HARVARD PORTRAIT

Makeda Best

At 13, Makeda Best bought her first photo-book: Brian Lanker’s I Dream a World: Portraits of Black Women Who Changed America. (Her second was an Annie Leibovitz collection; after that, lacking funds, she made her own with magazine cutouts.) At 16, she was given her first camera—a Nikon 6600, then the fastest automatic on the market—and began taking portraits. It was the only genre she knew before college, at Barnard, exposed her to other formats: “I didn’t know what photography could be.” Later, as a student at CalArts, she mostly snapped unpeopled landscapes, especially in San Francisco, its storefronts roiled by the dot.com boom. Best had been raised there by New Yorker parents who’d struck out west in the 1970s. To her mind, “California’s a place where people escape. It’s a place where you go because want to think freely, you want to be expansive. The East Coast is very much grounded in history.” Though she got her M.F.A., Best says, “I have nothing to show” for that time in art school. There’s no framed work, no secret box of prints—just an enduring fascination with the form’s technical aspects, which she brings to her new position as Menschel curator of photography at the Harvard Art Museums. Documentary is a special strength of the collection; Best, Ph.D. ’10, specializes in the photography of war and protest. Centrally, she’s interested in how artists struggle to capture their moment, grappling with new cameras and films. “That’s where my own background as a photographer comes in,” she says. “I can look at something and say, ‘Well, he’s trying to do this, but it’s not quite there.’” She no longer makes images, but her life is still dedicated to understanding that process: “It’s become a practice, now, of writing, of reading.”

—SOPHIA NGUYEN

News Briefs

Allston Updates

Boston authorities have approved construction of Harvard’s 9,000-square-foot, temporary “ArtLab” near the corner of Western Avenue and North Harvard Street. The facility will be sited to the west of the cluster of innovation spaces that have sprung up at the edge of the Business School campus, but is conceived in the same spirit. Construction is expected to take about one year (as reported in harvardmag.com/artlab-plans-17).

On a far more consequential scale, the preliminary filing for the commercially oriented “enterprise research zone” (unveiled in December), outlines two office and laboratory structures totaling 400,000 square feet; a 250,000-square-foot hotel/conference center; and a similarly sized apartment tower. They would occupy part of 14 acres along Western Avenue, opposite the business school—between the science and engineering complex now rising and the existing Genzyme manufacturing center. The rest of the site would be surface parking lots, at least temporarily. Harvard did
not identify a private developer for the project. Plans for the rest of the 36 acres envisioned for the zone, and for the more extensive Harvard landholdings underneath and south of the Massachusetts Turnpike intersection, which is to be reconstructed, were not put forward—a disappointment to some Allston residents. Another concern is the state’s delay, until 2040, on a mass-transit hub for the area. Further details on the filing appear at harvardmag.com/filing-17. For an update on Harvard’s January offer to jump-start the transportation hub by contributing as much as $50 million to the needed financing, see harvardmag.com/transit.

Down river, in the booming Kendall Square neighborhood around MIT (the sort of technology-academia hub Harvard’s planners may envision), the announcement that a supermarket would soon move into One Broadway signaled the area’s increasing appeal not only to life-sciences and information-technology tenants, but to their employees, who are taking up residence. MIT plans further intensive commercial growth in the area, including more than a thousand housing units plus offices and laboratories on a 14-acre site for which it has recently gained planning and development approval.

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Bryan Stevenson on the Shadow of White Supremacy
“I don’t think slavery ended in 1865 —I think it just evolved,” the Harvard Law School graduate said.
harvardmag.com/stevenson-17

Toward a Zika Vaccine
Medical professor Dan Barouch finds long-term Zika vaccine efficacy varies by delivery method.
harvardmag.com/zika-17

Harvard College Delays General-Education Curriculum
A surprising change in plans to revise the undergraduate course of study
harvardmag.com/gened-18

Overhauling Advanced Standing

At the December 5 Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS) meeting, dean of undergraduate education Jay M. Harris (see page 21) outlined proposals to eliminate the College’s policies on advanced standing. One element of the proposal proved uncontroversial: students should no longer be allowed to receive Harvard College credit for Advanced Placement (AP) examinations associated with their high-school courses, given the dissimilarity of aims and demands between those courses and their classes in Cambridge. (AP exams would still be used as measures to guide placement into College courses appropriate for each student.) Effecting this change would also, in a way, be a bow toward equity, because students from high schools with lesser resources and fewer course offerings arrive at Harvard less likely to have accumulated AP credits.

But two implications of the proposal were of concern to faculty members. Using AP courses has been the sole channel to advanced standing, enabling students to complete their undergraduate studies in six or seven semesters, or to pursue a master’s degree in their fourth Harvard year.

Harris observed that with financial aid, low-income students do not bear the cost of tuition and fees during a fourth year in residence. But some faculty speakers observed that some students wish to graduate in fewer semesters because of constraints on their health, or because of the pressing need to begin earning a full-time income to support their families—significant opportunity costs not captured in the grant of financial aid during a fourth College year.

More speakers, particularly from the sciences—computer science and physics among them—said that withdrawing the option to obtain advanced standing during an AP-eased fourth year would severely disadvantage Harvard in recruiting the most outstanding students in those fields, for many of whom the dual-degree option is a compelling attraction. The proposal Harris outlined—permitting any student capable of advanced work to pursue a master’s degree within four years of residence, but no longer allowing a reduction in College requirements (other than allowing a maximum of two courses to be counted toward both the bachelor’s and master’s degree, so earning two degrees would require a minimum of 38 courses or 152 credits)—did not alleviate those concerns.

One further element was not aired during the faculty meeting. The proposal suggests that students should continue to be allowed to fulfill their foreign-language requirement with a score of 5 on an AP exam. But the committee that drafted the report also noted that “policies around the language requirement should be reviewed.” Presumably, many high-school language courses, focused on acquiring skills and proficiency, also fall short of many College courses, which aim at “a broader cultural experience, and the kind of critical intercultural inquiry that further supports the core intellectual mission of the College.”
taining the AP exemption also maintains
the inequity imposed on students from un-
der-resourced high schools.)

The proposal as a whole was advanced in
December for informational purposes and
initial discussion; it returns to the faculty
for further airing, possible modification,
and a vote in the spring term. ～j.s.r.

Doctoring the Medical School

IN HIS 2017–2018 REPORT, Harvard Medi-
cal Dean George Q. Daley noted a $44-mil-
lion operating deficit for the fiscal year end-
ed last June 30, and promised that in the
current year, “several major initiatives will
help improve our long-term financial
performance. These involve cultivating
philanthropy and further evaluating
the school’s real estate portfolio.” On
the latter point, it is selling a 99-year
lease interest in the Harvard Institutes of
Medicine laboratory building at 4 Black-
fan Circle, which the school acquired and
renovated in 1994 and where it is now a
tenant, along with two Harvard-affiliated
hospitals. Although the school’s analysis
obviously projects a value for the transac-
tion, details are being kept private until
a transaction closes, perhaps late this
spring. Harvard will remain a tenant
in about 20 percent of the space, and
sublease other parts of the building to
other users. The proceeds may be ap-
plied to reduce the school’s debt, for-
tify its endowment (strained by the
operating losses), or fund research.

The adjacent New Research Build-
ing, where the medical school uses
more than half the space, was con-
sidered a strategic asset and was
therefore not put on the market.

To effect other economies and ac-
commodate growing demand for
research space, several projects
under way on the core Long-
wood campus aim to reconfig-
ure corridors and underutilized
areas and “densify” labs. For any
announcements about philan-
thropy of school-wide signifi-
cance, stay tuned. ～j.s.r.

Yesterday’s News

From the pages of the Harvard Alumni Bulletin and Harvard Magazine

1913 In response to a petition from the
Woodrow Wilson Club of Harvard, a jus-
tice of the Supreme Judicial Court rules
that college students may vote in Cam-
bridge if they make the city their domicile,
even though the parents who support
them live elsewhere.

1928 The Harvard Club of Boston has
introduced “the most novel of winter
resorts”—a tanning salon. At 50 cents a
sun bath, “over 300 men visit the beach
regularly” to take their ease, clad only in
goggles. Beginners are allowed two or
three minutes a side; the “hardened” have
10 each way, and not a minute more.

1933 Lampoon editors sneak into the
Crimson building and publish a spoof “ex-
tra” announcing the selection of “Henry
E. Clarke ’04… a [nonexistent] business
Messiah” as Harvard’s new president.

1958 For the first time in its history, the
Harvard Fund Campaign has garnered
more than a million dollars in a single year.

1963 On the Peace Corps’ second an-
niversary, the 43 College alumni serving
abroad place Harvard second only to
Berkeley as a source of A.B.s in the Corps.

1978 At its March and April meetings,
the Faculty of Arts and Sciences discuss-
es the proposed “Core Program,” de-
scribed by its chief proponent, Dean
Henry Rosovsky, as not going “back to
basics—I detest that phrase—but for-
ward to modern liberal education.”

1993 About 50 students from the
newly formed Minority Coalition for Di-
versity make an unscheduled appearance
during the College’s Junior Parents Week-
end to denounce “Harvard’s failure to
realize institutional diversity.”

STEPHANIE MITCHELL/HPAC

George Q. Daley

Illustration by Mark Steele

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