Message from the Chair
Why Diversity Matters
Board Chairman Bob Davidson discusses the role of diversity in creating robust learning environments.

Features
Create Change
Art Center President Lorne Buchman offers readers his 10 reflections on the College’s 2011–2016 strategic plan: Create Change.

Perspectives on the Plan
From future educational models to ensuring access, fostering the art/design dialogue to developing new spaces for learning, Create Change covers much territory. To help illuminate some of the larger themes, we’ve asked faculty and planning committee members to weigh in.

Emerging Ambitions: Scholarships Support Tomorrow’s Artists and Designers
Easing students’ financial burdens is a critical element of the College’s new strategic plan. Here, we profile three students and one recent alumnus who have benefitted from scholarships.

Spotlight
Storytelling is the Big Concept
We talk with Tim Flattery, the new Chair of the Entertainment Design Department, about a College in transition and what changes he has in store for his students.

Testlab Dispatches Students into Foreign Lands
Last summer, 15 Art Center students operated a pop-up studio in the center of Berlin for a sponsored project. Could this new model be the future of education?

Alumnus Leads Rebranding Strategy at PayPal
Advertising alumna Cynthia Maller describes her most recent branding challenge.

New Demo Shop Benefits Students
More space for critical tool demonstrations—thanks to a grant from the Ralph M. Parsons Foundation.

The Last Word
Members of Art Center’s visioning and strategic planning processes discuss their experiences.

Cover: Detail of alumnus Jammun Roberts’ FINE ’10 meditation sanctuary, which is installed on the Art Center hillside.
Diversity as a concept and goal plays a central role in the new plan.

Why Diversity Matters

Living in Southern California, I am often struck by the complexity of the ecosystem and the role of biodiversity in creating a healthy natural environment. I’ve come to realize that the same holds true for college campuses: those that thrive depend upon a diverse range of voices, academic disciplines, cultures and socio-economic backgrounds to create a robust learning environment.

Art Center is home to a diverse community of artists and designers. Considering background alone, our student body includes recent high school graduates and adults with several years of professional experience, domestic and international students, underrepresented minorities and first-generation immigrants. The Art Center educational model stresses placing students into cross-disciplinary contexts. Add to this the distinct perspectives and opinions—sometimes in opposition to one another—of our students and faculty members and you begin to piece together Art Center’s distinct ecology.

And so, as we commenced work on the College’s new five-year strategic plan, it was critical that the diversity found on campus was reflected in the planning process. For this I must thank President Lorne Buchman, whose thoughtful and invigorating leadership guided the community forward throughout these past 15 months.

The result is a community-generated plan in every sense of the word—students, faculty, staff, alumni, trustees and friends shaped the contents. Entitled Create Change, the strategic plan is guided by our core values and centers on ensuring students possess the vision, knowledge and creative problem-solving skills to succeed in their ever-changing fields.

As it happens, diversity as a concept and goal plays a central role in the new plan. Create Change calls for boosting diversity at every level—in the makeup of our students and faculty, in the kinds of programs we offer, and in the cross-disciplinary conversations we foster. Increasing the number of student scholarships is a top priority. The development of new spaces for learning is another—ensuring that students will have access to the types of physical and online learning environments that will encourage collaborations among the various art and design disciplines, as well as with outside partners like industry and nonprofits.

Appropriately, the plan’s second pillar (there are three) is called “Convening Diverse Communities & Disciplines,” and I find it fitting that the title reflects how the overall planning process was conceived and executed. A broad cross-section of faculty, students, staff members, alumni and trustees played vital roles in shaping the plan, and I am tremendously thankful for their contributions.

As revealed in Create Change, the role of diversity—in all of its manifestations—will significantly inspire Art Center’s approach to art and design education in the 21st century. I invite you to explore the plan in full online at artcenter.edu/createchange and hope you will join the larger dialogue.

Bob Davidson
Chairman
Art Center Board of Trustees
IN MARCH 2011, ART CENTER LAUNCHED A BOLD PLAN FOR ITS FUTURE: A FIVE-YEAR, COMMUNITY-GENERATED STRATEGIC PLAN CALLED CREATE CHANGE.

The plan is the result of more than a year of deep conversations, brainstorms and working group sessions with the entire Art Center community who came together to address the challenge of making our distinctive education cutting edge and pertinent in a changing world.

Create Change presents the results of this visioning process. Our plan at once honors Art Center’s distinguished 80-year history and imagines its future.

It builds on what we know and asks us to deepen and intensify our practices; it demands that we advance to a constant state of innovation.

Here, I offer my reflections on the plan, describing its evolution and how it will shape the College’s core values into a new model for art and design education for the 21st century—one that ensures continuing excellence, relevance and impact for decades to come.

1/ LEARN TO CREATE. INFLUENCE CHANGE.

This is our mission statement. It captures why we exist. It plays with the common structure of an institutional mission statement. It does in its unusual structure what we do as an institution—challenge expectation and thereby communications mission by both word and form. That it bears in the direction of the poetic is apt, as the prosaic options we explored left the community feeling flat. The rhythm and shape hold a power necessary in describing this special place where discovery comes from creating.

I’ve never loved a mission statement before, but I love this one. It’s a profound educational philosophy and it’s what Art Center is about.

2/ A COMMUNITY DIALOGUE.

We built this strategic plan with the fundamental assumption that, if challenged, Art Center’s community of extraordinarily creative people could imagine its own future. We intentionally took our time developing the dialogue, and we developed it in a manner that honored the multiple voices of a heterogeneous college.

The plan does not represent collective agreement, but it does represent collective wisdom and underlying consensus. It’s the product of a group of people who care deeply for this great institution and the importance of our mission.

The challenge—the design brief—concerned how the great art and design college of the 21st century could best serve its students. We wanted to apply to ourselves the same rigor and excellence we demand of our students.

In the end, more than 500 individuals—faculty, chairs, staff, students, alumni, trustees, industry and nonprofit partners, civic leaders and donors—influenced the content of our plan.

3/ A NEW LEARNING ECOCY.

Art Center is entering a new landscape of higher education in this second decade of the 21st century. Current trends suggest a changing student profile; new technologies and social networks present an as-of-yet unimagined array of fresh learning resources; a proliferation of new programs in higher education vie for the best students and faculty; new educational partnerships and diverse providers of content challenge traditional models of delivery; and an economic climate threatens diverse access to an education that is, and always has been, intensive and expensive to deliver. The best institutions will be creative in adapting to this changing landscape and to the new learning ecology that results.
4/ THE DESIGNER IMPERATIVE.
We embrace and celebrate the fact that our alumni are challenged to contribute to society in increasingly substantive ways. Today’s designers must apply their creativity to both anticipate and solve problems, with consequences that impact everything from business strategy and manufacturing, to environmentally responsible practice, to marketing and communications, and to the development of complex systems of activity and production. Moreover, designers are challenged to pay deep attention to the human element of design. The human element of design is critical to the realization of a mission where our alumni are challenged to anticipate and solve problems, with creativity to both substantive ways. Today's designers contribute to society in increasingly influential change.

5/ THE ARTIST IMPERATIVE.
Chekhov makes a distinction between “the solution of a problem” and “a compelling presentation of a problem” and adds, “only the latter is obligatory for the artist.” We educate those with the courage, insight and creative skill to identify and shed light on the human experience. Our art programs—often misunderstood at Art Center as only Fine Art but, in reality, inclusive of Illustration, Film, Photography and other programs that straddle art and design—produce graduates who raise our sensibilities and re-contextualize experiences so we might see them anew. That we educate artists at Art Center is critical to the realization of a mission where learning to create is fundamentally connected to influencing change. The art/design dialogue at Art Center holds enormous potential for research and learning and, historically, we as an institution have not taken the steps to move the conversation forward in the fullest way. Now is the time to do so.

6/ THE CONSERVATORY SPIRIT.
Art Center students have always “made” things exceptionally well. Thinking, making, finding meaning, applying creativity to anticipate and solve problems, entrepreneurialism, engagement of a practicing faculty, a focus on professional training for talented and serious students—all constitute the conservatory spirit that has and will continue to define an Art Center education as the new century unfolds. In this spirit, over the next five years we plan to expand our offerings and to implement a set of programs to straddle art and design—produce graduates who raise our sensibilities and re-contextualize experiences so we might see them anew. That we educate artists at Art Center is critical to the realization of a mission where learning to create is fundamentally connected to influencing change.

7/ CONVENING DIVERSE COMMUNITIES & DISCIPLINES.
Rich intercultural and transdisciplinary conversations provide a critical counterbalance to Art Center's highly focused conservatory spirit. A diverse college community that encourages such dialogue produces the sophisticated thinkers, practitioners and global citizens needed today. Twenty-first-century leaders in business, non-profit and public sectors are breaking down silos and assembling cross-functional teams who together set priorities and direction. Armed with a broad understanding of their enterprise and its cultural, social and political contexts, creative professionals will play an integral role in defining strategy and influencing change.

8/ NEW SPACES FOR LEARNING.
New degree programs will enrich the Art Center community and increase our overall size and scope. While these programs will be self-supporting, they will require space—some physical, some virtual. In order to expand our offerings, we must simultaneously enlarge and improve our campus and take advantage of technological resources to create an effective online, “low-residency,” learning environment. New and remodeled facilities will provide room for growth, invigorate transdisciplinary practices and encourage interaction among students, faculty, staff and external partners. The College's original model of the “campus as an office building” is giving way to the idea of the “campus as a space to live and work.” We seek to build a unified and integrated College with two centers and to address our space, technology, environmental and community needs in a manner that will ensure the highest standards for educational excellence and support.

9/ A VIABLE RESOURCE STRATEGY.
Our ambitions will require resources, and our five-year business plan calls for the following:
- An enrollment growth strategy through new programs (“on-the-ground” and “low-residency”).
- The purchase of new property to accommodate growth and academic demands on current programs.
- A comprehensive remodel of the Eliwood building.
- The development of student housing (live/work).
- The attainment of working capital through philanthropy, unused operating contingency, operating surplus and reserves.
- The acquisition of debt through bond issue (scholarships, faculty development, program development, bricks and mortar, technology, endowment).
- Strategic investment in infrastructure and personnel to ensure major improvements in ongoing operating support through philanthropy.

The Board of Trustees adopted Create Change in February 2011. My hope is that in a year’s time the Board will adopt a revision of the current strategic plan as new ideas surface, as our thinking gains in precision, as we conduct further research on the marketplace, and as we respond to the unpredictable and the opportunistic changes that will surely come our way. And I hope the same will be true the following year. The strategic plan is a guide, not a rigid set of dictates. It should, and must, evolve. Its strength lies not just in its measurable outcomes but also in the space we create for continued conversation and growth. The dialogue that produced our collective sense of the future will continue, and a commitment to tapping the wisdom of the Art Center community should, and will, remain the only constant.

To access the plan in full, please visit artcenter.edu/createchange.
Without passion, specialization is mechanical. The history of artistic endeavor tells us that, truly felt and truly understood, passion is ethical. Genuine passion for any activity considerably enhances the likelihood of achieving the very best—in process, object and outcome. In one sense, it’s simple. Yet it is neither easy nor self-indulgent. Understanding one’s own passion means knowing oneself. The Humanities and Design Sciences Department (HDS) is especially entrusted with enabling this grounded, rounded understanding of making. The conservatory spirit alluded to by President Buchman on the previous pages, and elaborated in the strategic plan, characterizes its ideal environment.

HDS is currently engaged in an exciting and challenging process of getting to know itself and renewing its passion. In a way, we are prefiguring the process of what we want to develop in the talented and diverse group of young people who are our students. Behind the curricular and organizational developments this entails is a dedication to ensuring that a special kind of critical and creative thinking manifests and grows as students develop. We must not underestimate the capacity of young people to achieve it. To paraphrase the great Baudelaire in The Painter of Modern Life, genius is childhood willingly rediscovered. Behind this remark is his understanding that when change occurs rapidly, the wisdom of successive generations becomes ever more distinct. That is why creativity must look to the past in order to understand the present and participate in forging the future. One sure way of engendering this is through collaboration among faculty and between faculty and students to find our collective genius.

The conservatory spirit grows from here: it enables another logic, another curriculum, that is more deeply connected to the present real world. It is a logic that springs from an abstract yet embodied level that all creative specialties share. It is an architectonic, or a multi-dimensional space, where reason and passion meet.

The best-known example is the relationship between music and mathematics. Both are indissolubly connected to the material world and to a logic that is greater than ourselves. In reconfiguring HDS, we aim to nurture this level of understanding in our students. Music and math are universal languages, yet highly specialized. The universal is no longer to be understood as a homogenizing generalization, but rather as a diverse and mobile network of positions that change, yet stay the same. It is wonderful to be living in an era when we have the potential to access not only the diverse traditions and knowledge of the entire planet, but also its contemporaneity, its varied experience, almost to the second. We owe it to the students to guide them towards ways of understanding our difference, our interdependence and our shared inventiveness.

They can best attain this connectedness and breadth by finding their own true voice. There is a paradox in self-knowledge in that it frees us from ourselves. If you know who you are as a thinker and maker, you can begin to inhabit a world that does not revolve around you, enabling you to begin to contribute to such a world. That is potentially the birth both of critical thinking and of creativity. It underpins a world-view that is also vital to the application of creativity to solving real-world problems in a global context.
Imagine Change

PHIL VAN ALLEN

Imagine you’re watching your favorite instructor demonstrate a new approach—for example, a lighting setup for portrait photography, or a new conceptual approach to transportation planning. At one point there’s something you don’t quite understand, so you touch the pause button on your iPad, select a different camera angle, and watch that part again. Expanding on the topic, you pull up the instructor’s diagrams, written notes and links. Because you’re sitting in a cafe and not a classroom, the pace is your own—you’re not slowing down others, and they’re not slowing you down. But you could sit with a friend (online via chat, or in-person) and review the material together, helping and challenging each other.

Later, to apply and explore the concepts from the demonstration, you use a 3D simulation on the iPad to position and control virtual lighting to see the effects of the key, fill and back lights on a portrait. Or, using an interactive animation, you test how different traffic calming measures affect traffic flow, business activity and safety on a street.

While developing your project, you refer back to the iPad to re-watch portions of your instructor’s demonstration. You check supplemental materials provided by the instructor and previous students—for example, details on how different lighting options affect a photograph’s emotional impact, or transportation case studies. You also post questions and suggestions for the instructor, whether in the traditional studio class, or online.

To accomplish this, Create Change proposes a range of approaches. These include better integrating technology in the traditional classroom and using collaborative tools and social networking to build new communities around making. To encourage and support self-directed and peer-to-peer learning, Art Center will develop an online and physical Learning Center supported by staff and digital materials. To address new student populations, low residency programs are proposed that combine online and tablet-based remote instruction with periodic intensive, in-person instruction.

We’ll also address our alumni and other practicing artists and designers more robustly through workshops, low-residency master’s programs and online courses. A key goal in the strategic plan is to develop new forms of art and design education to increase Art Center’s relevance, reach and diversity, and to maintain the rigorous, conservatory approach that is fundamental to the institution. Some approaches can be adapted from innovative trends in education. Others will need to be invented for the specific needs of Art Center’s art and design programs.

Art & Design: A Commando Raid on the Conventional

LAURENCE DREIBAND

“Don’t we need more on art to provide us with beauty, which is just as well...”

As a professional priority now, beauty belongs to organs of commercial culture, which must please or die.”

—PETER SCHIEHDAHL

Today art and design are engaged in a stimulating dialogue, one that questions assumptions about each, nurturing self-expression, enhancing creative problem solving. Art sometimes disturbs, design rather reassures. Design reaches out to embrace you, while “art could just as soon be a thumb in your eye.” Design assists commerce; art can be an argument for what might be considered sacred. Though our name brackets the worlds of design and fine art, they are all too often separated. As we embrace our new strategic plan—Create Change, we could do a better job of integrating artists and designers, who share a commitment to excellence and a passion for changing the world.

Is there a difference between art and design?

Hasn’t art always had a function? Is there not artistry in design?

Art has functioned as religious, ideological and political propaganda, economic currency, commodity, decoration, and a vehicle for personal expression. This dialogue and influence between art and design is not new. From Classical Greece and Rome, through the Renaissance and the Baroque to the Bauhaus and Russian Constructivists, science, art and industry have been united at different times in the past. Many artists, from Michelangelo to Donald Judd, practiced both—designing architecture, furniture and functional objects along with works of art. The distinction between “fine” art and “decorative” art intensified by the late 18th century when academies began to position painting and sculpture as the highest form of art—defined as a “source of aesthetic pleasure uncontaminated by the squalor of practicality.”

This negative attitude toward design as something inferior persist. Ellsworth Kelly remarked, “I don’t want any work of mine to be useful in any other way than to be looked at as a work of art.” A rather different anti-establishment point of view was that of Marcel Duchamp, who disapproved of the auteur aspects of contemporary art and, through his series of “Ready-mades,” explored found objects and industrial products offering viewers “the beauty of indifference.” Though artists and designers today can share similar ideas about form and space, including certain minimalist tendencies and the use of industrial materials and mass-production techniques—opposing ideas persist on how art and design should be defined. Donald Judd believed in the inherent differences—planting a firm wedge between art and design, while Scott Burton, coming from audience-oriented Performance Art, felt that future works of art should function as pragmatic sculptural structures. Artists like Richard Tuttle and Jorge Pardo now prefer that their work not be defined as either art or design, categories they consider restrictive and limiting. Isamu Noguchi aspired to make abstract artworks useful and integrated into everyday life. He saw his task as shaping space and believed art should “disappear” into the surroundings with a sense of oneness.


Photo: Steven A. Heller PhOT ’85 / MFA ILlU ’98

PHIL van ALLEN is a core faculty member in the Graduate Media Design Program and is the co-chair of the Curriculum and Pedagogy Committee.

Laurence Dreiband is the Chair of Art Center’s Undergraduate Fine Art Program.

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There’s no coincidence that so many of our most celebrated alumni working in fine art benefited from exposure to Art Center’s rich design and applied-art programs. Mark Tansey’s FINE ’72 infuses the language of illustrative representational painting with hidden texts, symbols and images to engage the viewer intellectually. Pae White’s FINE ’91 large photographic tapestries of crumpled foil or plumes of smoke dissolve the boundaries of graphic design, applied and fine art. Jorge Pardo’s FINE ’88 art practice integrates art, functional product design and environmental architecture. Jennifer Steinkamp’s FINE ’91 dynamic installations transform interior space, incorporating video and digital mass-media technology to explore motion, light and perception. And Doug Aitken’s FINE ’91 art video-installations and architectural interventions employ multiple screens that challenge conventions of linear narrative. What these diverse artists have in common, apart from having been educated at Art Center, is they’ve reached outside art to applied art and design for content and inspiration, integrating the divine and the mundane, making and meaning.

Art Center’s Fine Art Program is ambitious, providing an incomparable art education and nurturing each art student’s quest for self-discovery. However, given an opportunity, it can do more than expose design students to art’s numerous satisfactions. It can also disrupt commonplace aesthetic values, inspire awe for a particular idea, and change the way one perceives life’s possibilities.

While applied art’s strength may be in delivering clear messages, making useful products and diverting entertainments, art can be most meaningful when it orchestrates confusion and uncertainty when it doesn’t conform to what we already know, but rather leaves us momentarily disoriented, yet exposed to compelling new experiences and ideas. If we’re open, artists can be relied on to confront us with impudent acts of imagination, strange sensations that can stir the soul, and alter our way of seeing and thinking about the world we all inhabit. It can transform your vision. It can change your life.
Diversity in our society is no longer a projection; it is a reality. In the context of compelling issues in the United States and abroad—changing demographics, immigration, educational disparities, civil rights and diversity in the marketplace, to name only a few—diversity provides powerful opportunities and serious challenges.

In approaching these challenges and opportunities, Art Center must ask itself how it can build capacity to be an effective, high-performing place where diversity thrives.

As we search for an answer, technology provides a useful parallel. Decades ago, institutions understood that their physical and fiscal knowledge and cultural resources to respond effectively to a technologically sophisticated world.

In pursuing this vision, Art Center must also monitor progress and engage change in strategic ways. It will need to monitor data related to conventional measures of student success, including disaggregated graduation rates, to identify and aggressively address achievement disparities. It will need to monitor faculty hiring for diversity, the campus climate, and engage change in strategic ways. It will need to monitor the role of diversity in strategic planning, etc.

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As one thinks about the future, one can imagine an Art Center that engages diversity on many levels and provides a model for an inclusive learning environment.

As outlined in Art Center’s new strategic plan, we will also need to be a culture of innovation and continually rethink our own systems of teaching and learning so that we prepare and educate our graduates to thrive in a world of rapid change. The project-based education that Art Center has employed from its beginning remain key to our graduates’ long-term success and their ability to continue learning throughout their lives. But in order to address the important new emphasis on systems thinking, it is essential that Art Center convenes a broad and diverse community in our project model that includes engineers, scientists, public policymakers and business leaders—to illuminate and inform the system elements and organizational dynamics that industrial designers will need to understand and integrate as leaders of innovation.

Advancing the education of our graduates for success will also require a higher degree of resolution in our simulations of real world design challenges. Create Change calls for learning environments that will support projects that have longer duration and go beyond making appearance models that illustrate new concepts and, instead, engage in the realities of building full-scale prototypes that can be tested and put into practice to provide a proof of the proposed value.

To make this possible, Art Center will need new education facilities with flexible spaces that can support projects of various scales and which can accommodate the shifting needs of our innovation programs and their cross-disciplinary teams. Our ongoing work will require new fabrication resources and technical equipment that supports the development of prototypes in collaboration with a variety of changing partners.

By investing in new, flexible education systems for Art Center, our graduates will be ready to lead in the creation of new systems and positive change.

Diversity's Promise: Building Capacity for a Pluralistic Society

DARYL G. SMITH

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New Spaces for Learning

David Meckel and Heidrun Mumper-Drumm

Parallel to the strategic planning effort, Art Center has been conducting an architect selection process in order to find the best partner to help renovate and reinvigorate the iconic building designed by Craig Ellwood Associates that defines Hillside Campus. These architects have been asked to consider how to best address five key challenges presented by this 35-year-old facility.

These challenges are also opportunities for design innovation. They include improving and expanding academic spaces; updating the seismic performance of the building; installing new, sustainable energy systems; making the site and building ADA accessible; and renovating the historic building exterior.

While the Ellwood building was ‘modern’ for its time, it was not designed according to the current best practices and sustainability standards that faculty, staff and students consider a priority. The renovation now provides us with the opportunity to align our educational and community values with the learning environment.

The optimization of our South Campus is a critical component of the reshaping of space at the College. Initially, it will serve to accommodate those functions that are better served in that location and by that type of facility.

Eventually, South Campus will allow a scale of prototyping and fabrication not possible anywhere at the College today. Ultimately, South and Hillside Campuses, each with a unique character and assets, will function as one unified and integrated College.

The architect selection process has consciously been focused on selecting a designer, not a design. Once the selection is complete, the rich and multi-layered interaction between design team and students, faculty, staff, alumni, trustees and other Art Center stakeholders will begin to unfold. We welcome your interest, so stay tuned for this exciting part of the process.

Increasing scholarship support is a key priority for Art Center, as laid out in Create Change, the College’s new strategic plan. Here are three current students and one recent alumnus whose visions we can all delight in thanks to Art Center scholarships.

A bulletproof lemonade stand, a tender childhood moment captured in the Southern California sun, a futuristic car that stores energy in chemical bonds, and a sneak peak at the future of the written word—all of these were made possible due to the generosity of Art Center scholarship donors.

This past February, Art Center President Lorne Buchman and Student Government President Erik Molano addressed the student body at an event titled “Meet the Presidents.” There, Buchman offered a preview of the College’s new strategic plan and discussed one of its most important elements: easing the financial burden to students.

While pointing out that Art Center delivers an expensive form of education—equipment, labor and team teaching all add to a per-student cost that actually exceeds tuition—Buchman said easing students’ financial commitment is critical to maintaining a diverse student body and a robust learning environment. “A huge part of my job is to find the philanthropy and scholarships that are going to help,” said Buchman. “I think about this every day.”

He’s done more than think about it. In the last year, thanks to targeted budgetary reallocations and fundraising projects like the “$80 for 80” initiative, Art Center made an additional $3 million available for student scholarships. And with a full 80 percent of current Art Center students receiving financial aid, you can be sure that every additional dollar counts.

Annually, Art Center allocates $9.6 million for scholarships; of that amount, 18 percent comes from donors. And for many students who come to Art Center seeking a bachelor’s degree, but who already have a prior degree—as is true for three of the students profiled here—those scholarships are fundamental, as they’re ineligible for either federal or California state grants.

All images courtesy of the artists, unless otherwise noted.
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I felt like there was a certain freedom feedback, he and his partner branched found himself in California, helping to embracing their outlook. That’s when wait things out in New York, the Alaskan I knew I wanted something different.

Pleased with their success and positive Fast forward a few years and Roberts, who had also been working as a photographer’s assistant for a studio in Manhattan, but once he started working with kids, he found their imagination and playful attitude towards life infectious. “I felt like there was a certain freedom to embracing their outlook. That’s when I knew I wanted something different.”

Fast forward a few years and Roberts found himself in California, helping to reshape an after-school program at Ocean Charter School in Culver City. Pleased with their success and positive feedback, he and his partner branched out on their own and created Foundation 4 Life, a nonprofit after-school enrichment program. “We wanted to use the community as a tool,” said Roberts of the simple activities they started with, like organized soccer and going on neighborhood walks. “So we decided to use public spaces instead of a facility. We wanted to create a school without walls.”

It was during this time that Roberts also became interested in Art Center. A friend had introduced him to Ben Caldwell, the influential artist and filmmaker who runs KAOS Network, a community arts center in Los Angeles’ African-American Leimert Park neighborhood. Caldwell had been working with Art Center as a sponsor of “Community Design,” a Transdisciplinary Studio course run by Environmental Design instructor Randall Wilson, in which students developed a KAOS Network retail space for local artisans to sell their work. At Caldwell’s invitation, Roberts sat in on several classes and was impressed with what he saw. “I really liked how Art Center was trying to affect actual change in the community,” said Roberts. He decided to apply to the College’s Fine Art Program based on the experience.

Once at Art Center, Roberts found the work he did with kids had a strong influence on the art he created for his classes. He began researching the Boy Scouts of America—its 100-plus year history, its philosophy, and how the organization prepares kids for the world. Based on this research, Roberts shifted his focus to projects based around the concept of surviving in the woods, including sculptures that looked like booby traps. “I started exploring the idea of what happens to an object once you put it out there in the world,” said Roberts, who pursued this new direction during his last two years at Art Center.

During this time, he worked on several collaborative projects with other Fine Art students that explored what he called “off-the-grid permanent installations”—a “throne” built out of bricks, a far-flung “exhibition” of charcoal sketches, a “meditation sanctuary” made out of dead wood—which were all made using found materials and hidden from view in the chaparral surrounding Art Center’s Hillside Campus. “We were thinking about exploration, discovery and also privilege,” said Roberts, who wondered who, outside of his classmates, would actually stumble upon these works. Since there were no maps or signs pointing in their direction, the only way to find the work would be by accident or via word-of-mouth. Added Roberts, “The installations are still there, and somebody’s making alterations. Last time I checked, there were some mirrors inside the sanctuary.”

Roberts continued his work with Foundation 4 Life even as a full-time student, but in order to meet the rigorous demands of his studies, he had to scale back the program to a summer camp model. As it turned out, the camp—affectively called “Man Camp” by the participating boys and girls—inspired Roberts to take his final project into unexpected territory.

During the summer camp before his final term at Art Center, the kids had expressed an interest in making money, so Roberts started an entrepreneurship activity for them that involved selling lemonade at the Santa Monica Beach. “It gave them a sense of pride,” said Roberts of something major. They were part of a reversal of what artists like Jeff Koons or Takashi Murakami do when creating their work. But most importantly, Roberts said the attribution meant something to the kids. “It gave them a sense of pride,” said Roberts. “It let them know they were part of something major. They were part of a real art installation.”

But it’s also exploring paranoia and society’s overcompensation for safety. Roberts continued his work with Foundation 4 Life even as a full-time student, but in order to meet the rigorous demands of his studies, he had to scale back the program to a summer camp model. As it turned out, the camp—affectively called “Man Camp” by the participating boys and girls—inspired Roberts to take his final project into unexpected territory.

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The kids: how could you make selling lemonade in an urban setting a com-
For seventh-term Graphic Design major Christina Nizar, returning to school was not a decision she made lightly. “I had been out of school for less than a year,” said Nizar, who before attending Art Center had pursued another strong interest of hers—social justice—by earning B.A.s in sociology and political science at the University of California, Irvine. “So starting all over was a big deal.”

Why start over? The Bakersfield, Calif., native had been preparing to pursue a life in academia, but something didn’t feel quite right. She realized two things: first, she was curious about many top-ics and didn’t want to restrict herself to a small community; and second, she couldn’t ignore her creative leanings. “I came to realize that creating art was simply something I needed to do,” said Nizar. “And graphic design felt like a field where I could approach a variety of different subjects with fresh ideas.”

Today, Nizar not only finds herself more intellectually satisfied nurturing her creative side, but she’s also found ways to bring her social science research background into her work. In the fall of 2009, she was part of Designmatters’ Colorectal Cancer Prevention Campaign. For that course Nizar and five other Art Center students collaborated with the Mayo Clinic’s Innovation Unit and the American Cancer Society to create Family PLZ!, a traditional and social media campaign designed to build awareness around colorectal cancer screenings. “That class really gave me a sense of how to work with other people and how to adjust to other personali-ties,” said Nizar. “That was my first taste of collaboration in a design setting.”

CHRISTINA NIZAR
Helena Balfour Edwards Endowed Scholarship
Honda Endowed Scholarship
Pentagram Endowed Scholarship

4/ Concept shots and video stills from IDEO’s “The Future of the Book,” a project in which Christina Nizar, an intern, served as the visual lead.
5/ In her “Interactive Design 3” course at Art Center, Nizar conceptualized an iPad app for the United States Postal Service. Portrait of Christina Nizar by Jennie Warren.
Eighth-term Transportation Design major Ben Messmer was six years old when he started telling people he wanted to be a car designer. He remembers family road trips where he spent the entire drive drawing cars that passed them on the freeways. “I was fascinated with the way cars reflected the personalities of the people driving them,” Messmer said.

Messmer’s devotion to cars lasted until high school when he shifted gears and decided he wanted to become an artist. The North Carolina native took his new direction seriously and went on to study fine art at The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art in New York. But while there, he found it impossible to shake cars from his head. He constantly sketched cars in the sidelines of his notebooks. Even the work he created reflected his interest in automotive design.

A few years after graduating, Messmer learned that one of his Cooper Union classmates had been accepted into Art Center’s Transportation Design Program. It wouldn’t be her last. She recently took two terms off to work as an intern for two design companies in New York: first at IDEO, a human-centered design firm whose clients include Medtronic, Ford Motor Company and Hewlett-Packard; and second at Pentagram, a multidisciplinary design firm whose clients include Google, General Electric and Benetton. (Subsequently, Nizar received the Pentagram Scholarship from Art Center, independent of her internship.)

Nizar says IDEO was a great fit for her because the firm’s philosophy is a human-based design process that stresses interdisciplinary collaboration. She remembers being struck by how quickly they integrated her into their workflow. “Just 30 minutes after I met everybody in the office, they threw me right into two projects,” said Nizar.

One project she worked on while at IDEO, the studio-initiated “The Future of the Book,” explored three different scenarios for how interaction with the written word could evolve due to e-reading. For the project, Nizar first participated in a week-long brainstorming session and then became the project’s visual lead. The end product—a video of readers effortlessly checking the reliability of their text, sharing books with colleagues, and unlocking parallel chapters to novels by moving to specific GPS coordinates—received widespread attention and has garnered more than 425,000 views on Vimeo.

At Pentagram, Nizar worked with legendary designer Michael Bierut on a project commissioned by The New York Times for its annual “Year in Ideas” feature. The article, which appeared in the paper’s Sunday magazine in December, highlighted noteworthy innovations from the past year. Bierut and Nizar collaborated on an animated short to complement a story about ToneCheck, an email outbox filter designed by a Canadian startup that analyzes the emotional content of outgoing emails and intervenes to prevent an embarrassing situation.

Nizar said she knew The New York Times Magazine project was a big deal, but she didn’t realize her work was going to appear in one of the biggest issues of the year. And to top it all off, the work won a Type Director’s Club award. But most important to Nizar was the opportunity to work with one of her design heroes. “Michael has worked with so many cultural institutions in New York,” said Nizar. “In a way, he has shaped the city. Being able to work with him was such a pleasure.”

Watch IDEO’s The Future of The Book video.

Watch the animated short, “Emotional Spell-Check.”
Alex Klatt, the company’s director of interior design, on a door panel for the company’s Karma S, the convertible version of Fisker’s premium plug-in electric hybrid. Messmer’s tape drawing of the panel, based on the form of a running cheetah, inspired the door panel’s final design. Besides seeing his work transformed into reality, Messmer said he also took away valuable advice from Fisker himself: ‘He told me that as a car designer, you need to respect and create alliances with the engineers, the modelers, and others outside of the design staff. Because you’ll never accomplish your design without them.’

During his time at Fisker, he was contacted by Jay Rogers, CEO of Local Motors, a start-up company that manufactures customizable cars based on designs from an open source community. Rogers asked Messmer if he’d like to write the ignition kit rule book for the company’s first car, the Rally Fighter. Messmer took the job and Rogers eventually offered him an internship. His classmates thought he was crazy, but Messmer again chose to value a relationship and accepted the offer. And again, it paid off. As an intern, Messmer became the Rally Fighter’s lead designer. He took the car’s winning design—by Art Center alumnus Sangho Kim TRAN ’10, selected by the online community—and design directed the vehicle from the first quarter scale model to the first digital surfaces used in the final car, which is now in serial production.

For a transportation design student, what could possibly top that? How about this: ‘That was probably the best day of my life,’ said Messmer. So, yes, Messmer made it into the program. But the story doesn’t end there.

In 2008, following his fifth term, Messmer interned for Fisker Automotive, the start-up founded by Art Center alumnus Henrik Fisker TRAN ’89, whom he met through Art Center’s DOT Exchange program. When it came time to choose an internship, Messmer decided to value his relationship with his mentor and selected Fisker over a more established company. It paid off. While at Fisker, Messmer worked with the company’s creative director and Art Center alumnus Hubert Lee TRAN ’10, and also included alumni Daniel Kim TRAN ’10 and Jack Luttig TRAN ’10. The challenge? To envision a safe, comfortable and stylish four-passenger vehicle that weighed no more than 1,000 pounds. Figuring any vehicle that light must be “pretty sci-fi” in concept, Messmer looked to nature for inspiration and imagined a car that could store energy in chemical bonds like a leaf. Not only was this idea a hit, but Mercedes-Benz actually built a full-scale exterior model of the vehicle, which was then included in the company’s Super Bowl ad. Said Messmer, ‘That’s the most outrageous thing that’s happened in my career so far.”

“So far” may be the key phrase here. Messmer is currently living in Berlin, a stone’s throw from his internship at Volkswagen’s prestigious Design Center Potsdam. How did he land that job? A friend, who interned there last year, printed out Messmer’s portfolio and showed it to Peter Wouda, Volkswagen’s chief of exterior design. Which recalls something Messmer said he realized while soul-searching his future, “Our time here on Earth is short. And we’re spending every second either making connections and giving something to people, or we’re not.”

Knowing he was interested in doing the same, Messmer’s friend advised him to move to Los Angeles and to essentially embed himself at Art Center before applying. So Messmer did just that. He moved into a “shack” in Altadena and landed a day job at the College’s Copy Center, hoping that simply being on campus would help him make the right Art Center connections.

In the evenings, Messmer took Art Center at Night courses—he cites instructor Richard Pietruska’s lessons as particularly inspiring—and he even sat in on a class by instructor Ricky Hsu during the day. Hsu’s freethinking approach to what can influence car design—everything from the shape of a plant to the way an animal exists in its ecosystem—dramatically changed both Messmer’s entrance portfolio and his entire philosophy of design. For the next year and a half, Messmer developed his portfolio. He finally gathered up enough courage to approach Transportation Department Chair Stewart Reed and Geoff Wardle, the department’s Director of Advanced Mobility Research. They both already knew him as the Copy Center guy who delivered their paper, but this time he wanted to show them his portfolio and discuss his ambition to be a transportation designer. One meeting turned into several, and Messmer finally heard them say what he was waiting for: he had great potential to be a car designer. “That was probably the best day of my life,” said Messmer.

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Up until very recently, fifth-term Photography major Michelle Kunz had only wanted to take what she calls “found pictures.” “I didn’t want to create anything,” she said, explaining that she had opposed manipulating reality for a shoot. “I just wanted to shoot what was there in an interesting manner.” Some of that belief stemmed from her background in journalism—the Captain Cook, Hawaii native earned a B.A. in communications from Santa Clara University, spent several years as a news production assistant for San Jose’s KNTV-11, and wrote for the Bay City News wire service in San Francisco. And some of it came from her own personal interests—prior to Art Center, she was inspired by a documentary photography class at Samy’s Camera taught by Art Center alumnus Anthony Friedkin PHOT ’70, who began his career as a photojournalist for the cooperative Magnum Photos. But then, one day during her second term at Art Center, she was filling up at an Arco station in Pasadena and a vintage car, carrying a dad and his Slurpee-sipping son, pulled up alongside her. She was struck by the moment, and asked the father if she could take his picture. He turned her down, but said she could shoot his son if she’d like. So Kunz asked the boy to sit inside the car, and together, the two of them created a number of poses. “It’s very much a documentary photo, but it’s also staged,” said Kunz. “Prior to that day, I had never worked with my documentary subjects to capture anything specific. I had always played the part of the observer.” During her third term, Kunz had an opportunity to stretch this new sense of direction even further when she took “Composition” with Steve LaVoie. She sought to create a project that would land somewhere between her documentary leanings and the more conceptual work that LaVoie creates. To do this, she hired an actress, provided her with an intentionally vague narrative—a girl needs to leave L.A. right away—and gave her free reign to improvise. “We met in Pasadena, took off in my friend’s van and just let her do her thing,” said Kunz, who was pleasantly surprised by the variety of shots she took during the “road trip.” One shot showed her worry-laden protagonist standing outside her van smoking; another juxtaposed her with a menacing shadow of a man. Kunz added, “That assignment was really a turning point for me. I was able to
assert control over the situation while still letting things happen naturally.”

But her newfound freedom was only getting started. Again, during her third term, Kunz was given an assignment in Everard Williams’ “Portrait Lighting” course to shoot a portrait of a professional athlete. She knew she wanted to make a documentary photo, so she took advantage of the situation to call a childhood friend of hers who she knew was directing “White Collar Brawler,” a documentary Web series about two childhood friends who leave their uninspiring office jobs to train to become amateur boxers. Her friend set up a shooting opportunity for her between the fighter’s training sessions, and as a “thank you,” Kunz left him with a few images for publicity purposes.

After shooting the series’ stars outdoors using powerful strobes, she took a few more shots of them in the gym. Kunz didn’t think anything major would come of the pictures—she thought perhaps the show would use them on its Facebook page—which is why she was floored when her director friend showed her an article on The New York Times website that featured her photo. “Then he said, ‘Don’t forget to pick up the print edition today.’ What? Are you kidding me? So I ran out and bought six copies,” Kunz said. “I didn’t count the number of times people asked me, ‘How did you get a story published in that paper? That’s the Times!’”

For Kunz, the photograph captured “the ultimate goal. But never in a million years did I imagine I’d get into the Times through my photography.”

One of the first things visitors encounter in Tim Flattery’s office at Art Center is a life-sized alien hunched over a worktable. The creature is actually a foam rubber mold from The X-Files: Fight the Future, just one of several dozen films Flattery has worked on in a career that spans over two decades in Hollywood as a concept artist and illustrator.

No, the newly appointed Chair of the College’s Entertainment Design Department didn’t liberate the being from Area 51. The alien is just one of many props, toys and pieces of memorabilia decorating Flattery’s office, some of which he designed (a Hot Wheels replica of the Batmobile he created for Batman Forever), some of which he finds inspiring (a sculpture of Darth Vader and Luke Skywalker as originally depicted by concept artist, and Art Center alumnus, Ralph McQuarrie ’56), and still others he displays because he’s a self-professed geek (a Star Trek communicator, a Blade Runner PKD blaster).

Flattery’s credits include recent box-office blockbusters like Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man’s Chest and Transformers, and his work will appear on screen this summer in both Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen and Real Steel. He’s also no stranger to Art Center. He taught visual communication to Art Center’s Industrial Design students in the early ’80s and received a Teacher of the Year award from the College in 1994.

One of the first things visitors encounter in Tim Flattery’s office at Art Center is a life-sized alien hunched over a worktable. “Our hero journeys down a dark cave and discovers a city of light,” Flattery says. “The alien is a character of darkness whose purpose is to find his way to the light. It’s a metaphor for the student.”

“Storytelling is the Big Concept for New Entertainment Design Chair”

Art Center’s newly implemented strategic plan means that the College is in a transitional phase. Did you find that an attractive situation to enter? Yes, it made me more comfortable to know I could be a part of the transition. That’s a much better situation than falling into a rigid system. I think I was offered this position not only because of where I came from, but because I have things to offer that may be askew from the typical, institutionalized instructor. And I know that’s how Art Center thinks. The College has practicing artists and designers running its curricula, so that the school is completely in tune with the professional world.

What changes are you bringing to the Entertainment Design Department? Let me start by saying that Scott Robertson designed a really great program. The curriculum is very efficient and the students are prolific by sixth term. I’m coming at it from a different angle. I’ve been involved heavily in the entertainment industry for 24 years as a concept designer. So there are a few things I’m going to be bringing to the program, a lot of which involves integrating story heavily into the curriculum. Because ultimately that’s what we are: storytellers.

Could you elaborate? How does a concept designer or concept artist tell a story differently from a writer or a director? Writing is a linear style of storytelling, whereas concept art is more organic, because we’re visualizing a story. A lot of what I’ve been doing over the last eight years has been in the area of development, where I work closely with the director, as the film is being greenlit, to help visualize the script. The script might read, “Our hero journeys down a dark cave and discovers a city unlike anything you’ve ever seen.” Well, that’s up to concept designers to visualize and conceptualize. And depending on what they create, it can have a great impact on the story.
What changes are in store for the department?

When a student enters the Entertainment Design major, do they specify a preference for films, video games or theme parks from the beginning? Some are very motivated in one direction. But recently, when I asked everyone in the department what they wanted to do after graduation, a good portion of them said “everything.” They want to do video games, they want to do movies. They don’t care which, as long as they’re doing this [points to examples all around his office].

And what about the concept of entrepreneurship? The idea that when you graduate from Art Center you can also pave your own path? When I ask a student what they ultimately want to do, I’m secretly hoping to hear they want to make their own movies, start a video game company or launch a line of products, because those are the minds I’m hoping to cultivate. Students always think it sounds crazy. They say, “I know this might sound crazy, but I want to start my own video game company” or “I’d like to be a director one day, I know that sounds crazy.” That’s not crazy, that’s aspiration! Ridley Scott was a concept designer or “I’d like to be a director one day, I know that sounds crazy.” That’s not crazy, that’s aspiration! Ridley Scott was a concept designer or concept artist, and they need to understand what’s expected of them professionally in their working relationships with directors and production designers. I also plan on bringing a little bit of Hollywood into this department. For example, we’re going to turn the Intern Show and the Grad Show into larger events. Rather than just having companies come in to look at student’s artwork, we’re also going to showcase the students and the College. We’re going to let the entertainment industry know that we’re in tune with and sensitive to its needs.

What happens at the Intern Show?

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What other changes are in store for the department?

When a student enters the Entertainment Design major, do they specify a preference for films, video games or theme parks from the beginning? Some are very motivated in one direction. But recently, when I asked everyone in the department what they wanted to do after graduation, a good portion of them said “everything.” They want to do video games, they want to do movies. They don’t care which, as long as they’re doing this [points to examples all around his office].

And what about the concept of entrepreneurship? The idea that when you graduate from Art Center you can also pave your own path? When I ask a student what they ultimately want to do, I’m secretly hoping to hear they want to make their own movies, start a video game company or launch a line of products, because those are the minds I’m hoping to cultivate. Students always think it sounds crazy. They say, “I know this might sound crazy, but I want to start my own video game company” or “I’d like to be a director one day, I know that sounds crazy.” That’s not crazy, that’s aspiration! Ridley Scott was a concept designer or concept artist, and they need to understand what’s expected of them professionally in their working relationships with directors and production designers. I also plan on bringing a little bit of Hollywood into this department. For example, we’re going to turn the Intern Show and the Grad Show into larger events. Rather than just having companies come in to look at student’s artwork, we’re also going to showcase the students and the College. We’re going to let the entertainment industry know that we’re in tune with and sensitive to its needs.
Throughout her two-decade-plus career in the advertising industry, Cynthia Maller, ADVT ‘87 has experienced her share of branding challenges, whether for clients like Toyota and Logitech or during her seven years at Yahoo!’s first-ever creative director. And her current role is no exception. As the global creative director at PayPal, Maller has been overseeing the company’s complete rebranding efforts during the past three years. PayPal, the leading ecommerce system that allows its 94 million customers to send and receive money without sharing financial information, presented a unique branding challenge for Maller. As she explained, “PayPal has incredible unrivalled awareness. Everybody knows the PayPal name, but the comprehension of products and services is not where we’d like it to be.”

For example, shoppers on eBay (PayPal’s parent company) have a specific experience with the service, but PayPal offers users many other kinds of experiences, depending on need, preference and platform (computer, mobile phone). For PayPal to meet its goal of becoming a trillion dollar company, company executives realized PayPal’s brand strength would be a key factor. Maller cited PayPal’s complex yet highly successful business model as a major source of the branding challenge. With PayPal available in 190 markets and 24 currencies around the world—many of these managed by small to medium-size businesses—the proliferation of inconsistent branding of the PayPal service among merchants was rampant. “It’s a Herculean task—keeping control of integration when you operate at that scale,” she said. External brand diffusion impacted the company internally as well, something Maller is tackling by creating a Global PayPal Creative Community to provide connection and kinship amongst every employee doing any level of brand work for any customer touch point.

“We’ve learned that brand is a lagging indicator of company culture, so I’m giving equal attention to both in order to succeed in becoming one of the world’s best loved brands,” she said. New Demo Shop Benefits Students

One recent morning, Spencer Barry, a third term Graphic Design student, walked into Art Center’s new demonstration shop and was surprised by what he saw. Not only was the space equipped with full-scale tools—including a lathe, drill, vacuum forming machine and industrial sewing machine, but it also featured a closed circuit system and large flat screen to view demonstrations. “Our class watched an overhead view of a lathe demo by one of our instructors, and it allowed everyone in the room to see exactly what he was doing,” said Barry. “I was very impressed with the lengths taken to provide a professional and effective learning environment.”

Barry isn’t alone. The shop, officially known as The Ralph M. Parsons Foundation Demonstration Shop in honor of a $100,000 grant from the foundation to purchase equipment and build out the space, is open to students from all majors. It has quickly become an essential resource on campus—where students first present themselves to the main Model Shop, which had become jammed in recent years with required and lengthy demonstrations. “Students would get stressed out if they didn’t have access to the shops,” said Wendy Adest, Chair of Art Center’s Integrated Studies Department. Now, with dedicated demonstration space, that pressure is gone. What’s more, when the space isn’t in use for instruction, it’s often used as an additional, more intimate work environment for students. Adest believes it takes insight and awareness on the part of a funder to realize the significance of “back-of-the-house” operations. “Funding the demo shop wasn’t an obvious choice—it’s not like a library or classroom,” she said. “Thanks to the Parsons Foundation, Art Center can now offer students a quiet, clean and safe place to learn this technology and equipment.”

We began the visioning process with the directive from Lorne to let it get messy. Our challenge was to make sure that debates were productive and that our collected statements reflected the diversity of our approaches to education. At the end of the day, given the range of territories covered, I found it remarkable that there was so much agreement on the big ideas—and to see so many of these ideas brought into the strategic plan. Messy? Yes. But essential, and for the first time in my 20-plus years at Art Center, I feel that the faculty voice was strong and ever-present from start to finish.

My first impression was that the strategic planning process was something our school was in dire need of, and that the transparent and collective brainstorming would prepare Art Center well for the future. The process itself was gratifying because it empowered the entire Art Center community to take ownership of the College’s ideals and future direction by respecting all the ideas and differing perspectives from multiple levels. In my opinion, the results of the process are promising and are moving in the right direction.

Appropriately, our committee developed recommendations through modeling ourselves what it means to be a healthy and vibrant community. The ‘deliverables’ of the committee’s work—a strategy to further strengthen the fabric of our community—were evident in both the outcomes and the process itself—adding an authenticity and legitimacy so critical given the parameters of the team’s work.

This is one of those unique moments in history when we have the potential to impact the future of art and design education through the creation of a new kind of space. One of my main concerns was how to create an innovative atmosphere and space where students and faculty could collaborate across disciplines and realize their most creative endeavors. A space that would simultaneously represent the legacy and future of Art Center. It was illuminating to be part of the thoughtful and passionate dialogue concerning these issues.