

## Edited Video - Karen Carter

[00:00:00] I'm co-founder of Black Artists' Networks in Dialogue, um, functions largely as BAND Gallery, which is in Parkdale, uh, just off of, uh, Queen West at Brock, um, but also, uh, does work outside of the gallery space, um, just kind of helping to empower a community, um, and help with the development and education around Black culture, uh, and the education around Black culture as a means for, uh, dismantling racism or systemic racism or any kind of biases that are harming us and other racialized people, both locally and, uh, nationally and globally.

We started in 2010, we were incorporated in 2010, actually started programming in '09 around Obama's inauguration [00:01:00] and was motivated by some of the conversations and some of the things that he was saying around just kind of being responsible. Um, it was like a 21st century Kennedy-esque type of thing of taking charge and, uh, um, doing things that you wanted to see done in your community.

Um, so it moved us from an initial talk, uh, to, um, uh, actually incorporating. And that was myself, uh, Dr. Julie Crooks who's at the AGO, um, Maxine Bailey, who's probably most known for her previous role at TIFF and, uh, Karen Tyrell, who is, uh, um, a film, marketing, PR professional. It was the four of us that co-founded the organization.

It actually just started as Black Artists' Dialogue, which was BAD. And then we had a whole debate about BAD being good or just bad, [00:02:00] and how that acronym would play. Like I straight up remember the conversation like it was yesterday. And then the other day I saw someone posted on Instagram "BAD", and it was the Black Artists' Dialogue. And it was this talk around, I guess, Black arts. Uh, I don't know if it was the UK or the US. I think it was somewhere in the US and I was like, "Oh my God, somebody went with BAD", but we didn't. Um, we just didn't because of the interest in not just preaching to the converted and not just talking to community. Cause I think if we were not really caring about everyone else and, uh, um, focused internally on ourselves, BAD, just because of, you know, Michael Jackson's song, "You know I'm bad", like it's, it's bad is good in that context, right? So, um, but then we were like, no, this, there are going to be a whole bunch of people who don't get that context and just are like, why is it bad? It just comes across as a negative. So I'm glad we made the choice we did, [00:03:00] which was to include 'networks', because we were very aware of the fact that what we were doing was happening in a moment that there had been a, and I think it was about 10 years or a little over 10 years that, since there had been another Black culture organization that was kind of an art service, art presenter, kind of trying to do things with Black artists across the country, in the city, as well as internationally.

And so, um, we had to acknowledge that the research, cause we started talking about doing something and doing some research and just looking at the landscape from 2008. Um, we're friends, like we break bread together. So it's like if we had brunch on a Saturday we would talk about it or, you know, on, if it was Sunday after church, we'd be combing through the New York times and, and, and talking about what was going on and the things we were noticing and how that might influence what we might want to do.

[00:04:00] But we knew there was a need and we knew that there had been movement, as most people probably will, uh, now notice, because I think the history is coming up more about the music scene, the theatre scene, like there are things that had happened in different aspects of culture, across different disciplines.

So there were dance organizations, theater organizations, Obsidian was around, Dance Immersion has been around for almost 40 years. Um, and the music landscape had people like Jully Black, Divine Brown, and others who had come up from the nineties, um, uh, support scene. So we just thought we had to acknowledge that there were different networks across the cultural sector and that this was about networking. It was about conversations across those networks, as much as it was about conversations within, um, that international. And even that, when you think of international there's different international networks, like the Black [00:05:00] arts and culture scene in the UK is not the same as it is in the US, and it's definitely not the same in Africa or across the continent or in the Caribbean.

So the word 'Networks' became super important the more we went forward, but that's literally, there was a lot—sometimes people say, "Oh, this just sounded good"—but there was a lot of thought for us that went into the name. Um, and I didn't realize how substantial that would be. Um, uh, and now that we look back, but it, there was a lot of conversations and thought and, and definitely for me, uh, CAN:BAIA, which is Canadian Artists' Network: Black Artists in Action, because I had worked there toward the end of it, fresh out of university and thinking I could change the world, but couldn't so, uh, I couldn't save it when it was kind of, uh, coming out of a debt from their last big project CELAFI '97. But, um, that was front of mind for me. Uh, I don't think it was, it wasn't necessarily front of [00:06:00] mind for everybody else, um, so that's some context for how the name came about.

So I was, um, lucky to work, uh, when I was in university, in healthcare part-time. So uh, that basically meant that, although I'd left home at eighteen, I had, uh, most times enough money to pay the bills. Um, and so that allowed me to, um, maybe unlike other students who were just, you're just frantic about money and you're going to go into school and thinking about, okay, how does the rent get paid next or how do I buy the books, um, It allowed me to start to think about what I wanted to do when I was done. And I was in a education, uh, and history program. I did my undergrad in, um, Latin American and Caribbean studies. And, uh, I did a, um, concurrent education at [00:07:00] York program. So it ran concurrently with my undergrad, the teaching degree, which was for intermediate, um, students. And I knew that I didn't want to be a teacher, but the teacher was about my dad. Uh, the typical immigrant kids story, where they tell you to pick a bucket: lawyer, doctor, finance, teacher. Like they just, there's a bucket, you pick one, because you're going to have a profession. You're not going to work in the arts, what is that? Um, and although I left home at 18, you would say why would this still be a driver, but their voice stays in your head. So, um, the teaching degree was, so my dad could say, "Karen is at York, she's in education" when he's talking to his people. Um, and I knew, um, that I, because I'd always grown up with, uh, my cousin is Divine Brown and I grew up singing in church and so music was [00:08:00] always a big thing in our family. So I think for a lot of time during high school I thought I was going to be a Black Barbra Streisand. Cause I loved the music as much as I loved the showtunes and the performance, I had this whole thing going on in my head. It's hilarious now when I think

about it. But needless to say that didn't happen. Um, uh, and I did some music. I recorded this house track with this guy who was out of Detroit. And I did try to do some of it, but every time I was at a gig, there was usually some inappropriate moment with somebody. And I was kind of like, this is not my jam because I, uh, I'm not good at sucking this up, but I am going to tell you about yourself if you're inappropriate toward me. So I pivoted away from the music and then just started, like, researching and pushing myself into spaces that I was curious about, what was going on. And it was a friend who was actually a co-founder of BAND, Julie Crooks, who I think had asked me, or maybe she had told me about this CELAFI thing? I [00:09:00] don't, but I found out about it somehow because she had been awarded the first CELAFI in '92, which was the first time CAN:BAIA had done that International Black Art, African-Canadian Art Festival.

So I don't remember exactly how, but I just remember finding out that there was another one happening for '97 and then it was, I guess, '96 I would have found out and just started volunteering. And they had an office where Theatre Pass Muraille has its office now, at Wolseley just off of Queen. So I would go there. And then I literally just started volunteering my time because, and I, and I, I have to acknowledge that it was literally, the ability to do that was partly because I had the job at the hospital so I made pretty decent money. So I didn't have to worry about working constantly. And also, cause I was commuting, that, the healthcare facility I worked at was in Scarborough and I was commuting across to the West End to York. So a lot of my reading and class work was done on, on, [00:10:00] on transit. I remember actually this African Writers course and reading all the books in the first couple of months for the whole year.

And people were like, what? Like, who are you? I was like, none overachiever. I just happened to be spending a lot of time on the bus. And it's better to have your head down in a book than to be people watching. Um, uh, yeah, so that's how I kind of pushed myself into that. And then from there it was kind of like a snowball because, I don't know about you, but it feels like there's, or maybe I shouldn't say you, because I think y'all are too young to know yet, but, and from others that you've spoken to, if they all have a moment of, it wasn't that there was a magic bullet. It's just that there was a seed planted. So, the time there watching Ayanna, who at the time drove me crazy, just watching the tenacity of this woman who just willed things into being, and then watching the other community, people around her, like meeting some of the artists [00:11:00] and, uh, I met the jazz pianist Randy Western, uh, this guy Ed Providence who was a classical artist, a classical pianist and composer. I think he spends most of his time, if he's still with us, and I think he is, in Europe, just, um, just what that introduced me to, which let me... It was like, you just found your tribe. So I knew those were, that's where I was going to be. And I didn't know exactly what that would look like, but I knew that was where I wanted to be. And I did the education degree. Like as soon as that was done I literally, there was an opportunity because CAN:BAIA ended up in some trouble after the festival financially, and because I'd been there working they just said, oh do you want to work here? And then I took the job and it was, again, a learning experience. Cause I didn't really know what I was doing. I was way too young, but I thought I could just figure it out. The wonder of youth. Um, and although there's still a bit of me that's like that, that I take things not because I've totally figured them out, cause I want to [00:12:00] figure it out. I like the problem solving. I just now know that you have to also be strategically equipped

with some of the things, to even know how to unsolve and untangle the web of the problem. You can't just decide, you'll figure it out willy-nilly with no context or education or sense of what you're in. Um, so I think that seed planted. And then every other job after that, some of it was like, I spent some time at Harbourfront Centre in the education department, which is the only thing I ever did related to my education degree, teaching at a school by the water.

And then things happen that plant a seed in your brain, like people would come down from Jane and Finch and basically say, um, kids would say they didn't know there was a waterfront there. So it stays in your brain about what that means around access for community. And I just literally was floored that these kids that lived up in the North end of the city didn't know that there was a lake there. And I was kind of like, the Island and that area was cheap fare. I remember as a kid, for our family living in [00:13:00] Scarborough, we would come down and spend a day at Centre Island. And it was kind of this outing for us as recent immigrants that was affordable to get out in the city.

I mean, my dad was a truck driver, so he knew a lot of... Basically there are places our little family went in small town Ontario, where there literally makes no sense that a young Black family, that we were out there. Cause there was just no reason except that my dad was a truck driver and he just found these little nooks that we would go to.

Um, but it was kind of like every, every, every step in either me just taking a job or me working something in culture, I would clock something else that ended up now, at 51, there's this toolkit that I draw on. So I worked in healthcare and I had to quit the job to go to CAN:BAIA. And then they called me when I was at Harbourfront and I left Harbourfront to go there thinking I would do my MA and have a steady job that paid a bit more.

Didn't happen cause SARS hit and then I ended up in this Crisis Management thing with [00:14:00] logistics around supplies. And the chaos, um, I mean, it was, it was a fraction now when we look at what happened, at what's happening with COVID-19, but I think most people have been told, uh, it's like SARS and the flu had a baby and made COVID-19.

So for me, it's like this, this mammoth level of awareness of what those healthcare workers are going through. Having worked in, in Scarborough during SARS. But I worked in a union environment. So I saw, I had access to the senior team. I just, there were just little things that end up constructing and deconstructing and demystifying what it means to work in organizations, to be in a leadership role, to have to problem solve, to have to manage complex organisms and, um, and, and hopefully how to lead with compassion and not fear.

Um, Uh, which isn't always an easy thing for one to do. Um, but it also means that I feel like I recognize it when I [00:15:00] see people, especially when they're people I'm reporting to. And you're realizing, okay you're, this is... Even if you're compassionate right now, your fear is what's driving you and so we're not going to get anywhere because you're, you have either constructed this fear narrative in your brain, or you're just not comfortable with me as an 'other'. And, uh, that that's the driver and what's making the decisions for you.

Yeah so there, there wasn't some magic train. After healthcare I pivoted back into the sector and ended up working at Canadian Heritage. And that was a strategic decision because I

wanted to make sure that I had the ability to understand a bit about the funder situation. And that was invaluable because by the time I left there and went back to the city to work on the Toronto Museum Project, that... The colleagues I met there helped me to find out about grants that were appropriate for digitizing, uh, collections in [00:16:00] the early two thousands, when the feds were focused on museums digitizing their collections and helped to, um, get a large grant to do some of that work for the city.

And then by the time I was leaving that, I'd been in a mechanism at the city that, again, wasn't surprising because of my time in health care, but I knew, if I was going to get in trouble for stuff wanted it to be trouble that I caused. It was just time to be in a leadership role cause like, um, uh, there, there were just meetings there that I was in and I was getting verbal beatdowns, and I was kind of like, "Why am I getting a verbal beatdown I didn't do nothin?" But you know, if I'm going to take these hits then let me be responsible for taking them. So let me just go get an E.D. Job. And I decided it was time to apply for something more senior. And I got the job, luckily, at Heritage Toronto, and then spent five years there. And from there, I just mostly stayed in either building things from scratch or in senior. And I think I'm finding out at 51, uh, that I prefer to [00:17:00] stay in, probably, the incubatory build zone. I like the experimental. I'm not sure I'm running to big institutions. Um, Uh, and that's partly because, uh, of something ending recently.

Um, uh, but yeah, I, there wasn't necessarily a magic path. It was partly spidey senses, partly 'What do I think I'm going to learn here?' um, and what were the opportunities that were available to me?

So I would say by the time BAND was being built, I was at Heritage Toronto. Uh, and again, I feel like I do... The, the one thing that's consistent in my career trajectory and in being lucky to have really smart people around me to build things with and, and to play with, is I have a stable income. And then it would be "okay, what else am I doing?" because there's always this aspect of service, of [00:18:00] volunteerism, of what you're giving back to community, uh, that I think just comes from the way I was raised. I was raised, uh, with a family that had strong faith, grew up going to a Baptist church. So there was always a sense of you have to give back. Um, and, and the spirit of volunteerism, that's kind of going back as long as I can remember.

Um, so by the time BAND was being built, it was partly about the things that I knew, but also the stuff that others were aware of who were at the table. Um, and I think the person who is most influential of the four of us at BAND, it would be myself and, uh, Dr. Julie Crooks, who I said is at the AGO, because she would have been... Julie had worked, um, um, at, uh, Planet Africa and, and in the film program there. Um, and Karen came and went, [00:19:00] um, because she was usually off somewhere working on some big Hollywood film that you wouldn't know about until it was done. And then, um, Maxine, I can't remember the exact dates, but she would have been at TIFF since the nineties as well. Um, so it was largely by the time we were in the conversations about an idea like BAND and then the delivery of it and execution of it, it was Julia and I that thought, for instance, 2010 was appropriate to incorporate because she was looped into conversations with TD about Black History Month. And it was, the title for it at the time was "TD Then and Now Black History Month Series"

that we had, um, they had come up with and then worked together to brand and to develop this thing that was happening across Canada, that we would help build cause we would build out the network across the country. So [00:20:00] it was, um, I would say part of it was about what I was experiencing, but it was also was, uh, what about what she was experiencing and seeing and how that all came together into this collaborative soup of how the entity was built.

So for me, um, there was, I think things front of mind for me was, remembering the kid out of university who had no clue. And so there was a long time, which in retrospect wasn't necessarily the right way to go about it, where we engaged young people who weren't necessarily, um, qualified arts administrators to help with admin and, uh, the decision to not rent a space for an office but to rent something for the storefront, which I think changed our whole historic trajectory because we put ourselves in the position to have space. And we had done the research and known enough [00:21:00] that the visual artists were the ones that were given the least support in this sector, in the country.

Uh, Black visual artists were kind of, you know, pretty much left on their own. So we thought let's have a gallery space for people to use, to show their work and to help them develop their professional practice through, uh, exhibitions. And, and also it was very focused on solo exhibitions, not group exhibitions, which I don't even know if we consciously knew that, but now I look back and then, what I know of the landscape is the group exhibitions benefit the curator more because the curator's voice leads more than the individual exhibition would, right? So, and then we set up this 70/30 model, which again was just trying to make a decision of what we thought was reasonable to get an admin fee, but then make sure the artists' sales went back to them. And for the longest while I didn't know why there were people who didn't talk to me in the sector, but apparently that is not done. [00:22:00] It's either you're an artist-run centre or you're a commercial gallery. And so in doing what we did, we were this hybrid. We weren't following either rules. So we weren't just giving someone a CARFAC fee, which is usually like 500 bucks for a show or something, you know what I mean? It's, it's not as substantial. And then they're not necessarily building relationship with collectors. We were interested in, uh, what it would mean for people to sell, uh, as well as sometimes you would also still get the fee and you would sell. Like at BAND, because of the corporate relationships at Scotia and TD bank over the years, it just opened up the opportunity for us to be able to do both. So you get an artist fee, but you still get to sell work. So you get the benefit of both. And it was literally last summer in the backyard during the pandemic at BAND that the curator or the director of the gallery at York, um, I can't recall her name —she recently moved back from being away—was like, "where'd you get this model?" [00:23:00] I was like, I dunno, we just, this is why we thought it made sense. And, and then she was the one who told me that that's...No one does that. Who told you you could do that? Like, I don't know. I don't wake up in the morning feeling like I need to follow someone else's rules.

Um, and I'm lucky that, I've been lucky with the boards that they've, uh, they were happy. They let us experiment. Um, so it was partly about what is best for the artists, not necessarily what everyone's doing. And then the other part was boards. We decided the board had to be Black professionals or, um, and that I think harmed us for a while, because most of the way

the, um, funding entities are set up they want you to have artists on the board. But our artists, even the ones who we knew were most senior, couldn't be on the board because they needed to benefit from the projects we would do that would get the money. And if they were on the board, they couldn't do that. It'd be a conflict of interest. And for us [00:24:00] at the time, we didn't have language for it, but now I'm kind of like, we've given people the ability to learn how to be board members and to get governance experience and at a place where people want to diversify boards. How do you get the ability to learn what that means in the Black community and especially for arts and cultural organizations? So it's been a blessing for us to be able to have just that team of Black professionals who were interested in arts and culture to get the experience.

Um, uh, so it was about the desire to train board members, create space for artists. Uh, and then I won't lie. I think we almost in the beginning focus too much on the artist and not enough on the arts administrators and curators. And then the last few years we've packed in more of a heightened awareness around that.

And some of that is, it is 10 years and we're at the stage now where we're all off the board and I'm involved sometimes in a consultative role. I think after I left Myseum, I was in a [00:25:00] consulting role because of trying to tighten up the operations at BAND. Cause there was a lot of guilt that museum was stable.

I mean, it was a different scenario cause I was a hired gun for that, but it was stable operationally and I felt like I needed to be able to bring that stability to BAND. Even though we didn't have a millionaire benefactor. We, uh, needed to just kind of stop and focus on getting the charitable number and doing some of that stuff so, that stuff in place. Now we're at the point where we're ready to hire a director so that it becomes much more arms length. And myself and Julie will likely, still be involved in a fundraising capacity and always be there to assist. But it's, it's getting to the point where it's, uh, it's in its late teens and stepping into adulthood, which is, it's a good thing.

So yeah, it was a, again, in a roundabout way, it was a multiplicity of impacts, everything from what you learn operationally that benefits the artists directly, and then from the other end of the spectrum of how it's an opportunity for boards. So it, it lives in this multifaceted space that [00:26:00] I think allows us to address community needs in different ways.

So what happened is because both TD and Scotia bank, their funding helped us to basically cover the space and admin that we needed for the staff time to do shows, the majority of it, we would be able to have artists submit online. Sometimes people would come to us, uh, just show up at the gallery. But there's a process where we had, uh, an advisory committee that would review. So even if we said no, if the show, if the artist wasn't ready for a solo show, we would at least be able to give them some feedback and say, this is why. And sometimes, I won't lie, it wasn't necessarily that the work wasn't strong, it was just the thematically.

So we get submissions for instance, from African-American artists and it isn't neces- it's very African-American focused, the narrative. And the there that's there isn't necessarily going to

add something interesting for us as a, in the Canadian landscape or even something else [00:27:00] internationally.

So what would happen is we would, whatever the show, the cycle of shows that were approved, the first show would always be a 70/30 split. So the artists' sales, they would take 70% of the sale. We would take a 30% admin fee. And then if they came back, it would be 60/40. And then after that, uh, you would gauge when it made sense to potentially be 50/50. And I won't lie, we don't actually have anybody that's 50/50 yet. Most people have come back twice and then either don't or if they do... There's a couple right now who could come back just because of... So Gloria Swain, who's a Black woman, an elder and an abstract painter. Um, we, so sometimes we see things and reach out to people to show just cause we want to look at mixing up what we present. And so we hadn't presented a Black female abstract painter ever. [00:28:00] And I saw her work posted on Instagram and sent her a note and said like, can I see some more of that? I've not, I had no idea you were painting this type of work. And she said, I've been doing it since the eighties, but nobody has been interested in showing it. I was like, how is that possible? So we did a studio visit and then pulled some work and showed her work last year. And then the, showing those works, again we've got enough screen cred now that people notice things. So then she landed a couple of shows, one in Montreal and another one out West for the, her abstract paintings. And she's continued now painting and gotten some more opportunities to sell. She sold work at our show and then, um, she's now got another show coming this year for us. And so that will likely be 60/40.

The hope is that because you've shown with us, it raises your profile and creates opportunities elsewhere for you. And that's been, I think partly the mix of what we do locally, but also the relationships we've developed internationally. We've shown Gordon [00:29:00] Parks, we've shown James Barnor, we've shown Vanley Burke. We were doing talks and stuff that, I founded a Caribbean art fair in Jamaica at the end of January and BAND was one of the galleries represented there for obvious reasons. I'm going to pull that stuff. Cause there's a lot of Caribbean, artists of Caribbean descent that live in, uh, in Canada and definitely in the GTA. And those artists were artists that we had shown previously. So it made sense to include them as diaspora artists in the fair. Um, yeah. So the, that idea is really about, how might you create a model that allows more of the funds to get back to the artists, to help kickstart their ability to create the next body of work.

Well, how we define emerging for Black artists, and I think this probably crosses the same paradigm for a lot of racialized artists, is weird. It was weird to think of someone like Gloria, as an elder, as emerging, but based on the industry she kind of was because she [00:30:00] just hadn't been able to show. So when you're looking at someone... Like there's a gentleman, Owen Gordon, who's now represented by Metivier Gallery.

His show at BAND last year happened after he went looking, as a retired gentleman in his seventies, for a place to show work. He'd been, again, painting since he was in Jamaica, migrated in the eighties, worked at the city, retired from the city as an, uh, civil servant, um, in their solid waste management team and then just continued painting. I think he'd been retired for about seven or eight years, was painting and then wanted to start looking at ways

to show. Um, so when he showed up to us again, you've got, he had almost 500 pieces of art in his house. In my mind he's not—and he's technically so good across so many realms, uh, in the way he dances from sculpture to painting and from painting abstraction to figurative to, um, [00:31:00] landscape, he just, he doesn't play by any rules. He just creates, um, uh, wherever his mind leads him. Uh, but he too is emerging. So his first show was 70/30, um, and, uh, sold a lot of work. He did really well with our show. And then, as I said, we connected, we had been calling Metivier from the fall. Cause we've known, uh, Nicholas since, uh, Gordon Parks' show in 2014 at BAND. And when we saw, when I saw the work, I thought, "he needs to look at this" because it's an estate. Like he already has this huge body and we don't know how to deal with that. And also we're not in this space to necessarily become a dealer, we're there because we're interested in helping artists develop. And I think even that idea of getting to 50/50 is us being open to the fact that, um, there are artists who may decide they don't want to be with a formal dealer. They want more autonomy, and we want to be a place that they could [00:32:00] choose to stay long-term.

But that is a very recent thought. And I think some of that thoughts also come out of last year's activism and our awareness of the fact that not everybody is interested necessarily in, or even knows how to support racialized artists. So why put them through a difficult situation if they could use our space?

And also we've become, we've, we've had an opportunity now to access different spaces because of the reputation we built over the 10 years. So we don't always only show at our gallery, we show in other places around the city. It's like you want to put, put the money back in the artists' pocket as much as possible.

Like we have started cultivating a spirit of collection and doing some programming around that, where we'll ask a collector to feature a piece that they've purchased just to demystify collecting, and also to encourage the average person, you know, to start collecting. Because they, instead of buying... The \$200 [00:33:00] they might spend on a poster from Ikea, like you could actually get original art for that. So just those little things to demystify it.

Um, I'm always excited, uh, for the stuff BAND's doing, because I love that we dance in hybrid spaces and we're at the point now where there's as much stuff coming to us as there is stuff that we're trying to reach out and help to cultivate. So one of the things that came out of the, uh, introduction of, um, Owen Gordon to Metivier Gallery last year was their interest in, uh, uh, and I think some of it's strategic, um, although I've not even said this to them, just knowing what's happening with, uh, our artists and potentially opening up themselves to the next Owen Gordon. Um, uh, but also giving an opportunity for their collectors to also meet the other, uh, [00:34:00] uh, Black artists, uh, that they would otherwise not necessarily know about.

So they're allowing this, um, and it's under a BAND offsite branding that we've created to help with things that we'll do outside of the gallery. Um, so we're doing a pop-up group show there under BAND offsite to, um, as a foreshadowing, a preview into the season. So four of the artists that would be showing throughout the, I guess the summer/fall season will be featured in that show in May. So we're excited about that just because again, to be in that hybrid space with a commercial gallery is not something that a lot of people are doing, and

we're hoping that that, this moment with Metivier may open up those opportunities for us with other commercial galleries, because at the close of the day, we're here to try and help the artists with developing their careers.

And the other [00:35:00] thing that we were really excited about last year was how we figured out how to do performances in isolation that recorded and then pushed out. And then there was an artist Clerel who's out of Montreal that I keep seeing now. Uh, and we just stumbled into him because of an Instagram post.

So I know he's probably getting, like, he's doing something with CBC music, he's probably getting that because of his continued Instagram posts, but I know the impact and the reach of our brand in promoting that hopefully might've helped with him getting that extra push, from recording in his house in Montreal to recording in our house at BAND and pushing it out in the world.

So I'm also excited about continuing to cultivate the programming for the performing arts, that's allowing our space to be an incubator for those things. Uh, because definitely if you're in theatre or music, we're not some huge venue. We're the venue that if you're experimenting and [00:36:00] figuring stuff out, or there's just an opportunity to do a gig and get paid a reasonable fee for it, it's, uh, we're, we're really excited about staying in that lane. And then the other bit is getting to the place where we develop more fulsomely the emerging curators program to create space for curatorial residencies, for people to work with us, to work on shows, to pair them with, uh, some of the emerging artists, to write and research and to give context to the work.

So we're also leading a project, a BIPOC fellowship, uh, that myself and a colleague, Gail Lord, who's the founder and president of, uh, co-founder and president of Lord Cultural Resources, which is the largest museum consulting firm in the world, who happens to be Canadian. And she was talking to me about this fellowship that they created with the arm of Lord in the US and we were talking about the challenge of doing it in the Canadian landscape, and we kind of started talking and just [00:37:00] have I think decoded a way for it to work here.

And so I'm excited for BAND's leadership in, uh, helping to see something like that happen because we know, we know, I know, and I know colleagues who are seen as senior cultural people in this, uh, country, how challenging it is to be racialized and in leadership roles. Um, so whatever we can do to help with cultivating more leadership.

Cause some of it is just, if there's more of you than it demystifies it, as you being some kind of exception. Um, uh, and helping to actually feel like people can have career trajectories that allow them to grow in the sector to the, whatever their abilities are, not to what they're limited to, but whatever they're, so if they're capable of being the CEO of the ROM, they should be able to be the CEO of the ROM.

Uh, and if they, if they choose to want that, that [00:38:00] should be a goal they should be able to aspire to. Um, whereas I think a lot of people might say, I might want these, but

these, these things don't seem likely or plausible. Um, so yeah, those are kind of things that are happening that we're involved with and, uh, really, really excited about.

And, uh, I should have probably started with just fundraising to get us a proper director so that, uh, I'm happier to focus on little projects on the side. I mean BAND's always going to be something that I'm involved in, but it would be nice to have the, to just know that the day to day, yeah, know the baby's grown up. It's off as an adult living its life and you're, you're watching from the sidelines, cheering it on. If they need help. It's like, if they boomerang back home you can say, "Here and get out, go back, go away. Here's the help I got for you. Leave, leave again."

Um, yeah, but there's a lot of good things on the horizon and I'm [00:39:00] super happy for the team that's there.

We were super lucky. So our vice chair, um, Alysse, uh, she is comfortable in tech spaces. I mean, I feel like most of the board is, but she definitely is. So her and a volunteer, uh, were the ones who decoded Zoom for us very early. So we pivoted right away last year when the contact exhibition was planned for Christina Leslie. And they literally decoded how, functionally, we could do an opening using Zoom. That process of decoding how Zoom could work just kind of elevated throughout last year, where we went from, "Okay, this is how we're doing openings now" to like tightening things up, or we then.. The Artist Talk for that show included international artists, uh, Vanley [00:40:00] Burke out of the UK. So you kind of start to see, okay, with this tech you have this global audience now. So how do you pull your global network into this global audience's conversations? And then we, the first talk or the first, the opening we did was a bit, again, really kind of higgledy-piggledy all over the place.

And some of that made it fun cause it felt like the chaos of an actual physical opening, but it also meant people didn't always get to see the work cause I was in the gallery on my own, holding up an iPad mini, trying to look at art, which was just not the best way to see it. So we figured out things like, do a slide show.

So you could be sitting in the gallery and you know, behind you you see the work. So people know someone's there but, sometimes the artist is there, uh, but the actual work is done with a slideshow, usually curated with music. So people can actually see the work better than in person. And I don't know if you've seen the, been to the space, but it's a small Black Victorian house off of Queen West on the corner.

And [00:41:00] so we can literally sit in the backyard, open the door at the back, open the door at the front and see people enter. So it also meant we could safely social distance when things reopened, let people visit with timed entry appointments. So we, like a lot of people got to see Owen Gordon's exhibition last year for that reason.

And then again, if you know this space, you know that we have the public art outside. And so that became more important and we've expanded, or we'll be expanding that for Contact this year with large vinyl panels on the side of the house and one at the back. So we're doing more public art. Uh, which, I mean, I love that stuff cause it just feels like you're shaking the gallery outside and it was really important.

Those panels have been really important even with the neighborhood, for them to feel that the gallery is, a sense, in their community and accessible to them. I won't, I won't lie to you. It literally, that public art install came initially [00:42:00] out of people in the neighborhood not coming and our saying like, it's literally, there's a sign on the door, "Open, Please Come In" type of thing. And we know, again, this is partly about the subconscious in people's brains, that if it wasn't a Black culture space, um, and they'd probably come in, but because it is, there's a sense of, Oh, are we welcome? So we had to do a lot of work to let people in the neighborhood feel like they were welcome to come in and that public art, um, on the fence has helped with that.

It just helps to them talking to you. Cause they'll comment on what they've seen or, part of the reason we have that fence is our, that a patch of grass was a dog walking stop. And we got tired of cleaning up after the dogs. So the fence went up, literally, mainly to deal with the dogs. And then we thought, okay, we need to put some art on this fence.

Because of the safety issues with being inside, uh, the space being so small uh, and just even the things you hear about airflow with COVID, uh, I have made [00:43:00] it also, I think, more comfortable for people to come to as a small space. And then the backyard is a good size. So then people would socially distance. If they were comfortable, you could sit and have a chat, um, uh, about the work. And some people would just be like, they would see the work and leave, but it was a quick in and out. Um, yeah. So I think between the things we decoded online and the stuff that's happening physically in the space, It just feels like we're, well not feels like, we were lucky. We literally did not have to cancel any shows or any programming last year.

So this year we've kind of set up a system that we know will work for us because it's... There, there's ways to do it safely and not disappoint artists. The contact show this year was for a, um, Ghanaian Canadian artist who's been here I think three or four years. And so most of the work is from his time in Ghana.

That had to be canceled just because the work is so strong, we really wanted to [00:44:00] show it in an inside space with much more scale. But it's given another emerging artist opportunity to show her work in the public art realm, um, and not worry about work being inside. But by the time we get into that summer/fall window, everything I think we'll be able to... and frankly, even if it doesn't, we'd still, we, we mount the show, we take photos, we engage with it online. The artist gets their artist fee, like all that stuff happens. Um, work would be for sale and we can arrange studio visits that are virtual for people or, uh, isolation visits when it makes sense. So, yeah, I think, um, we've been really lucky that we pivoted pretty quickly because I have really smart board and volunteers, and then we were not, no one was disappointed with losing shows and I think actually we probably have done more shows and increased what we show because we had more people [00:45:00] sending in exhibition requests and was able to access more opportunities for artists, uh, in our, in our planning cycle.