

SUMMER 2019

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# THE DORNSIFE CENTER CONNECTOR

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## TRIPOD



# CONVERSATIONS

# WITH

# PLACE

## DIRECTOR'S WELCOME

Dear friends and neighbors,

This year marks the fifth anniversary of Writers Room, the program that we think so effectively distills our best ideas and hopes for the Dornsife Center: a creative collaboration that brings neighborhood residents and Drexel students together to create a shared story.

Our writers share with each other the things that make them tick, their memories, and their ambitions, and out of that collaboration they have generated a powerful common vision of what *community* is all about.

In this issue we present "What We Saw," a collaborative poem developed by writers Brenda Bailey, Matthew Brooks, Patricia Burton, Norman Cain, Rosalyn Cliett, Keyssh Datts, Mark Dawkins, Amy Gottsegen, Natasha Hajo, Kyle Howey, Dejah Jade, Yusha Johnson, Calvin Kiniale, Carol Richardson McCullough, Jordan McCullough, Lowell Nottage, Victoria Huggins Peurifoy, Shakiya Smith, and Devin Welsh.

Curated by Kirsten Kashock, "What We Saw" is part of the Tripod project, which combines creative writing and photography, with teams of three writers each who explore and experience Philadelphia together. Tripod is supported by Canon Solutions America, who we thank for their generous support of these innovative and inspiring artists.

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## PARTNER PROFILE

<i>Name:</i>	Patrice Worthy
<i>Job:</i>	I am the assistant director for Writers Room, a university-community literary arts program engaged in creative placemaking and art for social justice. I also am managing director for BlackStar Film Festival, an annual celebration of the visual storytelling traditions throughout the African diaspora and global communities of color.
<i>Hometown:</i>	I'm an Air Force brat, so I have many places I call home. My first home was Andersen AFB in Guam.
<i>Current Residence:</i>	Philadelphia's Fairmount neighborhood
<i>Favorite books:</i>	<i>The Alchemist</i> by Paul Coelho, <i>The Spirit of Intimacy</i> by Sobonfu Somé
<i>Favorite Food:</i>	Peach cobbler
<i>Favorite spot on the Drexel campus:</i>	The Writers Room Studio

### *What is your role at the Dornsife Center?*

As part of Writers Room I assist with making sure our monthly First Tuesday workshops at Dornsife run smoothly.

### *Where can we find you at the Dornsife Center?*

In the Lindy House, at the monthly community dinner, or somewhere enjoying the terrace.

### *What is your favorite thing about the Dornsife Center?*

How friendly everyone is. It's very easy to spark a conversation with a stranger. When it's your first time visiting a space that's very important, and I felt that during my first workshop there.

### *What do you do when you're not at the Dornsife Center?*

Right now I am deep in planning for the Conference on Community Writing that Writers Room is hosting this October at the Lindy House and for BlackStar's festival happening August 1-4. When I'm not doing that I am either record shopping, plotting on building new creative projects, or ideally sleeping!

## WHAT WE SAW

### KYLE:

I saw my parents in that photo in the corner  
Patricia saw her parents in that same photograph  
and Devin saw himself in Patricia's seeing  
Mabedi saw "just" a couple  
Dejah saw infidelity, saw a man (like usual) cheating  
on his quintessential wife, saw  
"the woman is always alone"  
Tash saw this is both true and not, saw sharing space  
in silence, saw through smoke all the way  
to love, instead

### ROZ:

Jordan saw a city  
Jordan zoomed past us, saw Gotham  
...he saw nothing, but in its concrete form  
Brenda helped us see, like a sudden torchlight  
in the fog of day, saw the need for bags of candy  
returning small favors, the need for voice to fill  
the studio with joy, serenity, and song—  
steadfast, keeping us in rhythm  
We all saw Lowell bouncing in the wind



### LOWELL:

At Bartram's Garden, we saw so much. The first part was a path that led through old industrial waste towards the Gardens, a place of history planted with new trees—but then we turned around and made our way to the other side of the tour.

This side was magical for me, it was as if I was walking through a forest of nostalgia, seeing old buildings and trees, it all looked so familiar. It turned out that it really was familiar, I realized I had walked those paths with old friends of mine many years beforehand. Everyone from Tripod scattered instantly, drawn like magnets to whatever was interesting to them...

Taking pictures of beautiful scenery and just observing the garden's schnazzyness.

We got so engulfed in it all that we lost track of time. It was a shame we had to leave—Cuz in the moment we wanted to see more.





**SHAKIYA:**

Words are more than letters smashed together—words can hurt. There are words out there that make people feel like they've been slapped in the face when it's uttered out loud.

I don't have a word that angers me, but I do have one that causes my stomach to get queasy, followed by a rush of uncertainty when it's brought to my attention.

When you've moved as much as I have, you find it hard to lay your roots down when you're not sure that you'll be allowed to grow from those roots. With each move, I tried to not get too attached to my current place of residence. Around the fourth move, I'm pretty sure when I used the word home, it lacked the emotional attachment that most people have when they use it.

I've moved three times just within Philly. First, I lived with my Aunt because she lived closer to my new school than my grandparents, which is where my mom and sister were. I was at my aunt's during the weekday at at my grandparents' on the weekend. When I switched schools, I left my aunt's house. That was during Christmas break.

I was discovering my love for writing during this time. Mom was a poet, she swears up and down that I get my creativity from her. I gave her a journal once--I've never seen her use it for anything other than writing grocery lists. I don't use my notebooks properly either, must run in the family.

My grandparents' house was okay. I had to share a room, but I'd been doing that all my life. The final move is where I'm currently living. It was the first time I got my own room. It took a while, but it was definitely worth the wait.

I have doubts that I won't pick the right place to live for college. And it's eating away at me that I won't have the one thing that has gotten me all through the previous moves. Mom was there for that process, adding her 2¢, sending me memes to make me feel better. Some of them didn't make sense but the thought counts.

I do have a home, maybe I just don't call it home. It's just a word, as I said before words are powerful. They impact on people, but they do not control us. I don't need that label to make me happy.

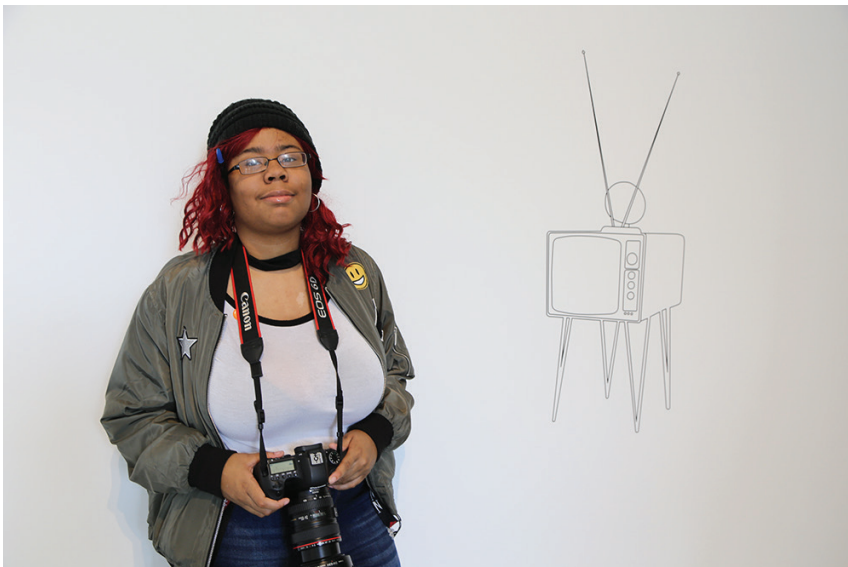
I have Mom for that.

**CALVIN:**

We always want to see more  
 Roz saw embers from the bright fire of memory  
 Jasmine found inspiration—a snippet of a story—  
 and that every story is defined as much by  
 the details it includes as by those it doesn't  
 Lauren saw that Jasmine ought to write more

**BRENDA:**

Roz saw the seashore, the need to change direction  
 Rebecca noticed gesture, Shakiya saw subtle  
 differences—neither of them fooled by twins  
 Shakiya saw dissonance in identical  
 faces, but Devin saw *The Shining*  
 and so avoided that photo  
 Shakiya saw lines, lineages, trajectories: futures  
 here, and out there too



**CAROL:**

And we have Rachel—  
Rachel saw it all, and first

Lauren sees and sews, fixes and frowns,  
opens doors and doors and doors  
Roz said she sees better with the glasses she lost  
You wait and see, I say, we may all yet be found  
Mabedi saw a little boy who just lost his crush  
to his jock-bestfriend ...*she saw surface*

**DEVIN:**

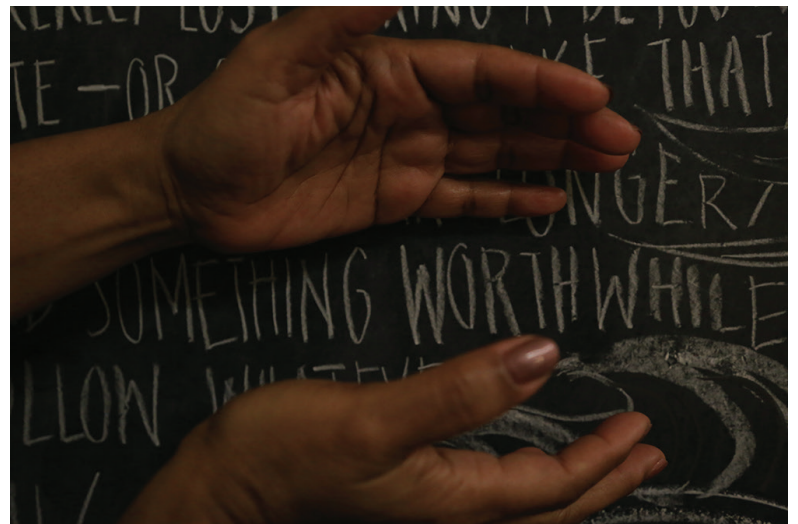
Amy saw two shadows of the young boy  
in his adult years - *she saw depth*  
Isn't it amazing how we see different things, like  
a woman pushing against the glass?

Rachel saw something in my goofy bright white  
chucks and invited me into this family  
Mom-mom saw something special when she  
looked through her viewfinder

**TASH:**

Kyle saw himself and Victoria as passengers - siblings  
on different paths to the same end  
*He saw how they always find themselves side by side:  
in the studio in the car, in class, and on this  
adventure—her confidence—notes in hand,  
heart on sleeve, voice full—growing together  
...partners for life.*

Amy saw her ideas scatter, felt the craziest itch  
known to man, eyes deep: she sees and sees  
and does, and maybe needs to play in puddles





**AMY:**

We turn on Powelton Avenue, and walk in the shadow of a sprawling hospital complex. I tell Brenda I could never bring myself to like Saunders Park-- something about being next to an emergency room always felt wrong to me. She gazes out over the park: "It's nice, though, for the people in the hospital to have a park to look out at."

I fear that too often I make things into a mirror-- my neighborhood, my relationships, my writings. I too easily forget the violence of gentrification, selfishness, narcissism. At times, I think the only way is to avoid my reflection all together.

I learned today, though, that behind the lens, cameras contain a mirror. So the image you see refracts through the lens, but it has to be reflected, too.

You can't take photographs without both lens and mirror.

Our final stop is a small garden, tucked into a crevice of Holly Street. It is shaded by magnolia trees, and the sides are lined with all sizes and shapes of cracked, mismatched mirrors. Everywhere I look, I see both Brenda's reflection and mine, doubly and triply crisscrossing this improbable space, and my improbable fortune to share it with her.



**MATTHEW:**

We saw Norman's eyes too, ever-dancing like his lines  
Tash saw him and Mark, wondered at the space  
between, and her wonder became a new space  
Devin saw it was safe to place his hat on the counter—  
saw writer's block in two musicians, saw what  
we all saw but pieced it together  
*... he saw connection*

**MARK:**

Dejah saw Yusha rapping his favorite song  
Keyssh saw music lyrics could capture her  
best mind best—Keyssh, who sees through  
all our defenses  
saw a woman trying to escape her darkness to enter  
the light (oh wait—that was me!)

**NORMAN:**

Matthew saw time walking in a city,  
saw his moment to go first had come,  
and we all saw the change he saw  
Carol saw that her right and left snaps were different  
Calvin saw that standing would let others see him, he saw  
Hudson Yards and what it wasn't

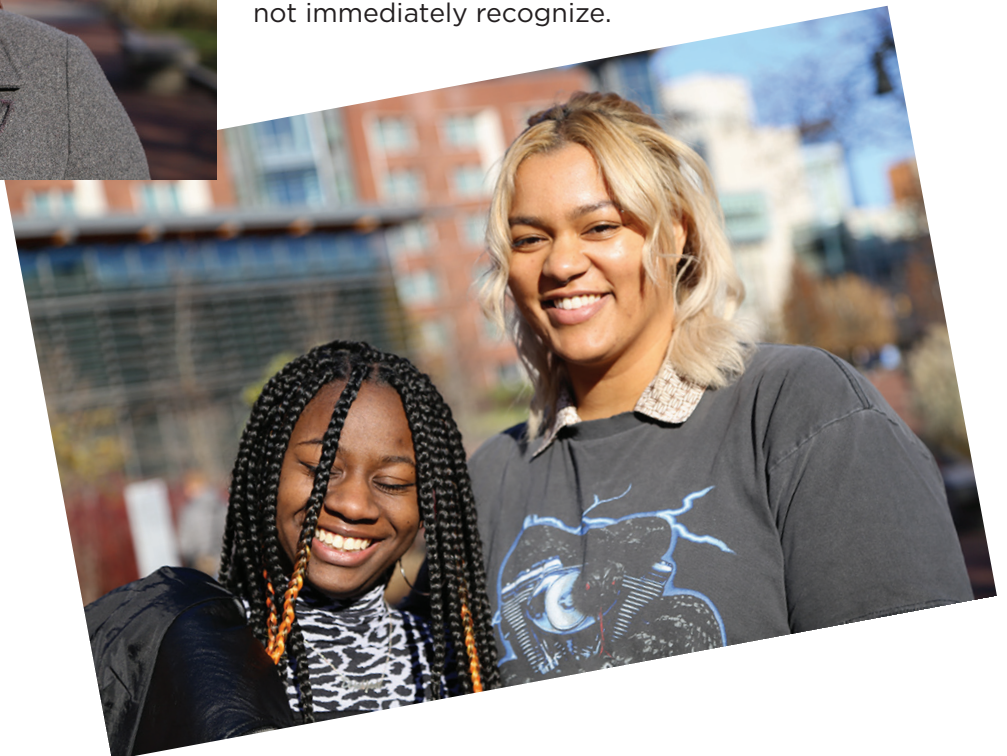
**DEJAH:**

Kyle saw Dahmere less this year, but when he did,  
saw him in daylight  
I saw Kyle typing away at his computer with his headphones  
listening to the unknown



**VICTORIA:**

The experience unfolds until it ends, but the story always continues. If there were ever more time, TRIPOD would have loved to visit many more places. To have seen many more faces. It's difficult choosing only a few out of all of our moments of seeing. But perhaps our work has given you a glimpse into what it means to be a part of a community. We hope you have learned something more about the relationship between portraiture and narrative, and the hidden relationships between people you might not immediately recognize.





**KEYSSH:**

The room saw all of our pictures, heard the tap-tapping  
of our pencils, our snaps ... *heard us*  
We all saw how precious life is  
Dejah saw pain, and Patricia—her mother’s  
Devin saw “creative constipation”  
We saw Dahmere in concentration, embracing life  
after graduation, learning to adapt outside,  
is comfort zone, even though you can tell  
he has a particular mind

**YUSHA:**

Amy saw how anyone can be forced out into the rain  
And I saw sweetness, a tableful of beauty  
Jordan saw a dark knight, and Carol how to push through it  
I saw us look at the city and see wilderness  
We looked at a clock to see how time had, does,  
may yet change us all—and asked *how do we  
want to be changed?*

**PATRICIA:**

Lauren reminded me writing doesn’t need to be perfect  
I told Dejah not every bad thing has to stay bad  
I saw a table of people writing / writing about pictures  
/ pictures that seem black and white / still I saw  
people sitting and writing color / writing about  
the emotion that has drawn them together / drawn  
from them by this thing / this thing we call art

**JORDAN:**

Roz saw delight, because (she says) we all give her life  
We see it too, can show it to one another, hold it  
in our hands like a photograph or a poem  
or another person’s truth

**KEYSSH and DEJAH:**

We all saw how life happens—  
in the most mundane moments,  
  
We all saw how connected we are  
And we saw that none of these things  
is so very hard to see  
—here in this room we are making

