

# Colby



Colby Magazine

---

Volume 103  
Issue 3 *Spring 2015*

Article 13

---

April 2015

## Ebullience on Exhibit

Lisa Rowan

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/colbymagazine>



Part of the [Art and Design Commons](#)

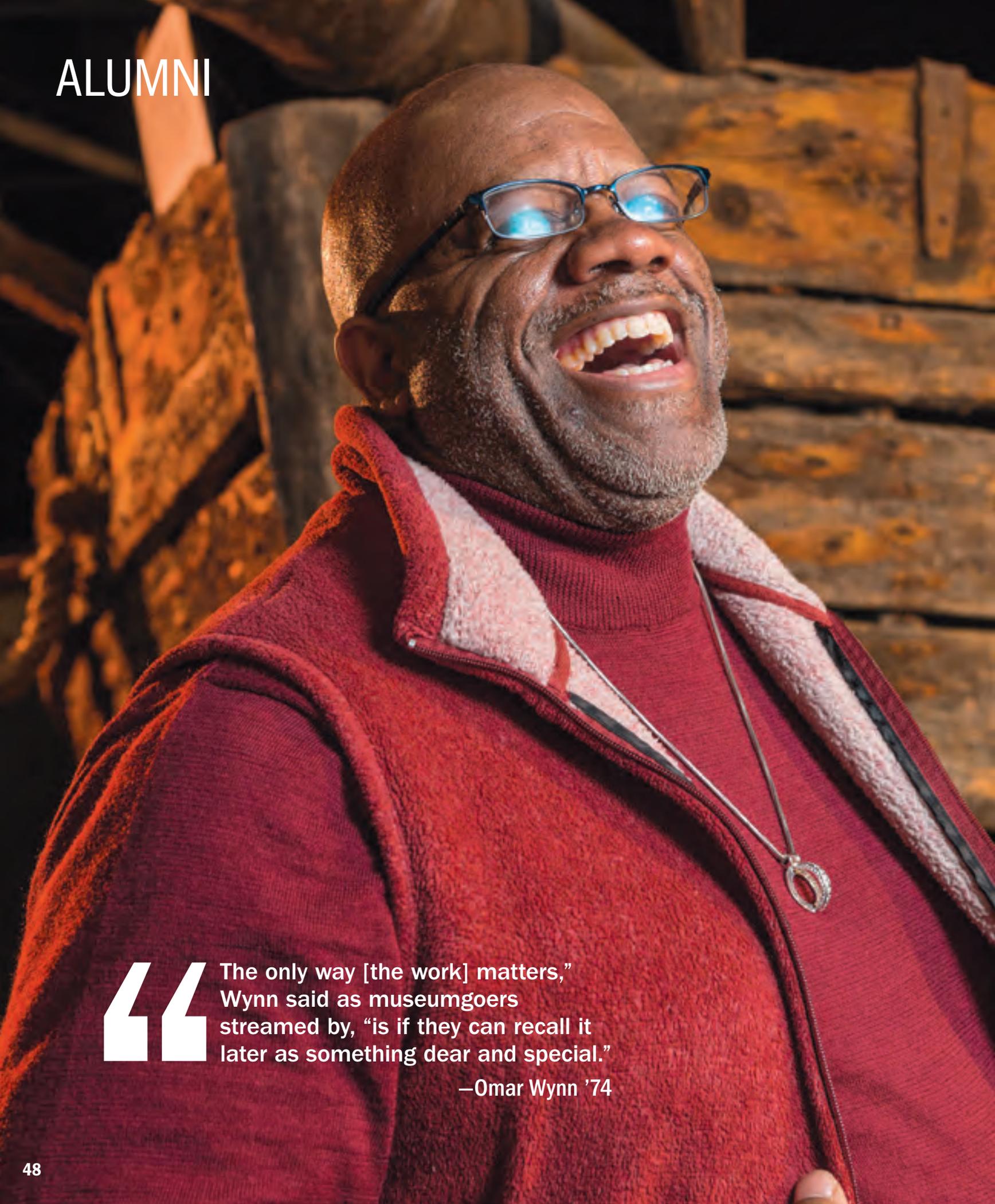
---

### Recommended Citation

Rowan, Lisa (2015) "Ebullience on Exhibit," *Colby Magazine*: Vol. 103 : Iss. 3 , Article 13.  
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/colbymagazine/vol103/iss3/13>

This Features is brought to you for free and open access by the Colby College Archives at Digital Commons @ Colby. It has been accepted for inclusion in Colby Magazine by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Colby.

# ALUMNI



“ The only way [the work] matters,”  
Wynn said as museumgoers  
streamed by, “is if they can recall it  
later as something dear and special.”

—Omar Wynn '74

## Ebullience on Exhibit

The Smithsonian was preparing for the 50th anniversary of the National Museum of American History—a story to be told through photographs, a model of the 1964 New York World’s Fair, and a sparkling ’64 Ford Mustang. In the lobby Omar Wynn ’74 moved away from a group of colleagues and carefully ran his fingers over a plate of Plexiglas hung by metal cables.

His fingers detected an imperfection, and the plate—which could have marred visitors’ experiences in the smallest of ways—was removed.

Wynn is director of the museum’s Office of Exhibition Services, responsible for translating the vision for an exhibit into a three-dimensional experience for visitors. Only when Wynn’s team has finished does the collections staff move artifacts into place.

“It’s an emotional experience,” he said, explaining that he can actually see his work reflected in the eyes of visitors viewing his installations for the first time. “The only way [the work] matters is if they can recall it later as something dear and special.”

He recalls an exhibit so special that it set the direction for his career: *Treasures of Tutankhamun*, which was presented by New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art in the late 1970s. He tells people about that exhibit even today, remembering details about the presentation and even the lighting. A poster he bought at the exhibit is now mounted in his office.

The poster is displayed along with plaster figures of a family from another special exhibit, *Field to Factory*, which depicted the Great Migration

of African Americans in the first half of the 20th century. When an exhibit is uninstalled, the artifacts are stored, but the other elements—signs, models, etc.—may be destroyed. The figures created for *Field to Factory*, which was on view from 1987 until 2006, were based on actual individuals from the Great Migration. “I couldn’t let them go,” Wynn said.

Wynn is known for his eagerness to share his experience and his willingness to mentor interns, both students and adult participants in the Smithsonian’s Behind-the-Scenes Volunteer Program.

His own path to the museum world began after he studied art history at Colby but realized that curation—with countless hours of solitary research—wouldn’t provide an outlet for his ebullience. He rotated through five departments at the National Collection of Fine Arts (now the Smithsonian American Art Museum) and discovered exhibit production.

Now his job involves matching increasingly complex machinery with staff skills, making sure that his team can continue to learn and grow with technology. Wynn recognizes that, though the tools have changed, the audience enjoyment of an effective exhibit remains the same—as does his enthusiasm.

Though he works behind the scenes, even after 30 years Wynn won’t miss an exhibit opening. “I go to openings because I want to see the response, the way people react,” Wynn said. “It’s been a most satisfying adventure.”

—Lisa Rowan