

This interview with Maggie Williams was recorded on 2/3/26. The interview has been edited for clarity, readability, and length.

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Rebecca Tucker (RT): Hello! This is Art History on Fire, an interview series exploring the current state of the field of art history through conversations with a variety of U.S.-based art historians. Your hosts are myself, Rebecca Tucker, professor at Colorado College, and...

Deborah Hutton (DH): Deborah Hutton, professor at the College of New Jersey.

DH: We're here to talk about what the future holds for our field. Art History, as well as higher education and arts organizations in general are facing a variety of threats that can certainly feel daunting at times.

RT: At the same time, it is also true that art history is in a dynamic and innovative phase. Scholars are doing exciting, interdisciplinary and collaborative work and museums are putting on innovative exhibitions that are attracting large audiences.

DH: In this series, we will talk to art historians on the ground to learn from them about what is happening and why, and to gather ideas for moving forward.

RT: For the fourth installment in the series, we speak with Dr. Maggie Williams. Dr. Williams has a PhD in Art History from Columbia University, where she specialized in early medieval European Art, with a secondary focus in the Arts of Africa. Dr. Williams has long been an advocate for a global perspective and anti-racist methods in art history - she is a trailblazer. She taught at William Paterson University in New Jersey for nearly 15 years, where she earned the rank of Full Professor with tenure. Her book, *Icons of Irishness from the Middle Ages to the Modern World* considered nationalism, group identity, and the expression of ethnic pride through visual symbols. Dr. Williams was also a co-founder of the Material Collective, a group that sought to make our field more inclusive and more open to speculative methods and creative practices.

DH: As always, you will be able to find a transcript of this interview, as well as more information on Dr. Williams and her work as well as this interview series on our substack, Art History on Fire, and on the project's website hosted by Colorado College.

RT: Today, we are delighted to welcome Maggie Williams. Maggie, thank you for agreeing to be part of our interview series. It's a delight to see you. Deborah and I are really excited to hear more about your work and your thoughts on the current state and future of art history.

DH: Yes, Maggie, thank you so much, and welcome. We are going to get right into it and we're going to start our interview with the same question that we've been asking all our interviewees, which is, how would you describe yourself and the type of art history that you practice?

Maggie M. Williams (MW): Well, first of all, thank you for having me, thank you for inviting me, I'm excited to be here. I have been listening to the other interviews, and it's interesting, because I think what my...it's a different path, but the winding path idea that Michael Fowler was talking about is kind of similar to mine, in the sense that, my art history background - so I did my doctoral work at Columbia. And I chose to do that specifically because I wanted a place where I could choose between European and African. I did not decide yet by the time I got there. And so I ended up doing a kind of combination of both. I did Irish studies, medieval Irish studies, and I combined those two fields. Irish Studies is very cross-temporal in its own way, because it has to be post-colonial, right? It's sort of impossible to understand medieval Ireland without looking at colonial and contemporary Ireland.

And so I was sort of automatically doing that sort of cross-temporal work, and then when I was doing things in African studies, I was learning about anthropological approaches and post-colonial approaches, and then I was kind of overlapping all of that together. And so I started out thinking globally in a time when that wasn't necessarily what other people were thinking, and I didn't have the confidence. I was young. I came straight from undergraduate, I did not have the confidence to know that I was on to something. So I ended up choosing medieval studies and focused on Irish stuff, but kept all that anthropological, and global kind of thinking involved.

My work has always been kind of looking through the layers of the past. I'm always trying to kind of think about what happened. How did the 19th century tell us something that the evidence from the medieval objects may have said differently, visually? So, in terms of art history, but I think also the other thing that struck me in the question, because of the rest of what we'll talk about as we go, is the idea of practice. I would say I practiced (past tense) art history. I think I am still practicing humanities work. Because I believe that the idea of disciplines and the structures of institutional art history, I've always been a little bit uncomfortable with that for a number of different reasons. The bigger umbrella category of humanities work is something that interests me. So I'm still in education, but it's studio art education, basically. Sort of. But we'll explain all that briefly.

RT: Can't wait!

MW: And, so, you know, I think of arts education writ large as connected to some of the conversations you've been having with some of the other folks about visual culture and visual analysis and the value of, visual literacy as part of what human beings need. So I'll come back to it, but I had a great experience when I was leaving my office. So when we come back to leaving my office, remind me about Charles Rufus Morey, and I'll tell you the story with a vague, vague quote.

RT: Okay, will do. I'm looking forward to the quote. And yeah, it's a treat to hear about winding paths. I think it's affirming for all of us, since not many of us went on a straight [line]... I mean, is there such a thing as a straight line? My own pathway involves many seasons of skiing! [laughs]

I'm going to ask you the next question, and it has a little bit of a preamble. So, as you know, we named this interview series Art History on Fire in large part because the title can be taken in both positive and negative ways. We want to capture the great work being done by art historians in recent years, and note the shrinking of the field, especially at public undergraduate institutions. You have experiences with both. So let's start with the positive. Much of your work, and your own research, as well as your writings from the Material Collective have powerfully asserted the cultural relevancy of medieval art and medieval art history. Can you talk about your approach, and that of the Material Collective?

MW: Sure. I think that my own individual art historical work was interesting in its own way. It was about identity and how ringed crosses, in particular, serve as symbols of Irishness, Irish identity. So I was thinking about that in their medieval context when they're there in monasteries and whatnot, and then I was thinking about it in modern contexts. That's what the book is about. But honestly, personally, research was never my top priority. Teaching was always my top priority. I went to Columbia because the powers that be said going to a place like that was what would lead to the Golden Gates and all of that kind of stuff, but I was never interested in being at an R1, and so maybe some of those choices, in retrospect were, you know, misguided or whatever, but I was always thinking about teaching, is the point. So... speaking of winding paths, I had finished graduate school, then I worked as a union organizer for a few years in higher ed, and so I want to talk about that a bit also, because I think the question of unionization and unions and how they work in institutions of higher education, is key, is crucial to what's happening in America at the moment. I did that, and then I taught elementary school for a minute. And then I went back into teaching, at the higher ed level. And so when I first started at William Patterson, it was all about teaching. That was what I wanted to be doing anyway, and I was thrilled to be doing that. We started the [Material] Collective three years after I began at William Patterson.

There are, I think 8 total of us who are the core organizers of it. We had different, ongoing relationships through graduate school and whatnot, but really, it began in 2010, when the Babel Working Group, which was a group of medievalists, they were very - kind of aggressively - non-hierarchical. They formed this organization. They referred to themselves as a working group, and they were very, very progressive and very, para-institutional.

RT: Can I just say, as an aside, medievalists are so much cooler than early modernists, clearly.

MW: Word. [laughs] No offense! Well, this is the thing, I mean, and it's funny you should say, because the whole reason I was attracted to medieval was the same reason I was attracted to the African stuff. Once I started to look at it, I was "how come we just keep talking about Michelangelo? Like, what else is there?" And "why are those things the things that we don't talk about?" And so, medieval in particular, it's a thousand years of European history. And we act like it's the middle, because the Italian Renaissance told us to act like that. Anyway, the Babel Working Group itself has kind of dissipated, but the woman who was the main leader of it, Eileen Joy, now has an open access publishing house called Punctum Books. So I definitely strongly recommend Punctum Books, they're publishing lots of good stuff.

So I heard through friends, through the grapevine, that these folks were doing this, and they were mostly in English as a field. I then went to a meeting of theirs and discovered that, like, 5 of the people that I had been working in union organizing with at Columbia were in this meeting. So, 2010, Karen [Overby] and I, Karen mentioned Rachel Dressler to me, who I had not met before, but she's a fellow Columbia grad, and she had started in the 90s (way back in the 90s!), an online journal called *Different Visions*. And in between the 90s and the early 2000s, it was still going, but she wasn't progressing with it, necessarily. She was teaching and doing her academic life. And so Karen and I brought Rachel into the conversation, and then we started thinking - we could do this thing. We could start to organize on the model of what Babel was doing. It was a very creative and hopeful time, when we started doing all this, between 2010 and 2015. It was around 2016 when things got a little dark. So the early days were very much about, like, let's be more playful, let's be more welcoming, how can we be more open and inclusive, and we were talking a lot about poetic and lyrical language and things like that. And we were being, performative as well, you know, we did a lot of conference sessions where we would have, things like prepared questions to pass through the audience, so that we were almost treating it like a class, and we would prepare things for the Q&A session that were more complicated than just "Raise your hand and speak for 20 minutes about what you want to say, and then pretend there's a question?" So, that was the kind of work we were doing, and things were still sort of joyful on Facebook, also, so we had a Facebook page, and we basically didn't have any sort of membership, it was just anybody who wants to participate in anything can join

us. So the thinking behind it was a combination of my activist organizing past and training and the desire from all of us to be more inclusive and welcoming and creative than the kind of art history writing that we were doing.

RT: It's a really compelling vision that you all had. Looking through the archive on the *Different Visions* website, it's clearly an exciting time. Such creative things were happening.

MW: Thank you.

DH: And I would say, too, that it seems very student-centered. The writings are accessible for students, you've showcased students, I was just reading—before we joined— the post that you did in 2022 about the two students who had presented at the SUNY New Paltz Conference whose programs have been closed, and that you gave them that platform. There's just this sense...I don't know how else to explain it, but it is welcoming, but especially welcoming to undergraduate students.

MW: I think this was what was interesting for all of us, is that we all came to it with different agendas, you know what I mean? And so, I would say, definitely Karen to some extent, but Jennifer Borland, I think is one who really pushed the undergraduate focus, and she and Nancy Thompson are still the most active in editing and producing things in *Different Visions*. It is very much still a live journal much more active than it had been in the interim years. Rachel's now retired. The other two have taken up the mantle.

DH: I will say that I have used many posts from the Material Collective in my teaching, so it made an impact on the field.

MW: I had to shift my organizing energy to trying to save the program at my school, and trying to save myself, and all that kind of stuff. But, I can't say enough good things about how the rest of them have managed to continue, and I think *DV (Different Visions)* is the real hub of that. They were the people that were really figuring out a way to move something forward that we could leave behind. Even when the collective itself disbanded. And we used to have all these discussions about whether or not we were a band that was gonna eventually break up, which I think is ultimately what ended up happening - I guess we were a band. I kept saying we were a movement. It looks like we were really a band. [laughs]

RT: But as you say, the legacy is there, though. Not just the reminder of what you all accomplished, but the continuing hub that *Different Visions* is. So that's really inspirational.

MW: For one thing, we collaborated digitally. So we were working, and a lot of it was just about the fact of collaboration. In terms of my personal history, like probably most of us, I was just a nerdy good girl, and I liked to be quiet and do my work and sit in my carrel and whatever, and then, when I started organizing, I realized that I did actually work pretty well in a team, and I understood better about how team dynamics work and that kind of thing. And so, you know, I think just the fact of working together was a big part of what we were doing also, because we wanted to think about how to move humanities scholars into a more collaborative space.

RT: That's a radical position in the general humanities landscape we live in.

DH: And forward-looking. You were just ahead of your time, right? You were global before it was global, you were interested in doing collaborative work before it became as important as it's becoming as a way of saving us.

Okay, so now we're going to turn to the more difficult questions about our field. You were a professor at William Patterson University when its art history major closed. And we've talked to several art historians who've experienced versions of this reality, including me. And so, the project that Rebecca and I are doing aims to look at the field broadly, and so we're interested in unpacking the situation at different institutions. Could you talk a bit about the circumstances around the closing of the art history program at William Patterson, and what happened? Do you remember, what was the size of the major, or ... just kind of give us an idea of the lay of the land before everything went sideways.

MW: It was tiny. If you look at the numbers, we had 5 majors.

DH: That was the same as ours.

MW: But that's exactly what I mean, is that it didn't actually have anything to do with the number of majors. So, we had an administration that had been there for a very long time. When I first arrived, the president had been president for 30-some-odd years. And had worked very closely with the union president for 15 of those years. So there was an institutional structure already in place that, from the union point of view, was disastrously, let's say, calcified, right? I'll come back to that, but from the institutional point of view, there was then an interim president for about 8 years who tried to make us more research-focused. We sort of succeeded, but not really, and it was a little rocky, and I don't really know the ins and outs of the top levels of why she was not still there, but then they brought in a new administration, and the person that they hired, his name is Richard Helldobler - he is currently the president of William Patterson University, had previously been at Northeastern Illinois College (where he had laid off 150 people? Something

like that?). So, he was a known quantity. They knew who they were hiring, they knew they were hiring an axeman. And, so that was one of the many problems.

RT: But I'm assuming there were financial concerns that were framing that choice, as well as the circumstance.

MW: Sure, yes, yes. From the organizer's point of view, and so this is the thing too, right, is that I have a strange amount of knowledge about all these things, because I was trained by Maida Rosenstein, who is the former president of Local 2110 UAW in New York City. Local 2110 represents the Met, just recently, the Whitney, the Brooklyn Museum, the MoMA, the Harlem Museum, I think, the Bronx Museum, all of the major cultural institutions in the city. So...We've got the new president who has been brought in. We've got the existing union president who has been there for a very long time, completely unchallenged. And, the reason I'm hesitating about numbers is that the art department at William Patterson had very good numbers. So we had really high enrollment numbers, one of the highest on campus, one of the highest retention rates on campus. I think numerically, it was maybe 300 - mostly BFA, Bachelor of Fine Arts.

DH: 300! That's huge. Wow.

MW: Huge. And we were NASAD accredited. They earned the accreditation, I think, the year before I got there. I was helping to write the self-study my second or third year, and NASAD suggested that we start an art history major. Because at the time, we had the largest art history faculty in the state, short of Rutgers. We had 4 full-time and 1 3/4 time [faculty]. We were serving the Bachelor of Fine Arts students, and we also had a Bachelor of Arts in Studio, and either one of those, the BFA or the BA, could do a double major in education.

DH: Okay.

MW: I also have a master's degree in education because of that elementary school thing, whatever, again, that's all about me. But so, I was advising the students who were doing that path as well - Education and Art. So NASAD had said to us, you might as well start a major, because you already have all the infrastructure, and you don't need to hire anyone. You don't need any classrooms, you don't need anything. Just say, rubber stamp, let's make a major. I was the junior person, and the senior people were all into that plan, and so the year after I got there, we started a major. Fast forward 15 years. New administrator comes in, and they decide they want to determine that this "major" is now a "program." So that they can eliminate it.

DH: Right, got it. So that's why it's important - that something that was really a major, they were calling a program, because then [they can] eliminate positions.

MW: Yep. So I was hired into a department, I was not hired into a program. I was serving in a department. I was paid by the university, not by a program, right? I tried to raise all of these issues with the union, but the union refused to hear my case.

DH: I'm sorry.

MW: Hmm. Yes.

RT: That seems like a really tough spot to be in, and one that seems like it would be fairly common across the country - what you're describing is a major built into a larger art department with multiple tracks, etc, but that implicit vulnerability I hadn't thought of before.

MW: I will never not be pro-union. Even after all of this, I still think having a union is the best solution. As I always said to everybody when I was organizing, that like any organization, it's an organization of human beings. So, you have to pay attention to who you're electing into a position of power, and you have to pay attention to whether or not that person is actually enacting the goals of the organization. Most academics don't know much about unions and how they work, and I believe it is the union's job to educate them, and help members to understand what their role is in the union, and how they can be more active in the union.

DH: Just circling back to this whole thing with art history, and a major, and a program, and who it's serving, and numbers, because I've been seeing that a lot in my institution, that there's so many different ways in which you can count art history, depending on what you want to do. For a BFA and a BA, a number of art history classes are part of those majors. They need that to graduate. And also, how many students are being served by these classes, not just through the College Core, things like that, but actually as part of their majors. So you can argue it that way, if you want - you can look at the art history classes and say, "oh, look at how many students they enroll, we can use that to bolster the overall number of students / average size of a class when studio classes are smaller." So we can count it as part of the program that way, but then we can count it separately as, "oh, there's so few majors, therefore it has to go." You know, not every school, but at many schools, art history is positioned with studio fine arts programs, and it's a part of those requirements for those majors. But it [art history] can also have a standalone major, and so it makes it easy, in some ways, for the administration to position it the way it wants to position it, but also to misunderstand. I think that oftentimes there's confusion about it. I don't think that's the whole story of what happened at yours, I think the union's a really important part, and this change in administration, but this story speaks to something about the way art history is often positioned within institutions that makes it vulnerable.

MW: Yeah.

RT: But what's the solution? I mean, what's the path forward? If you were providing recommendations for a program that was starting, say, or reworking itself, what would you recommend?

MW: That's, I think, the hardest thing, and the hardest question for me of the ones that you shared is what the future is. I'm kind of like: "I don't know, I tried."

RT: [laughs] I'm asking in a rhetorical sense, not expecting you to give the answer, but as part of our conversation. I just wonder, in the parlance of power in the university, and I'm not in a unionized institution. Having majors is part of your legibility, part of your status, right? So, not having a major might be safer.

MW: Yeah, I don't know. The reason I tell the story that way is because in terms of protecting myself, it was that language that was the problem. And so, I think when I arrived at William Patterson, I already was not a big fan of preserving art history per se, so I don't know how I feel about any of that.

RT: But what would be the non-preservationist pathway, then, that you would have maybe advocated for? Should we combine up as a discipline, with other interdisciplinary programs? Are we looking at a consolidation moment? If we're not with Studio, or art ed, or any of that stuff, where do we fit?

MW: Yeah, I'm not really sure. My thinking about it at the time was, when I had the freedom to think about it, was more, a question of branding. That question of, do we call ourselves visual studies? I mean... nothing against the folks who work and teach in communications departments, but communications has absolutely colonized art history, in my opinion. I don't think they've done that on purpose, I don't think anybody set out to do that. But that is definitely what happened at William Patterson, to a large extent. Because students, they arrive and they think they want to study, I don't know, let's say anime.

DH: Right.

MW: So they're going to pick Comm to do that because it's not clear what art history is, and art history seems to be elite, and it does fall into all the stereotypes. So now I'm going to remember my Morey moment! So, I don't know if you know who he is or was. The only reason I know him is because I'm a medievalist! So Charles Rufus Morey is his name. And he was a medievalist at Princeton in the 30s, and long story short, he was involved in bringing Panofsky over, and

starting out the department at Princeton, and the Institute for Advanced Studies at Princeton, and all that stuff, so he was actually pretty instrumental in starting art history as an American institution. And it's just a very strange moment that I had. So the last day I was in my office, I found this old book down on the floor somewhere, and it was one of those old, hardback, dusty [books]. I was like, what is this? Turned out it was his. And it was his book, from 1930 or whatever. I have no idea where it came from. But then I was looking into it, and he wrote a one-page essay, in 1929, just one-page:, this is why we need to have art history in the academy. And the quote that I'm going to mangle was, "it's the powerhouse of the humanities. It's where students go to fit everything back together, mentally." He basically articulated all of the things that you guys have been saying in these interviews, 100 years ago. So, we started from there, and then we ended up... because of all the colonialism, and the whiteness, and the power structures, and all of that stuff brought us to ... here.

All right. At the end of it, I'm very grateful that I had the experiences I had, and that I had the time in academia that I did have. But at the end of all of it, there's part of me that's like, you know, if you had just told me I couldn't do it in the first place, I'd have a great pension teaching K-12, you know? [laughs]

So, I don't, you know, I don't know if it's worth saving. I don't know. I was listening to the Michael Fowler interview, and so I looked at the article that he mentioned, too, from the *Brooklyn Rail*. And she's [Joan Kee], in a way, saying the same thing, but I felt like it didn't really offer another solution. And I don't know that there is another solution. So I guess, for me, I guess I feel like the solution is we have to organize, we have to break it. And we'll see what the next thing is.

I think we are on a track now where art history as a thing will continue to exist in the Ivy League, it will continue to exist at the Metropolitan Museum, it will continue to exist in the country clubs. I don't know what's going to happen with places like William Paterson, where we were really actively (all of us, not just me) all the art historians were really using it as a tool for helping kids who had come from tough New Jersey public high schools figure out how to write. Because, we showed them a picture, and we would say, now you write a sentence about this picture. And if they happen to memorize all the dates, great, some of my colleagues were more sticklers about things like memorizing dates, than I was. I was much more focused on the literacy aspect. And so it was a course where people could see themselves reflected, students could see themselves reflected in global art, they could learn how to articulate their thoughts in a more sophisticated way, dialogically, in class, and that was the work that we were doing. It was good work, so at least we were able to do it. [laughs]

DH: I'm with you that I have ambivalent feelings about the discipline of art history for all sorts of reasons, but it makes me really sad to think that it's going to be around in elite places, but not an option for people at public universities, and because you were doing work to show them, not just all the things that you just said, like building literacy and all those things, but you're also showing them, hey, this history that we construct makes the world seem a certain way, but that's not actually true. And that all of these other cultures, or all these other ways of looking at the world, that things like art history hid the contributions of certain cultures and certain time periods. And we have this physical evidence to show us that there's way more to it than that.

I think that there's something about art history - because it is objects that have physical, tangible form - that can show all of the power structures, things that you learned through organizing, art history can also do. And as an outsider looking in, I feel like you were doing that at William Patterson. You were teaching art history to make it meaningful for those students, and doing that work, and then it just... I don't know, it makes me sad to think that there are future students who won't get that opportunity.

MW: Yeah, well, and I don't expect that my interview will be the "upper" of the lot. [laughs] I mean, I literally just today listened to Michael Fowler, so that's why it's in my head, right? But one of you at the end said it was heartwarming, and I was like, "Get ready to get your heart cold again." But, art history isn't gone, this is what the president loved to say to me in all the meetings: "We will still have art history at William Paterson." It's that the workers are not being treated appropriately. At the end of the day, my classes aren't gone. They've hired adjunct faculty to teach my classes. I don't think that those people are any less qualified to teach them. But I do know that there is a large component, especially with the student population at a place like William Paterson, there's a large component of helping kids to figure out their program. Like, why am I taking this course? What course should I take next? How is this connected to the upper-level courses? All that stuff. And adjunct faculty, they shouldn't have to know all of that.

RT: You're right that that puts art history in that ancillary position, as it's not central. If there's no standing faculty, or few standing faculty, then they're not part of the academic infrastructure.

MW: Yeah, now it's one. It's now one full-time person.

RT: We've seen this in other institutions, of course, that they've not only, for legislative reasons, closed the major or whatever, and then they've sort of farmed out the art historians to other places, so the argument could still be made: you're still teaching art history, either in the history department or geography or whatever. But to what you are saying, it does seem like a mortal blow to the discipline, if we're not recognized as part of that enterprise. That's what we're trying to - I don't know what we're trying to do with it! but we're at least diagnosing it.

RT: Let's move on to the next question. I do think that what you've been doing is illuminating some different pathways for folks who might be experiencing some version of this reality. So you've moved into an alternative teaching field. And that, as I said, is a trend we've been seeing broadly across the academy, and we were hoping you might be able to offer some advice, potentially, or tips, or warning signs for maybe a fellow art historian who could be contemplating that pathway as they take stock of our field at the moment.

MW: I don't know... so this is probably the hardest. What we were going to do, what we would have done at William Paterson, if possible, would have been to change the idea of an art history major into more of a visual studies and graphic program that would have had a certificate. I think we were doing a certificate in graphic design or something alongside of it, so that it was a combined [degree] getting at the visual literacy thing, but adding something that brought in other departments. So I think all of that strategizing does make sense, like the kind of things that some of the other folks were talking about, reaching out to other departments, bringing in interdisciplinary work, all that sort of thing. But it's not necessarily a solution without the action, and because I was also the director of the undergraduate core curriculum for a couple years, I redesigned the undergraduate art history class for the non-majors. I was teaching all the writing intensive in the GE classes and the gen ed classes, and I was designing all of the global writing-intensive upper-level art histories, so that the BFA students could take Arts of Africa as a writing intensive instead of having to go over to wherever else.

So all of that stuff, I think, is, yes, very smart to do. But in terms of protecting individuals, the two things that really went wrong for me were language-related. So it was the language of the contract, which says, still says, that administrators can eliminate programs. There's not necessarily anything that an individual faculty member can do to change that language.

But if people at each campus push the leadership of their individual unions at each campus, and this is just New Jersey specific, but it would apply to any state system, those people can do more at the state level. And so what ended up happening is that the person who has been the president of the local [union] at William Paterson for so long, she's so entrenched and so comfortable with this "business model" way of doing things, she negotiated, and she kept saying she was going to negotiate. And she acted, and still does, like no one else in the room could have any input. My training from Maida at 2110 was that the purpose of a union is for workers and members to have a voice.

So, if you're in a union where the structure is entirely top-down, there's a problem. What would have solved all of these issues is if we had been able to actually push the administration, but the union was not willing to do that. The leadership of the union was not willing to allow the broader

membership to even speak. She actually refused to let us speak to the press. She muted us. I don't want to get too much into this individual, but it's really, it's an individual who is really problematic in New Jersey higher ed. And I'm in a position where I can say that, because she already got me, so I'll keep saying it. Luckily, there are people who know how problematic she is, and there are people who are working towards, you know, making change there, but it's not easy.

MW: So...in any union, the idea is that, as I said, workers are the ones who have a voice. That's the purpose of having a union, is that you want to be able to use the people in that workplace to say what they need. Like, I don't know what a factory worker in Illinois needs. But I do know what a faculty member at William Paterson needs, right? So that kind of member engagement was what was missing from our union.

I think that as those real organizing campaigns are happening, not only among graduate students, but also among adjunct faculty - there are plenty of contingent faculty unions that are also developing - that method of people power and really pushing the agenda from the bottom up, is what I think will help in higher ed, big picture. And so, for me, it's higher ed, it's not art history, because the same thing is happening to historians, the same thing is happening to people in mostly humanities [fields]. We're losing all the folks who are doing learning for learning's sake, which is what was happening in the [19]30s. The purpose of the Institute for Advanced Studies was learning for learning's sake, knowledge for knowledge's sake. And those guys were escaping fascism. So, I feel like that's what we need, we need to organize a new Institute for Advanced Studies, or within our individual institutions, we need to organize and stand up like that. For me, that's the bottom line. So by and large, academics are taught not to do that. We're taught to be polite, and, you know, respectful, and not say the wrong thing, and all that kind of stuff. But look where that's getting us.

DH: It's interesting, I think, that rather than everyone standing up together and pushing back, academics within an institution are sort of turning on each other, and there's a "I want to save my department, or my job, and so I'm going to, you know, hoard these resources, hoard these students, and let them make that choice of getting rid of this program, because that distracts from my department and more my program," right? That they've somehow turned it into, "if there's only finite resources," which is what they're saying, then each of us has to fight each other for them, rather than standing up together.

RT: I just want to point out that Maggie provided this really wonderful, optimistic vision that organizing could get us to a good place, and Deb, you just destroyed it with a *Lord of the Flies* analogy.

DH: I'm the "downer"! [laughs]

MW: No, I finally found my hope, and that's... that's what it is, right? Honestly, that's the thing that I learned in organizing, is that you know for sure that if you don't do anything, nothing will change.

RT: That's true.

MW: If you try to do something, maybe it might work. Yes.

RT: The trajectories of not doing anything right now are not super pretty. So you're right, that doing something has to be a positive - as long as it's not attacking your neighboring department and stealing all the majors.

MW: Right, right, right. That's why I was saying that about communications departments. I don't think they're trying to do that, but I think the existence of communications departments - we probably should have seen that coming a long time ago, you know what I mean? We probably should have realized how much they're going to pilfer, just because it seems more appealing. It *sounds* more appealing, you know?

DH: Some of that's on art history - we should have realized that we need to embrace visual culture. But we don't, for all the reasons, Maggie, that you mentioned in passing earlier. So some of that's on us. But I also feel like part of the lesson here, too, is that, to what you were saying, you can do all of the right things, but if the administration isn't behind you, that's not going to work. You need support from the institution, and if you don't have that, then you need the union organizing. Maybe this is the training of being good girls and studious and all these things, the answer is not just if we worked harder, if we just were smarter, if we just came up with that thing, it would have saved it? I don't know, without having the support of the administration, that's not going to [happen]. It's the neoliberal mindset, if we just work harder, right?

MW: Yeah. And I don't mean to say that we should work harder.

DH: No, no, I don't think you were saying that. I think your story sort of points out the fallacy of that belief. Because you were doing all the things, you were doing the teaming-up-with-other-departments, looking at the college core, rethinking the curriculum. You were doing all of the things that we're told, if we'll do, it might save the program and the major.

DH: All right, so the last question that we have - we've been asking everyone the same question, which is, what do you think the future of our history is? And are there actions now we can take to ensure the best outcome in the field? But I'm going to say that you've already partly answered this by saying that you're not sure about art history, but maybe that shouldn't be the question. It really should be humanities and higher ed in general. What are we going to do? And I feel like part of the answer is definitely unionizing, organizing, yes? Do you have other things that you might add to that?

MW: Oh, it's so hard, and it's so different depending on, you know, public institutions versus private institutions, large versus small, all that stuff. I think protecting academic freedom is probably the most important thing right now, at this moment, in general. But I'm thinking also about the alternative careers and all that, what things art historians could do.

But to answer that question about what I am actually doing right now, is that I'm teaching, still, because I can't help myself. But the only reason I was able to do that is because I had the certification from before. I did Teaching Fellows, which is an alternate, certification program. And so those are actually great for anybody who wants to do career changing... there are other ones too, but this was the one in New York. They substitute, or, I mean, subsidize your master's degree in education while they get you started teaching right away. So you agree to teach, in the New York one anyway, for 2 years in a "hard-to-staff" school. Which just basically means it's a pretty challenging public school. And so I did that, for three years total.

So when it all went down, at the end of the day, I had a certification in my backpack, and that was what really mattered. So, you know, don't be afraid of the other kinds of teaching jobs, they can be good, but I think, the answer is: "get some other work before the PhD." But, something that encapsulates the idea of public college that is not censored by political motivations. I think that's what matters the most, and that was the most important thing about William Paterson, and it still is in a lot of ways. I used to always say, we were doing really well in terms of social mobility index and all that kind of stuff, and we were really, for a long time, a small hidden gem, like a SLAC but public and available. And I think they are still doing a great job. I know for sure that in terms of art history per se, it's one amazing, wonderful person. But there's only one of her. And also, just because this is my chance to be kind to all my buddies... we were very much a family, and the two senior art historians actually both took early retirement in the hopes of saving me, even though I told them that that was dumb, because that's not what it says in the contract. But whatever! They survived, they seemed to be doing okay. But it was nice of them to do that.

RT: And it's heartwarming! That tight bond between you all...

MW: Yeah, yeah, we all really miss each other.

DH: See? Heartwarming..[laughs]

MW: [laughs] It's a theme.

RT: Well, Maggie, thank you so much. Your story is fascinating, and the way that you talk about the movement of these forces in the field has been really illuminating, and I have learned a lot from our hour together.

DH: It's a very interesting story, and I think your perspective is a very important one in reminding us about the bigger picture things, and not just the disciplinary ones, so thank you.

MW: Well, and like I said, thank you. It means a lot to me to be able to say this stuff out loud.

RT: Well, we all have a lot to learn from you, so we very much appreciate it.

DH: Thank you