried me into the VCS program.

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For all of its administrative failures, I don't regret graduating from CCA last year. CCA gave me excellent friends who are also kind of freaky. It gave me professors who introduced me to world-changing theory, who encouraged me to develop a backbone as a critic, to be less nervous, and to take up more space in the outside art world. CCA gave me college staff that trusted me—and other students before me—to lead a little online arts publication called *Rewind Review Respond* on the .edu website. My connections from school led to a full-time job working closely with artists and arts workers, many of whom also passed through CCA.

But attending an institution two to three years prior to its abrupt closure, I also experienced the VCS program as a neglected ghost with shifting leadership. Maybe a skeleton, something a bit more substantial. It is a symptom, of course, of shrinking enrollment, the school's simultaneous turn toward more profitable programs, and a world in which written and intellectual criticism no longer feels particularly valued. It makes sense that the VCS program would be the one to get a little abandoned.

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People say that it's not the institution that makes a place, it's the people. Everyone who's gone to CCA or taught there knows that the community runs deep. It's arguably our greatest collective strength. We keep up with the programs and the new student artists, and come back to work or lecture. We start projects and work together, now and years into the future.

It's difficult to think that after next spring, there will be no new classes of graduates. No more VCS students to guide with or BFA/MFA students to keep up with. Unlike the closure of a campus building or a program, the complete demise of a 119-year-old institution and the uncertainty of where its archives will end up produce a particular kind of stinging loss. The health of the arts can be marked by its density. When that thins, there are fewer places to land and connect.

Though Mayor Lurie declared that the Vanderbilt announcement was a "great day for San Francisco," many folks were, in fact, not having a great day. In light of other recent closures—or threats of closures—of art institutions and galleries in San Francisco, many of us were actually wondering whether a dignified and professional life in the arts here was still viable.

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Despite these feelings about the future, I also understand how important it is to focus on the present: on students finishing their final year, on faculty navigating an institution being pulled out from under them, on staff dealing with administrative erosion. As we continue to have conversations about what's working in the arts, higher education, our city, and country, I know that there are many good, smart, and strong folks who will carry whatever CCA was into whatever comes next. Not as an institution but as a kind of distributed knowledge that doesn't dissolve when a building empties or a website gets archived. I guess that will have to be enough for now.