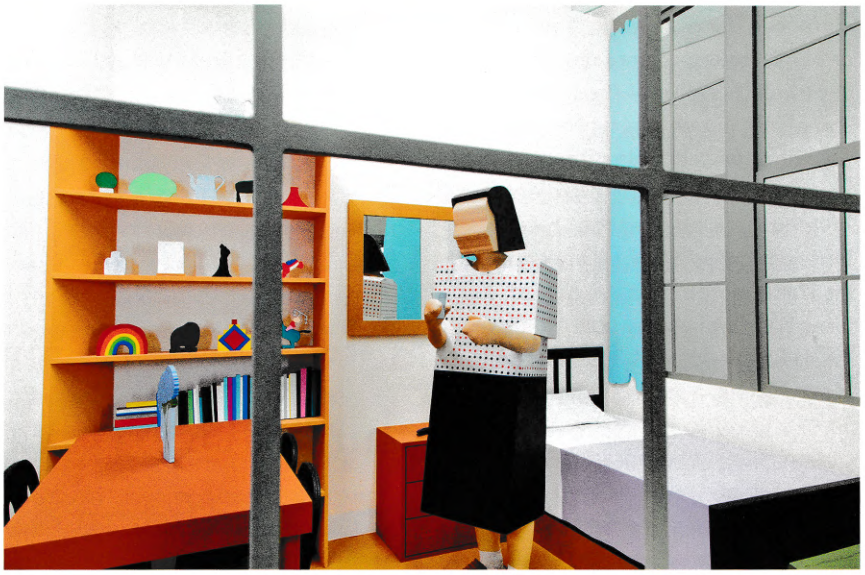
Meredith James '00, ARTIST





"I was always really interested in art," says Ms. Meredith James '00. One of her earliest art projects took shape in an after-school papier-mache class at Brearley led by Mrs. Mary Christiansen, where she made a "life-sized mermaid" that hung in Mrs. Nancy Scully's office until she retired.

During her time at Brearley, Ms. James discovered a passion for costume design and learned from fellow alumna Ms. Liza Siegler '95, who regularly returned to campus to help create costumes for different productions at the School. For her senior project, Ms. James worked on *Law & Order*, doing costumes for the show's extras. "Because Brearley is such a small school," she says, "if you have a passion for something, they're pretty great about facilitating it."

After graduating, Ms. James worked as Ms. Siegler's assistant on several off-Broadway productions. She jokes that she came to art through theater. In college, she realized she wanted to be the one directing, serving as the driving force and "not just a cog in the machine." She started taking sculpture classes, which gradually became her primary medium. "I still use a lot of theater in my work," she says. A few years ago, she collaborated with playwright Julia Jarcho and is hoping to create sets for another friend's upcoming play, which she describes as a "full-circle moment."

Today, Ms. James's preferred media is project-dependent. "The parameters of the project really dictate what I make," she explains. "I'm always trying to learn new mediums."

Brearley faculty provided Ms. James with "an incredible foundation" when she entered college, and she notes that the knowledge and concepts she drew on most were learned at the School. She recalls that while Mr. Jim Sykes, her art history teacher, professed not to really "get" contemporary art, he made sure his students were constantly exposed to it, taking them to the Metropolitan

Museum of Art every week. "We would lie on the floor and draw, and we really felt at home," she recalls. "He made sure we had a comfort level with the institution. Even though I didn't think of myself as an art historian, I had a pretty deep understanding of art from that class."

Other faculty continue to shape how Ms. James thinks about her work. Her history teacher, Ms. Gail Marcus, introduced "broader concepts that I still think about," and Ms. Carol Locke and Mrs. Ruth Carpenter, "both amazing English teachers," provided her with a literary framework that continues to influence her work, noting that she often uses literature as a starting point.

That foundation would later surface in her own work. One of her favorite projects to date captures the spirit of Brearley's liberal arts education, which she describes as "a culmination of many different skills and projects." A video installation at the Queens Museum called *Mobius City* centered on *The Panorama of the City of New York*, which was built for the 1964–65 World's Fair. Ms. James identified her apartment building in *The Panorama*, rebuilt it at three-quarter scale, photographed and painted it, and then created a video in which her apartment transforms into the flattened version within the model. She also transformed into a character she imagined might inhabit *The Panorama*. "It was very playful in form and depicts different ways that we see the world around us," she says. "Narrative plays a central role in my work."

Recently, Ms. James hosted a gallery talk and tour in New York City with Brearley's Alumnae Association, showcasing her solo exhibition *The Exit*. This project "was really about disrupting and manipulating the space, and then translating photographs into something three-dimensional," she explains.

Ms. James encourages current Brearley students to take advantage of attending school in New York City. "Brearley offers the extraordinary opportunity to see art constantly and firsthand. There's something special about learning how revolutionary certain works were in their time. You can't access the sense of innovation as well when you get older," she reflects.

"At Brearley, I felt like I could learn anything or be anything, and I think that has really served me," she says. "I feel confident and intellectually empowered to pursue anything." ■

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> —MS. MEREDITH JAMES '00