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Below is the edited transcript from an interview conducted by Michael Waters on July 10, 2026.

MW: You met as freshman-year roommates at Columbia. So tell me a little bit about your initial experience and what you remember about those first months on campus, and how it was that you decided to come to Columbia?

BB: What I mostly remember, since Carl is struggling with the heat in Florence, is that we arrived during an incredible heat wave, and we were mostly either going to the movies or sitting in the basement of Carman Hall, which was one of the few air-conditioned places on the Columbia campus at the time. What a brutal beginning.

CS: I remember Barry's mother. He probably met my parents, like the typical going off to college thing, bringing your stuff to a dorm room, which was not too impressive, frankly. Carman Hall, I think, has changed over the years, and it was pretty basic, and I have this vague memory that there was a strike in the food service, which of course turned out perfectly fine. So that gave us the young freshmen maybe a chance to explore the neighborhood. But Columbia was a whole different setting. They told you certain things that they'd never tell you nowadays, like what parts of the city to go into or not and stuff like that. But from the academic point of view, it was kind of exciting.

MW: And did you both come thinking you wanted to study art history?

BB: I did.

CS: I was interested in art history, but I studied medieval studies, essentially, which was put together for me by Professor Maristella Lorch. So I took art history classes, but I actually took quite a number of Latin classes at that period. And in fact, some of the classes I remember most, going outside of, you know, that humanities group that you take at Columbia were the Latin classes, particularly those of Steele Commager—his Catullus course. I have great memories. The Virgil course, things like that. Columbia had a lot. It's wonderful. You can explore a lot of different things at the university.

MW: And had you come from high school having studied Latin?

CS: I had Latin in high school, but it didn't necessarily prepare you for a more upper-level class. It's interesting. I'm now rereading Virgil, so something stuck, largely because I'm working on this new exhibition, which is about the time of Giotto, so I've been reading Dante very closely, the *Commedia*, and it got me back to some of these other sources of his.

MW: And Barry, how was it that you knew you wanted to study art history? Had you always kind of thought this for a long time, or was it something you had developed in high school?

BB: In high school. I can't remember how, but I loved going to the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and our high school went through this radical reform, where they were going to have required and elective courses. So you had a small course catalog, like in a college, and you could choose your courses and move them around. So I managed to create a schedule where two days a week I had an enormous gap in the middle of the day. I went to the adult education classes at the Philadelphia Museum. I would race there in my mother's car, go to the class, and then race back to the high school for afternoon classes, having grabbed a tuna fish sandwich at the Philadelphia Museum, where Carl worked for many years. When we were freshmen, he was always telling me how superior Boston was to Philadelphia, a continual motif, but he was preaching to the converted because half of my family is from Boston.

CS: We've been talking about high school. So museums—like for Barry, the Philadelphia Museum of Art—were very much a part of growing up and developing an interest in art. I went as a very young kid to art classes at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts almost every Saturday,

and then we'd walk over to the Gardner Museum right next door. That was very much part of the world growing up, and I think it gave me this foundation, almost a wish to work in a museum many years later, as I did, but also an interest in art. I'd go not only to those classes, but frequently with my grandparents, and then we had an art teacher in Sherborn, Massachusetts, just outside of Boston, who took us around. I remember first going to smaller museums like the Worcester Museum. I'd go up to visit my relatives in Maine, to the Bowdoin College Museum, and places like this, which are really wonderful resources too.

BB: I'll tell you a story if you like about our first semester.

MW: Please do.

BB: We both were eager to try out some art history courses. In fact, I must be the only Columbia graduate who never took ArtHum because by the time I was supposed to take it in my senior year, I had taken so many art history courses.

CS: I actually took it with Rosemarie Bletter.

BB: She was my advisor. I had every other course she taught. But anyway, in the first semester, Carl, probably influenced by the great Chinese collections at the MFA, enrolled in Chinese art, and I enrolled in a course in Fauvism and Cubism. The professor, who will go unnamed—he was part of the generation that we still inherited of people who were trained as painters and were teaching art history. We started the course, and I was extremely nervous because here we were in New York, and at that time, Columbia College was very heavily local. There was an incredible number of commuting students, etc. You suddenly were surrounded by New Yorkers, and at the beginning, I was quite intimidated by them; I thought, they're so sophisticated and I'm not. I was very fearful of shifting around in courses. But the professor spent the first class explaining why we would only see black-and-white slides, as color slides are deceptive. By the second or third class, looking at Fauvism in black and white, I was thinking, this is absolutely impossible. I have to switch to another class; but I was very afraid to go to a class that had already started. And Carl said, "Chinese art—it's just so fantastic. The professor is amazing." So I said, "Well, I don't really have much interest in Chinese art, but you have the notes already, and I can see you're a very good note-taker. And so I'll go with you to Chinese art." So we go to Chinese art. We were about the only Caucasians in the class, and we came in, and Professor Cornelius Chang was writing all of the names of the artists, key titles, and concepts in Chinese on the blackboard. I thought, "why have I jumped out of Fauvism in black and white into lists of works of art in Chinese?" At one point he said, "Don't worry, for those of you who don't have Mandarin, I can translate into Cantonese." I thought, "Well, this is really not going to help." We were so nervous about this class that we papered our concrete cinder block room in Carman Hall with brown paper bags cut up to make the entire room into a bulletin board, and we made a timeline of Chinese art.

CS: I wish we had preserved it.

BB: Yes! We turned all three walls of the room into a timeline of the development of Chinese art from the Song Dynasty on. Anyway, the two of us aced it. We got the best grades, even though we couldn't read any of the Chinese.

CS: I actually remember so much of the lectures. He was quite a good teacher, now that I think of it. Later, you know, I went to get a diploma at SOAS in London fairly recently, so that helped me. It was helpful.

MW: So how was it that you came to focus on Renaissance art and modern architecture, kind of respectively, or perhaps you hadn't by the end of your undergraduate years?

CS: Well, I was interested in the medieval and Renaissance periods, quite early on. In a funny way, like I was saying about Virgil, I came out through a lot of things with literature, taking a Dante course and then a *dolce stil novo* course, and I learned Italian pretty much, and got to go to Italy some fiftyyears ago.

BB: I think you went after our sophomore year.

CS: Yes, I took what would have been my junior year off, and I was in Italy. And part of that period, I had, you might say, a summer job, which is not really a job, but they were restoring the frescoes in the Upper Church of Assisi. And I brought up buckets of water, cigarettes

back then, cups of coffee and things like this, and so I got to really experience looking at a lot of those things up close. I remember coming back to Columbia at that point, what would have been my senior year, and taking that *dolce stil novo* course, and then I took, I think, a course with Rosand and two teachers. I'm trying to remember the other professor.

BB: David Rosand used to teach a course that was literature and art. Was it with Bob Hanning?

CS: Yes. And I took that course, and I think, during that period, I decided to apply to graduate school at Columbia, and when you're in New York, it's sometimes hard to leave, as you probably both know. And it's a place where there's a lot of art to see, which is a big, big thing, and that was the initial attraction to come into Columbia too, among other things.

BB: We came into Columbia College together. But because Carl took off and went to the wonderfully named Università per Stranieri in Perugia, wasn't that where you went? I still have a box with all the postcards he sent me.

CS: Yes, I had a connection to the Scarpellini family. I was staying at their house, and he was an art history professor, among other things. So that's how I got this opportunity to work in Assisi.

BB: So I graduated in '77, Carl a year later.

CS: You then went to Cambridge then, right?

BB: Yeah. I went to Cambridge on a Kellett Fellowship for two years. So when I came back, Carl was ahead of me in graduate school by a year.

MW: When you went to Cambridge, you went to study architectural history. Had you already decided on an area of focus by that point in time?

BB: Yes, I had. In my first two years at Columbia, I remember being so excited when the course catalog arrived in the mail; it was like an intellectual version of the Sears Roebuck catalog. It's unbelievable: there's a Department of Art History. You can actually major in art history. And look at all these courses—they're so wonderful. And there's one on the Bauhaus by Rosemarie Bletter, which she then never again offered because the course catalog listed every course that had ever been taught, not just what was about to be taught. Over the course of the first year or so, I thought, I'm actually more passionate about cities than I am necessarily about paintings. This is what is really compelling me, and I think I suddenly realized I wanted to come to New York, not only for art history, but I wanted to get out of suburbia and into an urban environment. And New York was very dangerous and exciting in the 1970s. And so, for a while, I thought of majoring instead in urban studies, and then I thought of majoring in architecture because the undergraduate architecture major was brand new, but in the end, I decided to just focus on architectural courses within our department that is so strong in architectural history, as you know. By the time I graduated, I knew that I wanted to work on nineteenth-century British architecture, and that was why I was a candidate for this Kellett Fellowship to go to Oxford or Cambridge.

MW: Through that you met Robin Middleton, right?

BB: Yes, exactly.

CS: I think when we were undergraduates at Columbia, you know, it was a whole different generation of professors at that time. And I remember, we never met him, but I think Wittkower died right as we were arriving.

BB: Wittkower died in '71, so alas he was no longer with us.

CS: Okay, well, it was still a Wittkower-influenced department. And also Meyer Schapiro was still teaching. I sat in on some of his courses. He didn't have undergraduate students, but you could go hear his courses, which were kind of star studies. He would have loved PowerPoint because he had three projectors he used, which was unusual then. There was also Branner. It was a whole different world, and very much still the world of the German refugees. It seems like a very long time ago. But we would go down, in the early years of graduate school, particularly down to Princeton to the Index of Christian Art. In my field, you'd see Weitzmann there, and it was those heroic types who were still teaching and creating art history as we knew it in the post-war years.

MW: That was going to be one of my follow-up questions. Looking back, what do you think defined the department at that point in time? It was, in some ways, a moment of transition, but still grounded in that era of large personalities that defined the department for so many years.

BB: I didn't perceive it as a period of transition. In retrospect, you might say, "Oh, in fact, it was." I would say, Carl might take exception to this, that the department was very heavily Italian art focused.

CS: No, I think you're right.

BB: I think, from my somewhat rebellious spirit, I wanted to do something that I felt was slightly maverick, and also the architectural instruction with George Collins and Rosemarie Bletter, who was a protégé of his, although she probably wouldn't like to be called that, was very heavily twentieth-century architecture, modernism, etc. Collins was a great specialist in Gaudí and Catalan *modernisme*, and Rosemarie had worked on the Bauhaus period and more and more on contemporary architecture. So for me, nineteenth-century British architecture, which was never taught at Columbia, was the perfect act of rebellion. My mission in life was going to be to prove that the nineteenth century's goal had not been to prepare the twentieth century.

CS: There were all these, like any art history department, areas that were not taught, obviously. But there was a great focus on the twentieth century, of course, the Museum of Modern Art and lots of architecture in New York, and then the Renaissance. And medieval art meant French art at that point. I mean, I doubt there was a single professor who would have given you a talk about Salisbury Cathedral, or even Sant'Ambrogio in Milan, so it was very much an old-fashioned textbook view of things with some pretty brilliant people working on them. There was also a real shift in my area of Italian art history, in general, from the Renaissance to Baroque, which kind of defined the field of Italian art for the next twenty years or so.

MW: One of the other questions I had for you: were there any professors you felt, even outside your field, that really shaped your thinking about art history and the field in general?

CS: Well, I took a number of courses in graduate school at NYU with John Pope-Hennessy, who had just arrived. He was a curator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and they were very much courses I liked because they were in the museum and focused on the actual objects. And I know that people like Beck or Davis were very suspicious of going off, not necessarily to NYU, but to the world of the museum. Well, Pope-Hennessy had a very particular personality; hardly got along with anyone, so they probably didn't get along with him either. He was actually quite nice to his students, most of them. Going to the Met introduced me to a world which was really not part of the Columbia teaching. I still remember Pope-Hennessy in an interview when I went down there at the Met. He said, "Are you an Offnerian?"

MW: Like a Richard Offner follower?

CS: And I wasn't quite sure what he meant because of his clipped accent. I thought he said, "Are you a fairy?" So he [Pope-Hennessy] was a great influence in many ways for getting into the museum world, and seeing that as a valuable way of continuing to work on object-based art history. At Columbia, I was very influenced by Howard Davis. He was just a teacher, but I found his way of looking very fascinating. I know other people who wanted to do graduate work found him not that easy to work with, but I learned a lot from him. One thing: if you wrote a paper, he read it, or if you asked him to read something, which seems strange, but he actually got back to you with very incisive comments, and that's a very nice quality when you're beginning to write art history.

BB: So maybe I pick up on some of the things that Carl was saying in response to this prompt. Actually, for one thing (I think it's true that at the time—and maybe it's still true) there was the Columbia-versus-NYU divide. Columbia was seen as very much a bastion of an academic art history, and then gradually, with Richard Brilliant and others, the idea that there could be a theoretical art history became, somewhat controversially, very much a project within the department. NYU was perceived as having very much an association with the Met and with the museum world, there was something of an unspoken sense of the difference in ethos between the two departments. But the two people who were most important for me were Rosemarie Bletter and Joseph Connors. I think

partly because everything that Rosemarie taught was framed with a sense of revisionist skepticism. I don't think she would say that she was doing historiography, but in a sense she was. And then for me in graduate school, the arrival of Joe Connors completely recharged my batteries. I came back to Columbia from Cambridge, which had a very strong, if somewhat reactionary, architectural focus, and the Columbia, let's say, post-medieval architecture configuration was falling apart. I was actually going to leave the department after my first year there, I was so unhappy, and I was taking courses at the institute with Henry Russell Hitchcock, who, despite his fame, was not a scintillating teacher. And I took two courses because I thought it was historically important to be in touch with him, and I got along with him personally very well. That was a real low point in architectural history here. And then Joe Connors arrived, and he gave as a job talk what is basically the urbanism chapter of his great Borromini book. Urbanism was studied as a result of contracts and deals, moving property lines, etc., rather than the grand scheme of Sixtus V, but much more this kind of negotiation of space. It was an inspiring lecture.

CS: That was his initial lecture at Columbia. I remember that too because later we became good friends, and he was on my dissertation committee, he was at I Tatti, and then he hired me to do the catalogue of the Berenson collection, so I still remember that.

BB: He was on my dissertation committee as well. He must have come in September of my second year, which would have been your third year, I guess. He was brand new in the department, so I immediately went to him and said, "Do you need a research assistant?" I was his work-study research assistant, which involved making three million slides and having lunch with him once or twice a week. He was a great inspiration, really, despite the fact that I was trying to get away from the Italian mafia.

MW: And how was it that you both decided to continue on to the PhD at Columbia?

BB: Actually, I was offered a place at Yale, and I was going to be Vincent Scully's student. And I decided that I wanted to be in New York, and I wanted to be near the Avery Library, and Rosemarie was still there, although almost immediately after I got back, she didn't get tenure and left. I decided against Yale also because I was not that inspired by Vincent Scully's most recent books, as famous as he was. So I decided to come back to Columbia for its resources, and in the end, it paid off because then Joe came a year later.

CS: Rosemarie, because you mentioned her name. I remember because we had to take our German test, and she was the one correcting it the year I took it. Of course, one was a little nervous about the German test, and she said, "Come to my lecture on Schinkel." She was giving a lecture, maybe part of her course or something else, and the whole German test was a passage about Schinkel, so it made it just a little easier to get through it.

BB: She has always had an odd relationship with the German language because when I asked her to write me a letter of recommendation to the Goethe-Institut in Germany, she said, "But your German is excellent. You know, you use all these sources all the time. Why do you need to go to the Goethe-Institut?" I said, "Because I really can't speak German." And she said—and she's German—"What do you need to speak it for?"

CS: Like one of my other undergrad roommates, Tim Weiner.

BB: Yes, I remember him.

CS: Whose mother escaped from the Nazis in Germany. He expressed some interest in the language and said to her, "Why didn't you teach us German?" She said, "You only need four words: 'Wo ist der Bahnhof?'" That generation, you know, of persecuted Germans who didn't want to have anything else to do with the country.

BB: Didn't he get a Pulitzer Prize?

CS: Tim got two Pulitzer Prizes.

MW: So transitioning to your careers, correct me if I'm wrong, but both of you started positions before you had defended, right? Carl at the PMA. Barry, you started teaching at Columbia slightly before you finished, right? So, what was that transition like from graduate student to professional work as a curator or professor?

CS: I hadn't finished my dissertation. I'd already done some work at the Brooklyn Museum, and then I got my position at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. But around the same time, or very shortly afterward, as I was finishing up my dissertation—remember, no computer, Smith Corona typewriter days—I was hired to be a co-curator of an exhibition at the Metropolitan on Sienese Renaissance art, which had some overlap with the dissertation. In the museum world, a PhD was not necessarily required.

MW: And your job at the PMA, was it from the beginning on the Johnson Collection?

CS: Yes, the Johnson Collection. It is about 1,500 paintings, and they're not just all Italian. The first in-house exhibition I did was on Constable, so there was a great deal of depth. The Philadelphia Museum of Art was very dynamic under the leadership of Anne d'Harnoncourt. One of my first jobs was to take Teeny Duchamp to Venice with her daughter Jackie Matisse. It was really wonderful—very varied. You weren't just in your field of Italian art. We did a lot of work with the conservation department, more than at most other museums, so it was a very close collaboration working on catalogues, but also on the conservation of pictures, and it became a very exciting time in the world of technical research because it was the beginning, with Dolf van Asperen de Boer, of infrared reflectography, and so at our museum, and later at the Met, we had the first infrared reflectography machines. We went off to Europe, often working with the people in Brussels, or in particular in my case, the Opificio delle Pietre Dure in Florence, which is a conservation institute there. There was a great deal of opportunity to travel. So before I was even going to Italy, we were on the road quite a bit. So it was an exciting type of job.

MW: You talked a little bit already about Pope-Hennessy's influence, but had you always considered in graduate school you were going to go on to work in a museum?

CS: I would say so, though I later taught at Johns Hopkins.

BB: I saw Carl frequently in Philadelphia in part because that's where I'm from. So the irony of all that needling about Philadelphia was that he ended up in exactly those Mid-Atlantic states. My grandmother, who was from Cambridge, Massachusetts, once said, "and then I met your grandfather, and I had to move to something called the Middle Atlantic states." Anyway, what was your question, Mike?

MW: The question was about the transition from grad school to, in your case, teaching at Columbia.

BB: It was, in a sense, a very strange time. Today, the administration would never let this happen. If the department had five finalists for a job, which was the case, and one of them was a PhD candidate in the department, there is no way that the department would be authorized to hire its own. But happily for me, I can only speak for myself, it was allowed.

MW: There was certainly precedent, right? Rosand, and then later Jonathan Crary.

BB: Yeah, and there was the sense that Columbia is a flagship department, and therefore many of its graduates would be quite reasonable choices for faculty members, but today, as you know, the administration is against that. So, I had a very funny year because I was still a graduate student, and I was a brand-new faculty member. I had two ID cards: one I called the card of privilege and the other the card of discount. I remember I had to cancel class so I could go to my own doctoral defense.

CS: Did you teach a graduate course that year too, or no?

BB: I wasn't allowed to teach a graduate course that year because I was just a lecturer. I was hired as an assistant professor, but because I didn't have my degree, I was immediately demoted to lecturer. Actually, I'll tell you one funny story, which is that when I was in Paris working on my dissertation on Vaudoyer, I met Phyllis Lambert, and she was putting together the Canadian Centre for Architecture, and she wanted me to come and be the curator of collections there.

MW: You did a very early exhibit there, right?

BB: Yeah, I did that after this story, but I didn't take the job that she offered me. But then I ended up doing the second exhibition in the new building in Montreal on the Pantheon in 1989. But in any case, when I was one of the five finalists, I already had a job offer to go work at the Canadian Centre for Architecture, so I needed to

decide between having a museum career and having an academic career, and I remember telling Phyllis, I said, "I think I would like to teach in a university, and I think if I come to you, it'd be very hard to go from a museum to the university. But it's probably much easier to go from the university to a museum." That was my sense.

MW: And it remains true.

BB: So I turned down the job in Canada, even though I had already had all the interviews to become a landed immigrant in Canada. I had to go for a language exam with the province of Quebec, et cetera, et cetera.

MW: I am interested in what threads from the research you undertook as a graduate student still shape your scholarship today.

CS: Well, two things in particular: going to the archive. I might do less archival research like that now, and secondly, traveling, going to see things. So, if somebody asks me for advice about life, besides saying you should floss, I tell them you should go travel.

BB: Well, I think one of the great things in the graduate program was there was this money to travel in an exploratory fashion for your dissertation. And going back to Rosemarie's lectures on Schinkel, I was going to do my doctoral dissertation on a German topic. In the end, I was between German topics—a couple of topics that all had to do with Schinkel—and a French topic that was Vaudoyer. But then I had this summer travel grant to go test it out, to go look in the archives and really just assess the situation, but also to go and see the buildings because I was not going to write on Vaudoyer if I didn't go to Marseille and see this cathedral—and this is so out of fashion now—to see if I liked it. I wanted to make sure that it was not so repulsive that I couldn't possibly work on it. But this was because I had an ample travel grant from the department. I went to Germany for several weeks. I met many scholars. And I thought, I'm going to see how easy it is to work in the Schinkel archive. I managed to get arrested in East Berlin, and I thought, I am not working on any topic that involves the German Democratic Republic, you know, *kommt nicht in Frage*. And so I made a hasty retreat to France and decided that Marseille Cathedral was amazing-looking enough, and discovered for myself what everybody else knows: French food is a lot better.

CS: I too had a travel grant, and there also happened to be a very important exhibition in Siena that year called "Gotico a Siena." When I was deciding about the dissertation that was a big influence: being there, then going over and seeing what was at the archive. I still think that's very important.

MW: And Barry, are there any threads from your graduate student days to now?

BB: Well, I still work on many of the same things. I just found in an auction house a couple of weeks ago a travel diary of Vaudoyer on his 1840 trip to Germany that I was looking for for decades. It happened to be in a very distant branch of the family whose members I never met, and then somebody died and they put these manuscripts up. So anyway, I'm working on that now.

CS: Did you buy it?

BB: I tried to buy it, but I was outbid. But then I found the person who got it. But the unexpected thread was, I really wanted to be this shining white knight of a revisionism about nineteenthth-century architecture, and to take it back from all these people who were only interested in those strands in the nineteenth century that were anticipatory of modernism, and in the end, I ended up going to the Museum of Modern Art, working on twentieth-century architecture, doing an exhibition on Mies van der Rohe, and so on and so forth.

CS: You're talking about the Museum of Modern Art. One of my first memories, I think, of the year we were first at Columbia as undergraduates, was that Picasso died, and we went—maybe, Barry, were you with me? A group of us went to the Museum of Modern Art to go see *Guernica* that day.

BB: Yes, I think I was part of that group. I don't know if your memory is the same as mine. There weren't many people at the Museum of Modern Art. It was a very peaceful place to go because people were not interested in modern art, and certainly not in contemporary art. The Metropolitan might be packed, but not the Museum of Modern Art. This is one of the biggest shifts that's happened: a huge decrease in interest in earlier periods, and this presentism in so many domains of thinking. But in those days, if you wanted to go and sit in front of *Guernica* for a half an hour, you didn't find

people walking in front of you, or you could go into the room with Monet's water lilies, and it was almost like a private chapel.

MW: So, one of the things I was going to ask, both of you have produced scholarship that is for specialists as well as a general audience, so I thought maybe the last question we might talk about is how you appeal to those different audiences, and folding back in something we already talked a little bit about, the dialogue between museums and universities. You both have experience in both. How do you see art history in the wider world of the public, the academy, and the museum?

BB: I'll just tell you an anecdote while I try to gather my thoughts about how I'm going to answer your question. When I went to MoMA on what ended up being an extended leave of absence from the department—well, not totally because I was still teaching one course a year—but anyway, when people said, "Well, what is the difference?" Well, you know, it's just the number of people that I'm reaching is absolutely incredible. Three-quarters of a million people came to see the "Home Delivery" show, and it was all over the press. So I really had a sense of doing something very public. Some of the same people asked me when I went back to Columbia, "What about that comment you made about the public and reaching so many people, et cetera." Yeah, I don't know them. I've never met these people. They're not going to write to me in ten years and say your course, you know, really inspired me to do this or that or even changed my life in this way. In the way I'm sure you get those messages from former students, Mike. You really feel that you've had a connection to an individual whom you know, but I do think in this world of presentism and of contemporary art, above all among all things, to continue to find the middle ground between things that break scholarly ground and ask new questions and are contributing to what a specialized audience might respond to in some way, and yet to engage the public, is really, wherever you are, absolutely vital for the continued existence of the history of art as an intellectual enterprise.

CS: Well, first of all, when you think about museum work as opposed to academia, I actually think museums are producing a lot of scholarship, no matter how you might want to define that word and what it means, whether it's in their laboratories, whether it's in their installations, or whether it's in their exhibitions. And I also am a firm believer that a lot of museum catalogues, which do have to reach a bigger public, also have become a very important way of presenting scholarship, and particularly in the time since I began to work in museums, as opposed to the far more minimal catalogues that existed for a lot of exhibitions before that. I had an experience with Fra Angelico that became unusually successful. It was very surprising. So the last few weeks we had like three-hour waits on line, which was quite incredible. In trying to figure out why this exhibition caught on so much, it made me realize that there's a public that wants all sorts of different things, and can be very surprised about it. And people say, "Oh, that's because they want to have the old masters, or people are going back to the old religion." They said, "Well, it's the Trump and Meloni era," which I didn't like, but it just made me realize that you have to communicate to a broader public somehow or another.

BB: I've always said one thing I like about exhibitions: unlike a scholarly book, which you can keep postponing, an exhibition has a finish date, and the press comes the day before, so there's not even a punch list. And the work is collaborative. Other people are counting on you. Unlike scholarly books, you can't just keep saying, "Okay, well, this can be next year, next year, next year."

CS: And when they talk about peer review, you've got the public.

BB: Maybe this is a bit of pop psychology, but I do think the museum is one of the last remaining places that, first of all, is a public place. There's an incredible decrease in the number of places where the public actually meets one another, and I think in a completely digitized world, there is a thirst for some sense of authenticity. So even if it means sixty-five Renaissance Madonna and Child paintings, I think people feel they're in a relationship with something authentic. I think a lot of museum audiences are not necessarily going with an art historical agenda. They just feel as though they're having an authentic experience, which is rarer and rarer.