JOAN MITCHELL
FOUNDATION

CREATING FUTURE MEMORY

BUILDING THE FIELD OF ARTIST LEGACY STEWARDSHIP

IN MEMORY OF

TED BERGER

1940–2026

Arts Leader, Emeritus Joan Mitchell Foundation Board Member

ALEXANDRA KEISER, PHD

1970–2026

Art Historian, Curator, Project Director of Joan Mitchell Catalogue Raisonné

Creating Future Memory: Building the Field of Artist Legacy Stewardship
© 2026, Joan Mitchell Foundation, New York, NY

ISBN: 979-8-9861173-5-5

The Joan Mitchell Foundation cultivates the study and appreciation of artist Joan Mitchell's life and work, while fulfilling her wish to provide resources and opportunities for visual artists. Through its work, the Foundation affirms and amplifies artists' essential contributions to society.

The *Creating Future Memory* invitational convening was held May 14–16, 2025, at BRIC in Brooklyn, hosted by the Joan Mitchell Foundation, planned collaboratively with a national advisory council, and supported in part by the Mellon Foundation. This publication draws on the key learnings from that convening, along with broader research by the Joan Mitchell Foundation.

Authors: Solana Chehtman, Sharon Mizota
Editors: Christa Blatchford, Jenny Gill
Consulting Editor: Jessica Lott
Designer: Melissa Dean
Convening Notetakers: Sharon Mizota, Reina Gattuso
Fact Checker: Sarah Dhobhany

This publication is shared with a Creative Commons License, NonCommercial 4.0 International; see https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/. This allows third parties to share, distribute, adapt, transform and build upon the Publication solely for non-commercial purposes, so long as any such use (i) includes appropriate credit to the Foundation; (ii) provides a link back to the Foundation as the source of the Publication and a link to the Creative Commons License; and (iii) indicates if changes were made to the Publication.

CREATING FUTURE >>> <<< MEMORY

Building the Field of
Artist Legacy Stewardship

CONTENTS

Foreword **2**

Executive Summary **5**

PART 1

Understanding Artist Legacy Stewardship **11**

Why This Work Matters: Cultural Continuity 11

Who Is Involved: A Broad Ecosystem 16

What This Work Looks Like: One Size Does Not Fit All 21

PART 2

Building the Field of Legacy Stewardship **31**

Centering Equity and Under-recognized Artists 31

1. Access to Knowledge 34
2. Funding and Resources 40
3. Coordination and Collaboration 55

Conclusion **66**

About the *Creating Future Memory* Convening 68

About This Publication 72

Glossary of Referenced Organizations & Initiatives 75

Legacy Planning Resources 78

Foreword

What happens to an artist's work, archives, and ideas when they are gone? What resources and knowledge are required to steward them—and who carries that work forward? How can the arts community take greater responsibility for this work while ensuring that the stories we tell reflect the full breadth of creative production? And how can artists retain agency over how their practices are understood and remembered? These questions have guided the Joan Mitchell Foundation's research and programming for many years, and what we have learned is reflected in the pages that follow.

This publication is both a call to action and an invitation: We aim to share the current state of artist legacy work in the United States today—its commitments, its gaps, and its possibilities—while making the case for deeper, more equitable investment across sectors and communities, within the arts and beyond. Our goal is to galvanize a broader ecosystem: to advance the field-building and culture change needed to recognize how central legacy stewardship is to artists, communities, institutions, and our shared cultural memory.

The Foundation's commitment to artist legacy work is rooted in our experience as stewards of Joan Mitchell's own legacy, and builds on more than 15 years of learning through the Foundation's Creating a Living Legacy (CALL) program. CALL began in 2007 by providing late-career artists with funding and assistance for documentation and preservation of their life's work. After many years of this direct support model, the Foundation expanded the CALL initiative's reach, making its resources widely available through free workbooks, guides, online tutorials, oral histories, and case studies.

In 2024, we began a new phase of inquiry to shape the future of the CALL program, identifying and entering into dialogue with dozens of cultural leaders engaged in legacy stewardship to better understand the challenges, needs, and approaches shaping the field. A key milestone in this process was the *Creating Future Memory* invitational convening, held May 14–16, 2025, at BRIC in Brooklyn, supported in part by the Mellon Foundation and planned collaboratively with a national advisory council. The event brought together 145 individuals: artists, family members working on their loved ones' legacies, legacy and arts workers, representatives from artist-endowed foundations, archivists, conservators, curators, grantmakers, and representatives of the market and from governmental agencies. Sixty percent of participants came from outside of New York City, including half a dozen international participants from Europe, Africa, and South and North America.

Creating Future Memory Convening, May 14–16, 2025

This convening took place at a moment of heightened concern about the political situation in the United States and abroad, and the intensifying erosion of cultural infrastructure globally. To ensure it could serve as a genuinely safe space for candid exchange, sessions and conversations were not recorded. Instead, two notetakers captured salient contributions and observations.

What emerged was both inspiring and sobering. Across the country, individuals, collectives, and organizations are doing extraordinary work to preserve artistic legacies—yet these efforts remain largely disconnected from one another and chronically under-resourced. Alongside this dedication, we continue to hear urgent accounts of loss: archives discarded or damaged, artworks destroyed, artists forgotten. And perhaps most persistently, we hear accounts of isolation, loneliness, and overwhelm from those facing the enormity of this work. In the current political climate, as cultural erasure accelerates, the need for collective action has never been more pressing.

Drawing on voices from the Convening and our broader research, this publication offers some grounding on what legacy work can encompass. It maps key challenges alongside emerging ideas, innovative approaches, and opportunities. The knowledge we've acquired has directly informed the Foundation's vision for the future of our programming, including a new direct support program for artists undertaking legacy work, currently in development, with a planned pilot in 2029.

As we release this report, we invite artists, curators, museum directors, funders, scholars, collectors, and others across the cultural sector to be in conversation—and, above all, to join us in building a more connected, sustainable community of practice to support artists and their legacies. Through that shared effort, we can ensure a broad and equitable historical record.

We are grateful to the Mellon Foundation for its contribution to *Creating Future Memory*; to our advisory committee for their guidance and generosity; to Sharon Mizota for her invaluable partnership in putting this report together; and to the Convening participants, interviewees, and many others whose perspectives have shaped this work.

Christa Blatchford, Executive Director
Joan Mitchell Foundation

Solana Chehtman, Director of Artist Programs
Joan Mitchell Foundation

Installation view of *Death Production: The Archive of Janna Flessa* at Los Angeles Contemporary Archive (LACA), 2018

Executive Summary

Artist legacy stewardship is a vital yet underappreciated cornerstone of cultural heritage preservation. By safeguarding and contextualizing creative works and histories, legacy stewardship provides cultural continuity, especially for artists underrepresented in mainstream institutions. Often considered an endeavor undertaken by an individual artist or their estate, legacy stewardship encompasses a wide range of activities and involves people from various areas of expertise. It is an important cultural and economic ecosystem that is largely invisible and chronically under-resourced.

Understanding Artist Legacy Stewardship

Stewardship activities are important acts of care for artists' cultural contributions. At their center is a belief in the social and historical value of artistic expression. Artist legacy work is also a form of place-keeping and is especially urgent as many histories are disappearing, either through neglect or cultural erasure.

Legacy stewardship encompasses the care of artworks, maintenance of analog and digital archives, creation of oral histories, and preservation of creative spaces—along with all the accompanying logistical, organizational, technological, and financial concerns. Artists and estate executors must decide what to keep, what to distribute or seek institutional placement for, and what to discard. What's important to note is that artist legacies for individuals and collectives are as diverse as their practices, and cannot be prescribed a shape or a narrative.

The potential field of support for artists, collectives, estates, and small cultural organizations undertaking legacy work is incredibly broad and growing, and requires more awareness and recognition of the role that many professionals and institutions play—or could play—in this ecosystem. Legacy stewards include family members, executors, administrators, archivists, conservators, appraisers, curators, art historians, lawyers, and other arts workers and professional advisors. That said, artists' agency in guiding wills, directives, and recordkeeping efforts is key. Artists' relationships with their communities are also central and often necessitate a collective approach.

Building the Field of Legacy Stewardship

The artist legacy stewardship ecosystem faces many challenges stemming from systemic inequities in the broader cultural and social landscape. These include underrepresentation in the canon of artists across multiple intersecting points of identity, including gender, race, disability, and other factors. Art historical biases, demographic imbalances in institutional staffing, and art market trends create additional disparity in access, visibility, and financial compensation.

The Foundation has identified three main types of challenges in artist legacy stewardship:

1. ACCESS TO KNOWLEDGE
2. FUNDING AND RESOURCES
3. COORDINATION AND COLLABORATION

1 ACCESS TO KNOWLEDGE

What are the challenges?

Artists and estate managers often do not know where to begin. Artists do not typically learn how to organize and preserve their artwork during their formal education, and professional training can be expensive or difficult to access outside major art centers.

Heirs and estate managers often become "accidental archivists" who come into their roles through relationships with an artist but lack access to specialized knowledge to do this work. Existing legacy training programs are usually geared to professionals in specialized areas, require substantial fees, and are not always offered in the languages, specific cultural approaches, or communities in which stewards operate.

What can be done?

- Legacy stewardship training and practices need to be made available throughout artists' and arts workers' lives, including education; residency and fellowship programs; peer coaching circles; and do-it-yourself (DIY) workbooks, toolkits, and templates.
- Collecting, exhibiting, and educational institutions, such as museums and public and university libraries can also offer assistance: for example by sharing knowledge and services, such as digitization. Publishers of all kinds should ensure targeted distribution of materials among those outlets.
- Arts workers with legacy stewardship responsibilities (curators, gallery staff, art lawyers, and others), as well as collectors, need further education in this work.

2 FUNDING AND RESOURCES

What are the challenges?

Sustaining an artist's legacy is time-consuming and can be costly, but this work is largely underfunded or unpaid. Adequate, secure, and climate-controlled storage space is often beyond the reach of artists, estates, and institutions alike. Tasks like inventorying and digitizing artwork and preserving contextual records may require access to technical knowledge as well as to digital storage. Expensive professional services are often needed to navigate copyright, royalties, and property and estate laws.

Artists often can't manage legacy concerns amid day-to-day work, while stewards may juggle multiple jobs to keep an estate afloat. Organizations also struggle to meet these significant expenses. In the philanthropic and government sectors, grants for legacy work are extremely limited, as well as hard to access.

What can artists and estates do?

- While dependent on structural privilege and art market participation, certain income generation and personal financial-planning strategies, such as buying real estate, purchasing life insurance, saving, and investing over time, can provide funds for legacy work.
- In-kind resource-sharing, cost-sharing, and collaborative fundraising can ease the burden.
- Artists and estates can also look for funding outside the art world, from community organizations or private companies and individuals.

What can institutions, funders, and the art market do?

- The field would benefit from grantmakers offering more funding opportunities adaptable to legacy work—multiyear, unrestricted funding or micro-grants for time-sensitive, short-term expenses—as well as loosening application and reporting requirements.
- In addition to larger institutions supporting artists, estates, and smaller organizations by sharing resources, museums and other institutions should also compensate artists and estates for their work on exhibitions and acquisitions. They could also pursue structural changes that diversify acquisitions and create specific teams dedicated to legacy work.
- Galleries could contribute labor or services to advance legacy efforts in anticipation of sales and be more transparent about their operations. Collectors could also contribute by acquiring complementary art historical documentation and making it accessible.

What can government do?

- Elected officials could reform copyright laws to institute resale royalties, in which artists or estates receive a percentage of all second-market sales.
- Lawmakers could change the federal tax code to provide tax breaks for artists and artist estates.
- Policymakers could also institute new state and local funding models.

3 COORDINATION AND COLLABORATION

What are the challenges?

People engaged in artist legacy stewardship don't think of themselves as a "field" and often feel overwhelmed and isolated. Moreover, systemic inequities in society and the art world have led to tensions in the field: between a desire to centralize resources and repositories and the benefits of decentralization to keep materials in artists' communities. Similar frictions may appear between institutions and legacy stewards, who sometimes feel organizations fail to grasp the community roots or cultural specificity of the artist's practice.

What can be done?

- Continue learning from artists and communities who are experimenting with alternative structures of peer exchange and collective care.
- Develop more formal networking channels for consistent connection and knowledge sharing, so that estates and legacy workers can draw on one another's expertise.
- Increase visibility for organizations working in this field. To address this, the Joan Mitchell Foundation is launching an online Legacy Field Map, highlighting nonprofit organizations engaged in legacy stewardship.
- Create more interconnected, visible, and accessible digital platforms or repositories for hosting multiple artists' work and archives.
- Dedicate time and resources to data collection and metrics to highlight the field's needs, reach, and importance.
- Support convenings—in person and digital; national, regional, or local—to build connections and trust for future exchange and collaboration.
- Foster and support new models of collaboration and cooperation, such as equitable resource-sharing between larger and smaller organizations; integrating legacy training into artist education and residencies; public–private funding partnerships; shared stewardship agreements; and shared service providers, such as lawyers and conservators who are available through low-cost or subscription-based programs.

◆ ◆ ◆

In conclusion, the future of the artist legacy field requires capacity building on all fronts to make it more sustainable—for artists, legacy workers, and organizations. The Joan Mitchell Foundation invites other funders, institutions, and individuals to join us in collectively building a more representative cultural record, with artists at the center.

> “They’re running with a big eraser right behind us.
>
> Remembering is a defiant act.”
>
> —AMALIA MESA-BAINS

“How to Become an Ancestor,” a conversation between artist Amalia Mesa-Bains and Josh T Franco at the *Creating Future Memory* Convening

PART 1

Understanding Artist Legacy Stewardship

Artist legacy stewardship encompasses a **range of activities** that preserve, organize, and manage the tangible and intangible traces of an artist or collective's work, lives, and ideas. It also involves distributing, activating, and interpreting these materials to ensure their lasting impact on society. At its core, this work is about cultural continuity—for artists and collectives, as well as for their communities, for the present, and for the future. It is often emotionally and intellectually demanding work, unfolding over many years and across multiple generations; and it can present significant financial, logistical, and labor challenges.

Too often, these efforts are approached as a series of isolated tasks, rather than as part of a **coordinated, sustained process**. In reality, legacy stewardship operates as a complex web of mostly invisible and often under-resourced tasks, in which each actor—artists, estate leaders, archivists, conservators, lawyers, and other supporters and arts workers—contributes complementary labor and knowledge. Recognizing this ecosystem as an interconnected whole is essential to understanding how seemingly small individual acts contribute to a larger, enduring network of care and preservation.

The first section of this publication is designed to map the varied forms this process can take, as well as the diverse ecosystem that sustains it.

Why This Work Matters: Cultural Continuity

Artist legacy stewardship is on the front line of **safeguarding our cultural heritage in all its richness and diversity**, confronting the social, economic, and political forces that have long determined whose stories are preserved and whose are forgotten. Art tells us who we are, where we have been, and where we might go. It shapes how collective identity forms. It offers ways to commune with the experiences and visions of others. It is an indispensable part of our cultural and societal fabric. When art and archives are lost—through generational change, neglect, displacement, war, censorship, institutional failure, or lack of resources—our society is deprived of lineages and possibilities.

Solana Chehtman at *Creating Future Memory*

> "Artist legacy work should not be an afterthought. It is a foundational part of our cultural health now and over time."
>
> —SOLANA CHEHTMAN

In her introduction to the *Creating Future Memory* Convening in May 2025, Solana Chehtman, Director of Artist Programs, Joan Mitchell Foundation, stressed, "Artist legacy work should not be an afterthought. It is a foundational part of our cultural health now and over time." "If we don't do something now, we will lose a generation of work, stories, and struggles about the United States' history," a Convening participant shared. Another added, "I persist [in legacy work] in honor of my community—to recognize our struggle, celebrate our resilience, and inspire the next generation."

For heirs, legacy work may begin in grief but grow into **purpose**. Mikiko Ino, President, Director, and Chairperson of KINOSAITO, described preserving her late husband Kikuo Saito's legacy: "Kikuo always said there are two deaths: the first is physical, and the second is when nobody talks about you. I decided to never give him the second death." Cat Gardère, Director and Executor of the Paul Gardère estate, shared, "It was a labor of love. There was a lot of self-discovery, learning my own father as a man, and learning him as an artist. It was a real journey, and I didn't really want to stop, but it was also tiresome, and there was a lot of grief to confront." For both, stewardship became an ongoing pursuit.

Artist legacy work is also a form of **place-keeping**, a practice in which communities retain the ability to see, access, and carry forward their own histories as grounded in their particular setting. At the local level, artists' legacies can become a stabilizing force for communities, helping to ensure that ideas, networks, and cultural infrastructure remain rooted in place rather than extracted. In Minneapolis, MN, artist Seitu Ken Jones founded The Black Gate to safeguard his own archive, and eventually those of other local African American artists. The Black Gate is a living foundation that maintains Jones's studio and library, and is developing an artist residency program within his community. Similarly, London-based artist Yinka Shonibare's eponymous foundation extends his social practice by providing space and funding for collaborative projects, fostering connections between artists, communities, and cultural infrastructure in the UK and West Africa, his two places of belonging.

In that sense, a Convening participant questioned, "How do we record the stories that we need to capture immediately, not only of individuals, but the support system these individuals have had?" Artist and curator Amalia Mesa-Bains affirmed during the keynote conversation at the Convening, "Protecting community organizations is as important as protecting artists; all those places where the stories were told. We checked in at the 30-year mark of the organizations we started in the '70s, and the stories were painful and tragic—organizations were ending, either

because charismatic leaders had died or they had no money because they were depending on federal grants for so many years."

Cultural preservation is especially critical for **communities underrepresented in dominant art historical narratives**. Many—particularly communities of color—have long recognized the importance of this work. "For thousands of years, Indigenous communities have carried our own knowledge," said Rachel Martin, Creative Director and Curator, Gochman Family Collection. "For 500 years, outsiders have studied and misrepresented us. Archiving our voices, specifically as Native people, is how we reclaim the right to define who we are." Artist Neal Ambrose-Smith, son of artist Jaune Quick-to-See Smith and manager of her estate, added, "Our voice [that of Indigenous artists and communities] is the most important thing, and I know that each of our communities would say the same thing in terms of tracking and archiving artists' work. If you don't write your history, someone else will. We're in the middle of helping rewrite our history; we need to create an archive or a place for our community."

Reflecting on the importance of institution-building, the Studio Museum in Harlem Ford Foundation Director and Chief Curator Thelma Golden said, "I have inherited—proudly—an institution created in a moment like we're in now. Our founders understood the swings and we were aware that institution-making, institution-building is significantly important."

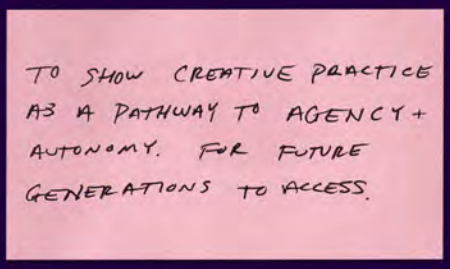
Many artists and cultural workers acknowledge **a particular sense of urgency** around legacy preservation in the current moment. Amalia Mesa-Bains best expressed this feeling by sharing, "They're running with a big eraser right behind us. Remembering is a defiant act." Paul Ramírez Jonas, artist and Joan Mitchell Foundation Board Co-President, referring to the removal of the stories of marginalized peoples from government websites and historic sites, added, "At all times, the issue of legacy is of extreme importance, but these days it is vibrantly relevant. It feels like survival." In his presentation at the Convening, Kwame Brathwaite Junior, Director of the Kwame Brathwaite Archive, reflected on managing his photographer father's estate, stating, "This archival work is resistance. It's important that we protect [artists' estates] and ensure that we are prepared for the next iteration."

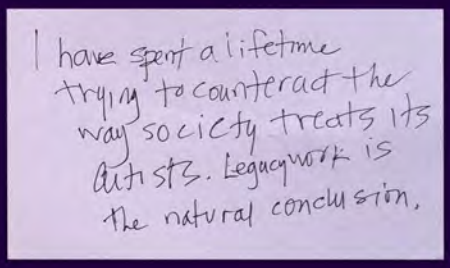
> "For thousands of years, Indigenous communities have carried our own knowledge. Archiving our voices, specifically as Native people, is how we reclaim the right to define who we are."
>
> —RACHEL MARTIN

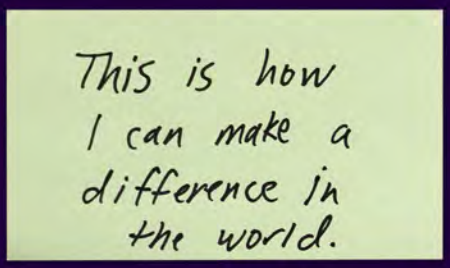
Rachel Martin at *Creating Future Memory*

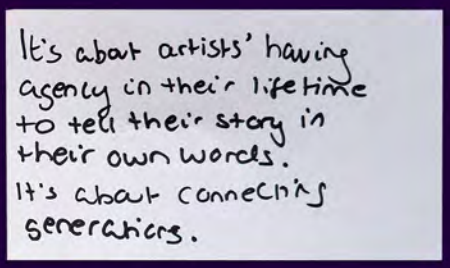
During the *Creating Future Memory* Convening, participants were invited at various moments to contribute their reflections on note cards, which were collected and posted throughout the event in three displays: the Wall of Whys ("Why do you do this work?"), the Wall of Questions, and the Wall of Ideas.

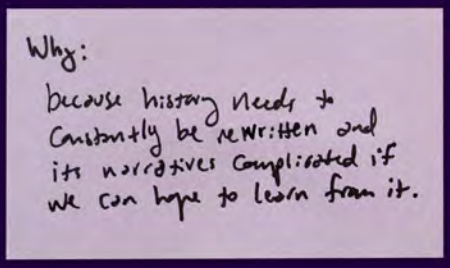
The following cards from the **Wall of Whys** offer a window into the intentions that guide this work across different disciplines and perspectives.

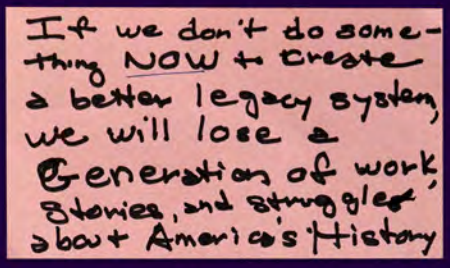


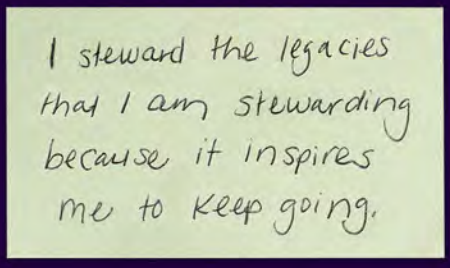


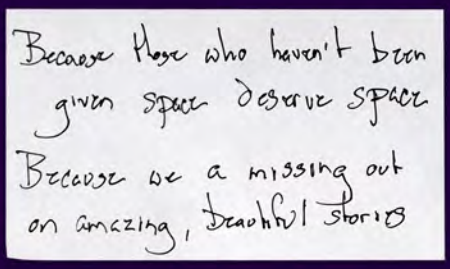


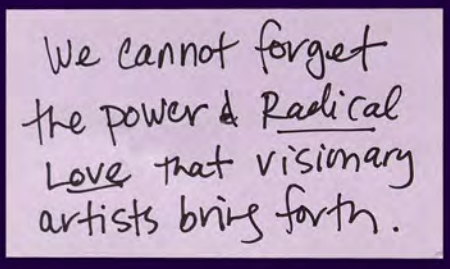


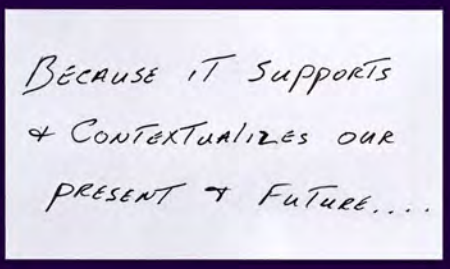


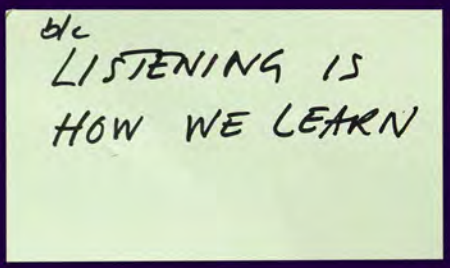


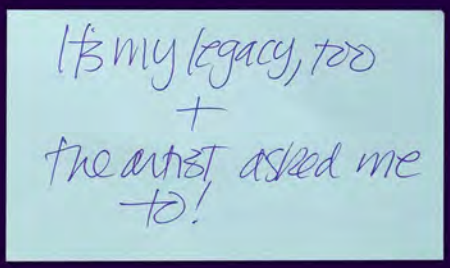


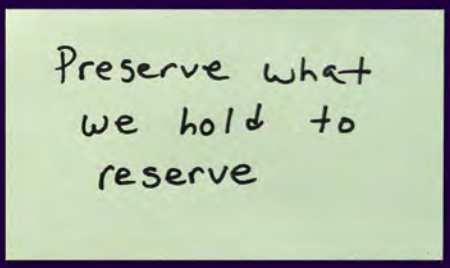


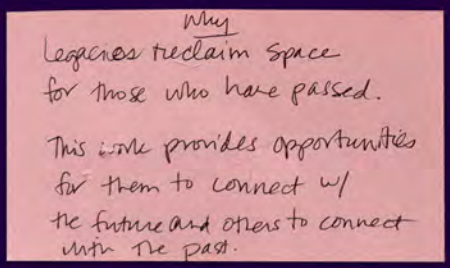


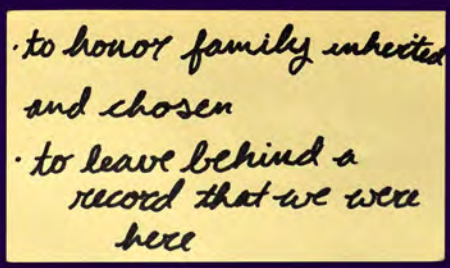


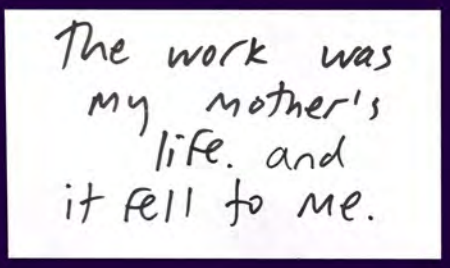












We should know what came before us, both to acknowledge and honor them, and also to inform / inspire present and future generations of dreamers + makers.

This work matters:
> Who gets to be remembered and seen
> we will never grow if we have no past to learn from
> we already lost so much because of colonization

Respect, Admiration, Voice, Love, Connection, Collaboration

WHY?
Accidental Archivist
--- make the story whole and true ---

To compensate for the ones that are always visible.
To make their voices relevant

Because historical memory is critical to our present and future societies.

Why -
* because it's my legacy too
* actively engaged in building the legacy as it happens.
* it is part of the history of the place
* storytelling at its finest

the show must go on and the Story must be shared today and tomorrow

THE WORK WAS INVISIBLE & UNKNOWN. THE IMAGES ARE POWERFUL & TELL A STORY THAT NEEDS TO BE SHARED BECAUSE IT'S FORMALLY GORGEOUS & CONTINUES TO BE RELEVANT.

So that we can struggle together

Because the art is really good + important.

LOVE & DEVOTION
CHOSEN FAMILY
QUEER ARCHIVES
LESBIAN HERSTORY
ARCHIVE FEVER

I want it to be easier for young people to know their/our history

I steward this artist's legacy because the conversations his works speak to are CRITICAL and need to be had.
And because if I didn't do it, it would be lost.

FOR MY ELDERS, MY COMMUNITIES, MY STUDENTS + NEXT GENERATION WHO Deserve to know these stories that are being overlooked, forgotten + erased.

- Avoiding erasure of a person's artists work
- celebrating and affirming the legacy
- Holding the stories and lives of artists against the larger cultural and social context - Analysis
- story telling

The stories will not be remembered without this effort - and they are worth remembering.

THERE IS NO ONE ELSE

to support the life's work of people who may have no one else to champion their legacy

because the art + work moved me to

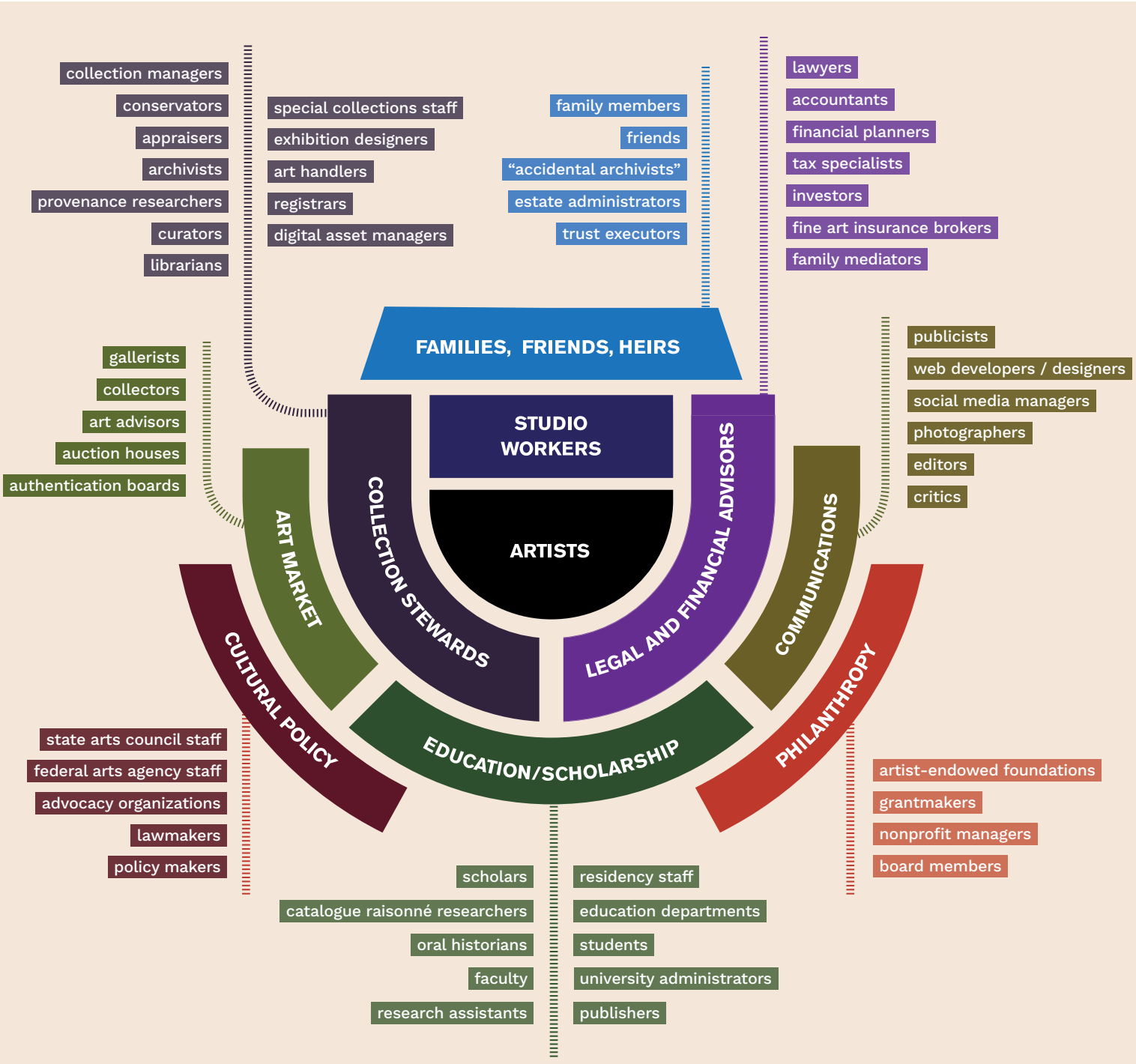
- Because if I don't NO ONE will
- The preservation of my work is the preservation of my parents.
- It says we EXIST

I was taught the value of elder artists
I've learned so much from them!

Who Is Involved: A Broad Ecosystem

Artist legacy stewardship is a broad, interconnected ecosystem that brings together **complementary forms of knowledge and proficiency**—from established legal, archival, and institutional frameworks to the deeply nuanced familial, artistic, and art historical understandings that surround a practice. These perspectives must be woven together and balanced to support thoughtful and comprehensive stewardship towards aligned goals.

Below is our attempt to **visualize this ecosystem** in terms of stakeholders and vantage points. It is important to note that each stewardship approach is unique. Not all of these roles are required, practical, or desirable for every project, and not every artist, estate, or institution has access or can afford the depth and breadth of specialized expertise available in the field.



> “Artists, your children do not know what to do. Make a will. There’s nothing more nightmarish than dealing with an estate when there’s no will.”
>
> —GLENN PHILLIPS

CENTERING ARTIST AGENCY

By actively engaging in the stewardship of their own legacies during their lifetimes, artists can provide a more authentic and accurate picture of their practice for future generations. As one artist who participated in the *Creating Future Memory* Convening noted, “This is about being seen, but also about deciding how we want to be remembered.”

Many artists describe organizing their archives or documenting their work as simultaneously challenging, affirming, and generative—a creative act that gives new meaning to the trajectory of their practice while easing the burden for others later on. As Mimi Smith, one of the artists who participated in the Joan Mitchell Foundation’s Creating a Living Legacy (CALL) program, said, “Coming to terms with the idea of stewarding my own legacy has completely shifted how I understand what I’ve created.” In many cases, this engagement becomes an ongoing iterative process, where acts of creation and preservation influence each other. In fact, more and more artists find value in creating and keeping their own archives to ensure the intentions for their work are recorded and that they maintain the **authority** to define the meaning of their work.

Legacy work can feel overwhelming, especially for artists who haven’t started documenting their work or planning for the future yet. But it’s important to know that artists do not need to start from the beginning. Even small steps—documenting current projects, organizing recent work, or simply sharing intentions with collaborators or heirs—can create momentum. Making legal and financial decisions, and formalizing them, can be expensive and emotionally taxing; however, “information transmitted [by the artists themselves] clearly and intentionally is essential because when someone dies, what’s left [archival papers, recordings, legal documents, etc.] is the material of their legacy,” reflected David Walker, Archivist at The Easton Foundation. Artists who aren’t involved in such groundwork may put their cultural contributions in jeopardy, or leave them vulnerable to misinterpretation or mismanagement by future scholars or heirs.

At the Convening, Seitu Ken Jones recounted what happened to the estate of an artist friend: “Our friend passed before she could sign her will. Her work is sitting in places I don’t know about right now. We have lost a great American treasure, and that really hit us hard.” Getty Research Institute Chief Curator Glenn Phillips echoed this urgency: “Artists, your children do not know what to do. Make a will. There’s nothing more nightmarish than dealing with an estate when there’s no will.” Without **clear directives**, the fate of a lifetime of work and archives can be left to guesswork, risking both loss and misrepresentation.

Legacy work often involves deeply personal, trust-based, sensitive conversations. Thelma Golden emphasized the importance of creating "a wide ring" around artists to foster openness before any formal agreements are made: "I try to enter conversations not as a voice of legality but as one of care." Similarly, artist and legacy worker Drew Kahu'āina Broderick stressed the importance of **respecting artists' wishes**, even when doing so may compromise the completeness of the historical record: "Some elder artists request not to be recorded… Although we may be inadvertently erasing our history in the making by honoring such a request, ultimately it is more important that their knowledge is transmitted than recorded. Sometimes it's simply about being present face to face. Whatever helps folks feel most comfortable with sharing their stories."

> "I think we need to reframe the idea of who archives are for, and perhaps invert this idea that artists need help to preserve their legacies. Instead, we should highlight that archives are for everybody. Because they shape future ideas of history."
>
> —TERESITA FERNÁNDEZ

Teresita Fernández, *Fata Morgana*, at Madison Square Park, New York, 2015

FROM INDIVIDUAL BURDEN TO SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Convening participants emphasized that the **benefits of legacy stewardship impact the entire art field**—institutions, funders, researchers, the market, community organizations—as well as future generations. "I think we need to reframe the idea of who archives are for," stated artist Teresita Fernández, continuing, "and perhaps invert this idea that artists need help to preserve their legacies. Instead, we should highlight that archives are for everybody. Because they shape future ideas of history. Every single person in this room has a job that stems from the work of artists, so we are also talking about a larger ecosystem of documentation and public archiving that goes far beyond any one individual."

With this in mind, an important consensus emerged from the *Creating Future Memory* Convening: the burden of legacy stewardship cannot continue to fall solely on artists, their heirs, and close support circles, who have the least capacity to shoulder it. This is particularly true for artists from underrepresented communities, whose needs are often the greatest, yet the support available to them remains the most limited. Instead, to build a broad, equitable

foundation for this work, artist legacy stewardship must be embraced by the field as a **shared responsibility**. "It's less on the artists, and more on the community to ensure these stories survive," one Convening participant said. Ultimately, every legacy needs **champions**—people committed to the long-term work of fostering understanding and helping to construct meaning. Diedra Harris-Kelley, Co-Director of the Romare Bearden Foundation, agreed, "The people who really need the help are the people who are left behind, charged with continuing these legacies."

At the Convening, numerous archivists, curators, conservators, and estate stewards described working together with artists and communities to ensure documentation reflects artists' intentions and accurately represents their work. Ego Ahaiwe Sowinski, artist and archivist, characterized such collaborations as a "technology in and of themselves," rooted in the recording and preservation of artists' stories. Artist, curator, and editor Julie Ault detailed her relational research process: "I engage in artists' self-narrations and regard their creative methods as models to build on, and I try to attune to the spirit of the work," she said. "I think of these projects as collaborations—ongoing dialogues—whether with a living person or with memory. Memory, after all, is a form of reproduction."

These relationships are ultimately part of a long, **intergenerational continuum**. In a recent article, Hannah Ledyard, Archives Manager at the Harry Bertoia Foundation, noted how cataloguing Bertoia's collection involved "collaborating" with his wife, who kept detailed records of her artist husband's work: "Working with Brigitta's binders made me realize how description can carry both intimacy and authority. Her choices—what to photograph, what to name, what to leave blank—reveal her relationship to the work. She wasn't following a standard, but she was describing in her own way: through care, attention, and proximity. When I catalogued the binders, I found myself describing her description—layering my voice on top of hers. It was a humbling reminder that archival description is rarely neutral. It's built from human interpretation, often generations deep."[1]

Practical Guides for Artists

Artists can begin to shape their own legacies simply by communicating their intentions to an heir or estate manager. For more concrete recommendations and workplans, see the Foundation's Creating a Living Legacy (CALL) resource guides, which are available as free PDF downloads or by print on demand.

joanmitchellfoundation.org/guides

1 Hannah Ledyard, "Describing Form and Feeling: Visual Description in the Bertoia Archives," *Descriptive Notes*, Description Section of the Society of American Archivists, November 17, 2025, https://saadescription.wordpress.com/2025/11/17/describing-form-and-feeling-visual-description-in-the-bertoia-archives.

> “I’ve spent the past 20 years accumulating. Can I spend the next 20 letting go?”
>
> —THEASTER GATES

Theaster Gates at Yoshihiro Koide’s studio in Tokoname, Japan, 2023

What This Work Looks Like: One Size Does Not Fit All

The approaches to artist legacy stewardship are **as varied as artists' practices**: what counts as a meaningful legacy—and how it is sustained—differs from artist to artist, from steward to steward, and from organization to organization. Each legacy stewardship process requires a specific combination or overlap of strategies, depending on the nature of the artist's practice, the intentions, and the resources available.

PRESERVING THE CULTURAL RECORD: ARTWORK, ARCHIVES, AND SPACES

Artists' artworks, archives and oral histories, and the physical spaces in which they created—studios, homes, and other significant sites—form the tangible foundation for understanding artists' practices, cultural contributions, and community engagement.

Artwork collections are often among the most precious components of an artist's legacy. As Lisa Le Feuvre, Executive Director of the Holt/Smithson Foundation, explained, "When an artwork leaves the inhibition of the studio to be exhibited, it enters the world. It's no longer umbilically connected to the artist, it has its own life. It's that life that legacy is concerned with. It's about ensuring that the artwork can have multiple identities that resonate with different versions of the present." Caring for **artworks** over time can be complex and costly, requiring both active and preventive conservation, including attention to storage conditions, handling, and long-term material stability. These challenges are often magnified when not addressed holistically and over time.

In practice, we hear from many artists grappling with the burden of accumulation. "The older I get, the less important it is to have a footprint," reflected artist, professor, and Convening presenter Theaster Gates. "I've spent the past 20 years accumulating. Can I spend the next 20 letting go?" Recognizing that long-term stewardship does not require the physical preservation of every object, artists and estate workers may edit down a body of work to focus on its most essential elements, pursuing donation, sale, or distribution of artworks. In some cases, artists prioritize the creation of robust documentation—through registration, photography, written records, or other forms of capture—as a way to ensure that works remain legible, researchable, and, in certain instances, publicly accessible even if the material object is no longer retained.

Archives gather the information that surrounds and helps contextualize the artworks and the artists' lives: preparatory drafts, writings, interviews, scholarship, books and other reference materials, even instructions related to performance or conservation of the artwork itself. Other records, such as diaries, journals, photographs, or studio materials, can also serve as archival material.

Archiving often includes collecting **oral histories**, which are an effective method to preserve artists' lived experiences in their own voices, as well as the voices of key members of their peer groups, families, or communities. Curators or art historians may initiate this type of recorded interview to document life stories, artistic intent, and the relationships between an artist's life, practice, and broader networks—ideally capturing subjective and complementary perspectives. Conservators tend to conduct oral histories to better understand the materiality, process, and preservation needs of an artist's work. A key reference on this methodology is provided by

Aminah Robinson Residency, Columbus, OH

Alex Rojas's residency studio at KINOSAITO, Verplanck, NY

Voices in Contemporary Art (VoCA), a nonprofit organization that offers free Artist Interview Workshops geared to art historians, curators, conservators, and other arts professionals.

Physical spaces of creation, such as artists' houses, studios, and even artist-founded and led organizations, can also hold profound significance. However, the preservation of these sites beyond the sustain the intellectual and public life artists' lifetime—whether as historic homes, collection management facilities, artist residencies, community spaces, adaptive reuse projects, or venues for public programming—is often prohibitively expensive to maintain. "So many people feel a connection to the space where the person lived and worked and want to maintain it, and usually can't," noted Lisa Darms, independent archivist and appraiser, and former Executive Director of Hauser & Wirth Institute.

The efforts to preserve Valerie J. Maynard's home in Baltimore, MD, and convert it into a foundation and an artist residency site illustrate how such spaces can remain active long after an artist is gone. A similar model is the Aminah Robinson Residency, located in the artist's former home and studio in Columbus, OH, and managed by the Columbus Museum of Art. The program offers space for African American artists, writers, and scholars to live and work. KINOSAITO—introduced previously through Mikiko Ino's reflections on stewarding her late husband Kikuo Saito's legacy—offers another example: based in a former school building in Verplanck, NY, the public charity honors Saito's vision through exhibitions, residencies, and other community-based public programming.

WEAVING A LEGACY

Artists and estate managers or executors are usually the first to decide **what to keep for posterity and what to discard**, ideally (although that is rarely the case) with the direct support of a conservator, a curator or art historian, and an appraiser. In making these decisions, artists and stewards must consider not only storage capacity, condition concerns, financial means, and available support, but also which materials most meaningfully represent a practice and its

trajectory. Taking into account any privacy considerations, they must try to imagine what could be of interest to future generations, and how to construct a narrative of the artistic practice, ideally following the artist's vision.

Selecting artworks and archival materials is not enough; they must also be **preserved, contextualized, and shared**. As Mel Yimeng Chu, Archives Manager of Cai Guo-Qiang Archives, notes, "The goal is not to accumulate endlessly, but to preserve what sustains relationships—between knowledge, materials, and the people who hold the work—along with the context of its creation."[2]

At the heart of these decisions is a "duty of care"—a responsibility to preserve, document, and make artworks accessible in thoughtful and sustainable ways over time. While museums and nonprofit institutions have formal obligations to uphold this duty, artists and private collectors often embrace it as a guiding principle. Legacy stewards play a critical role in shaping the conditions in which artworks remain visible and legible, and it includes developing and advancing exhibition opportunities, ensuring continued inclusion in group exhibitions that situate the work within relevant cultural and historical frameworks, and prioritizing accompanying publications whenever possible. Such efforts help build critical scholarship, deepen context, and sustain the intellectual and public life of the work.

For many artists and communities, **institutional placement**—the acquisition of artworks or records by museums, libraries, or archives—is a sought after but rare opportunity. Institutional collecting practices are necessarily selective and often dependent on an artist's existing recognition, institutional capacity, and relationships cultivated over time between artists and curators or other representatives. Many artists and estate leaders find even their offers of

> "The goal is not to accumulate endlessly, but to preserve what sustains relationships—between knowledge, materials, and the people who hold the work—along with the context of its creation."
>
> —MEL YIMENG CHU

Cai Guo-Qiang Archive, New York, NY

2 Mel Yimeng Chu, "A Living Archive," Archival Thinking: Artist Archive Symposium, organized by the Asian Cultural Council (ACC) and the Cai Foundation at MoMA PS1 in New York, December 4, 2025, https://cai-foundation.org/programs/2025-archival-thinking.

donation declined when they seek to place bodies of work with established organizations. In this context, it becomes important to broaden the range of potential stewards.

Other potential custodians include local, regional, or university museums or collections with which the artist or collective has existing relationships or ties. Community-based organizations also offer meaningful alternatives—-from art centers to hospitals (for example, using platforms such as RxART), schools, libraries, and other public-serving institutions that can integrate artworks into everyday spaces and audiences. More informal pathways include distributing works among family, friends, and neighbors, as well as engaging with newer platforms and models such as artist-run fairs or initiatives that facilitate direct, often noncommercial circulation of work—for example, Zero Art Fair. These approaches may rely on long-term loans, partial dispersal, or forms of shared custodianship rather than permanent acquisition,

Resources and References

At the end of this publication (page 75) we have compiled links to the organizations and resources mentioned in the text. The Joan Mitchell Foundation also hosts a Legacy Field Map on its website with additional listings.

joanmitchellfoundation.org/legacy-field-map

Similarly, artists and estates may seek out placement of **archival materials** within an institution or community organization. The Archives of American Art and the Getty Research Institute are widely regarded as two of the most significant collectors of artists' archives in the United States. Together, they have come to function not only as repositories, but as key infrastructural anchors shaping archival standards, access, and scholarship in the field. Part of the Smithsonian Institution, the Archives of American Art holds over 20 million items across nearly 6,000 collections and is often described as the largest resource dedicated to documenting the history of the visual arts in the United States. Its Oral History Program, established in 1958, is the largest collection of interviews related to the visual arts in the world, encompassing more than 2,300 in-depth interviews with artists, dealers, critics, and curators. The Getty Research Institute, supported by the J. Paul Getty Trust, maintains hundreds of archival collections of global significance, including the papers of major artists, curators, and art market actors.

Other key institutional archives include the Frick Art Research Library; the Museum of Modern Art Archives; the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library; the South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA); Asia Art Archive; the Native American Artists Resource Collection at the Billie Jane Baguley Library and Archives, Heard Museum; and UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center, among many others. University archives may accept archival materials from their alumni, while the special collections in local public and private libraries and some site-based organizations also collect and preserve artists' records, providing access for research and practice-based learning.

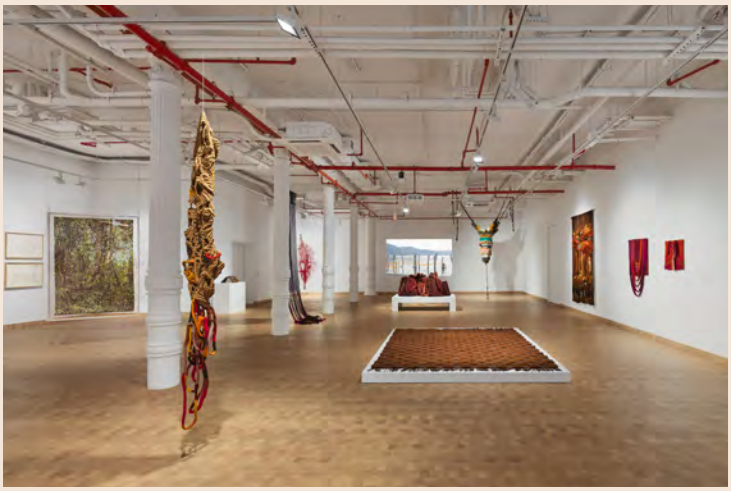
In terms of **spaces of creative production**, notable organizations are the Historic Artists' Homes and Studios (HAHS) program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the John Michael Kohler Arts Center. These are important public and private models that focus on artist-built environments and home-based collections that often include artists' studios.

THE ROLE OF THE ART MARKET

An artist's participation in the art market—however exclusive and unpredictable—can play an important role in distributing artwork and in supporting its preservation during the artist's lifetime and beyond. Regardless, posthumous success remains relatively rare, and market involvement can introduce conflicts of interest. For example, commercial pressures may distort stewardship priorities, pushing estates to prioritize the sale of high-value works over the thoughtful development of a market strategy for an artist's entire oeuvre. That said, some estates, artist-endowed foundations, galleries, and art advisors have successfully balanced market development with broader stewardship goals, demonstrating that financial sustainability and preservation are not mutually exclusive.

More and more **collectors** are deciding to play an active role in this work. For example, Ariel Aisiks, Founder and Executive Director of the Institute for Studies on Latin American Art (ISLAA), notes that "to place artworks on museums' walls, we need to support research and expand knowledge; we need to have context." To this end, ISLAA has developed an extensive archives collection alongside its artworks, providing important context within larger institutional frameworks. It also makes art communities' archives accessible to independent researchers, curators, artists, and the public through its recently opened exhibition and programming space in downtown Manhattan, as well as through partnerships with universities that foster scholarship.

Archives at the Institute for Studies on Latin American Art (ISLAA), New York, NY



Installation view of *Threads to the South*, ISLAA, New York, 2024

THE 1%: ARTIST-ENDOWED FOUNDATIONS

Artist-endowed foundations (AEFs) remain one of the most visible—and often aspirational—legacy structures, yet they are neither necessary nor suitable for every artist. Vice President of External Affairs and General Counsel at Powerhouse Arts Yayoi Shionoiri noted, "Each artist's estate deserves a bespoke set of strategies. It's not one size fits all… for example, not every

artist's estate needs to be incorporated into a foundation." The costs and complexity of forming and sustaining a foundation are significant, and as Christine J. Vincent, Managing Director for the Artist-Endowed Foundations Initiative (AEFI) at the Aspen Institute, notes, legacy maintenance is "oriented around the needs of the artist," while foundations are tax-exempt charitable entities "oriented around activities that benefit the public." These aims may overlap but are not identical.

> "It's not one size fits all... for example, not every artist's estate needs to be incorporated into a foundation."
>
> —YAYOI SHIONOIRI

RELATIONAL AND COLLECTIVE APPROACHES

The theme of connection was at the center of the *Creating Future Memory* Convening conversations when participants described working with an artist, art collective, or community to organize and document their work and voices. Artists' achievements rarely exist in isolation, nor are they contained solely within the physical works or records the artists leave behind; they emerge from the ideas artists advance, the networks that sustain their practices, and the wider cultural and historical contexts in which they operate. "We are not just the resources and formal legacy structures that can be built," Teresita Fernández said during her presentation at the Convening, "but also the liminal relationships that connect it all—the expansive mesh of collective connection that galvanizes into an indestructible persistence." In fact, many artists are also activists, educators, mentors, and organization builders engaged in their communities; these roles are as integral to their creative lives as the artworks themselves. Other artists are embedded in broader ecologies of collaborators, cultural workers, and audiences who hold essential knowledge about their processes and impact.

In her opening remarks at *Creating Future Memory*, Joan Mitchell Foundation Executive Director Christa Blatchford reflected, "I came into the work thinking about the individual and the objects, and the artist Jaune Quick-to-See Smith reminded me that this is about community. She would say, again and again, 'Preserving my legacy is about preserving American history.'" This approach was echoed by Glenn Phillips, who noted that when considering archival acquisitions, "we look for connectors—not just a singular person, but someone who was bringing all the people in their community together." Artist Marilyn Nance described this "connector" quality as a way of identifying overlooked figures in art history. "There's a whole constellation of people you won't know about until you go into an older person's papers," she said.

These perspectives also indicate a shift away from the canonization of the individual toward an understanding of legacy as something held across communities—raising questions not only about whose stories are preserved, but who participates in shaping them. Many artists and legacy workers are choosing **collective approaches**—community archives, artist-run spaces, collaborative platforms—that foreground reciprocity and shared responsibility. A notable example of this type of strategy is the work of Sixty Inches From Center, an organization composed of arts workers, writers, editors, artists, curators, librarians, and archivists who promote the preservation of culture within Indigenous, diasporic, queer, and disability communities of the Chicago region by producing collaborative projects about art communities, archival practice, art history, and culture.

Artists are also at the forefront of this type of effort. For example, artist-led Los Angeles Contemporary Archive (LACA), a public archive and library dedicated to contemporary art-making in the city of Los Angeles, organizes its work around open access, participatory cataloguing and artist-driven forms of care, with the goal of allowing artists to learn from each other's experiences. Hailey Loman, artist and Co-Director of LACA, noted during her presentation at the Convening, "We make an effort to say 'people over preservation.' We are centering artists' intentions. We are showing complicated lives. Archives are collections of collections that gain meaning in relation to each other." Even in terms of accessibility, LACA is doing things differently. Loman explained, "Archives are historically designed for people who already know what they're looking for. How can our labeling, our signage, help people learn about [the organization's] artistic methods rather than being a barrier? Our finding aids are often printed as zines or artist books accompanying the collections, because these are familiar to our communities."

> "I came into the work thinking about the individual and the objects, and Jaune Quick-to-See Smith reminded me that this is about community. She would say, again and again, 'Preserving my legacy is about preserving American history.'"
>
> —CHRISTA BLATCHFORD

Jaune Quick-to-See Smith in her studio in Corrales, NM

Some forms of collective legacy stewardship are inseparable from **social activism**. Kyle Croft, Executive Director of Visual AIDS, describes the organization's archival work and programming as "multidirectional"—bridging art, activism, publishing, oral history, and institutional partnerships. Here, the archive is a tool for both community empowerment and artist recognition within museums or scholarly contexts. However, success is measured mostly by whether the work continues to serve the communities most connected to the artists' lives and histories.

During the Convening, Drew Kahu'āina Broderick shared another example of legacy work **grounded in communities and cultural continuity**: Joan Lander and Puhipau's Nā Maka o ka 'Āina project, which represents a decades-long commitment to recording Hawaiian language, history, art, music, sovereignty movements, and environmental struggles in films and videos used by educators, activists, and cultural practitioners. In their model, legacy work is enacted *with* and *for* the local population. As Broderick explained, "Instead of centralizing our knowledge, we're really spreading it out across communities, across the archipelago. For me, coming from a community context and not an institutional one, I really believe in families holding their own knowledge and safeguarding it against what's coming and what is already here."

Artist Victoria Martinez speaking to cohort of members from Sixty Inches From Center's CANJE project at the studio of Natalia Villanueva Linares, Chicago, IL

Screening of unedited footage from Nā Maka o ka 'Āina's 1992 film *Ahupua'a, Fishponds and Lo'i*, Ko'olaupoko, O'ahu, Hawai'i

> “We have to work toward building a value system that pushes back against the hierarchies that we’ve all been taught.”
>
> —DYANI WHITE HAWK

Dyani White Hawk in her studio in Minneapolis, MN, with work-in-progress *Visiting*, 2024

PART 2

Building the Field of Legacy Stewardship

The work of artist legacy stewardship faces several **systemic challenges**. Across the preparatory conversations, advisory council meetings, and centrally during the *Creating Future Memory* Convening, three needs surfaced consistently: 1) access to knowledge, 2) funding and resources, and 3) increased models of collaboration and coordination across this nascent field—all key to increasing awareness and building capacity and sustainability within the ecosystem of legacy work. In the second half of this publication, we go through these challenges while highlighting promising emerging strategies.

Centering Equity and Under-recognized Artists

Before diving into the challenges and potential solutions, it is important to acknowledge that the artist legacy ecosystem, in its current state, does not have a level playing field. Participants in the *Creating Future Memory* Convening pointed to the canonization of a small subset of artists (by museums, markets, critics, and scholars) as representative of the art world's gatekeeping structures and narrow definitions of value—making any claim to equity contingent on **prioritizing those who are historically marginalized**.

As Teresita Fernández said, "Who gets remembered has a whole lot to do with who is allowed to just be." Artist Dyani White Hawk added, "The ways we tell future histories aren't going to change until those big exhibitions are happening. Until the catalogues are being written. Lasting things—not just a one-off show, not just a group show—but until artists are being valued equally across the board. We have to work toward building a value system that pushes back against the hierarchies that we've all been taught." Collector Komal Shah, founder of the Making Their Mark Foundation, agreed wholeheartedly, "If canonization means being on the walls, being in books, we have to do that now."

Since 2008, artworks acquired by US museums[3]

11%
WORK BY WOMEN

2.2%
WORK BY BLACK ARTISTS

0.5%
WORK BY BLACK WOMEN ARTISTS

Artist-Endowed Foundation representation[4]

21%
ASSOCIATED WITH WOMEN ARTISTS

8%
ASSOCIATED WITH PEOPLE OF COLOR

The 2022 Burns Halperin Report found that, across US museums studied between 2008 and 2020, works by women artists accounted for only 11% of acquisitions; works by Black American artists 2.2%; and works by Black American women artists just 0.5%.[3] Supporting this data, the latest Aspen Institute Artist-Endowed Foundations Initiative (AEFI)'s National Study of Artist-Endowed Foundations from 2018 shows that just 21% of artist-endowed foundations are associated with women artists. Even more sobering, only 8% are foundations for people of color. Underscoring this disparity is the fact that artist-endowed foundations tend to represent the top 1% of artists with significant assets, and are often made possible by the artist's commercial success.[4]

The demographics of museum staff further shape whose stories are collected and preserved. As Amalia Mesa-Bains observed, museums have often failed to collect work by Latina artists like herself because the institutions "weren't grounded in our world." She continued, "Every piece of my work that has been acquired—which is only very, very recently—has been acquired in a museum where there's a Latina [curator]." If curators do not possess the cultural understanding to provide needed context for work by artists from a diverse range of backgrounds, that work fails to be assessed as having historical or financial value, and will not receive the proper positioning and care. The 2025 Museums Moving Forward data reveals that 79% of director-level staff and 72% of executive-level staff (including museum directors)

3 Charlotte Burns and Julia Halperin, *The Burns Halperin Report: The State of Diversity in U.S. Museums* (Studio Burns, 2022), https://studioburns.media/heres-every-element-of-the-2022-burns-halperin-report-all-in-one-place.

4 Christine J. Vincent, *The Artist as Philanthropist: Strengthening the Next Generation of Artist-Endowed Foundations. A Study Report Supplement 2018* (The Aspen Institute, 2018), https://www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/the-artist-as-philanthropist-study-report-supplement.

identify as white, while 67% of museum workers overall self-identified as white, and 77% selected "white" as one of the options identifying their race, including multiracial respondents.[5]

Furthermore, at the Convening, artist Ebony G. Patterson asserted, "None of these [identities] are monolithic. It's like suggesting that, for example, there is only one understanding of Blackness. The point is to recognize that there are differences and to think about our common goals and the outcomes that we want. Because this is the agenda, to flatten us."

The lack of opportunities for underrepresented artists is further compounded by the fact that art history scholars are often more comfortable studying and writing about artworks or rooting their work in the **historical canon** than they are working with living artists. A Convening participant wrote, "My own graduate school training did not touch at all on the practical and ethical issues related to conducting research directly with artists and artist estates. Young art historians should be made familiar not only with working with physical archives but also with conducting oral history interviews and studio visits…how to work collectively and in a non-extractive manner with artists and others."

Market dependence deepens these disparities. Ursula Davila-Villa, Co-Founder of Davila-Villa & Stothart, observed that concentrated focus on a few "market big names" mirrors and contributes to broader inequity. As a result, artists with commercial success have access to systems or personal resources to sustain their legacies, while those without such visibility or resources—women, artists of color, queer and trans artists, artists with disabilities, as well as artists engaged in ephemeral practices such as performance, multimedia art, relational or community-centered art, among others—remain excluded from the infrastructure that sustains memory, and by extension, art history.

> "Young art historians should be made familiar not only with physical archives but also with conducting oral history interviews and studio visits…how to work collectively and in a non-extractive manner with artists and others."
>
> —CONVENING PARTICIPANT

Artist Interview Workshop hosted by Voices in Contemporary Art (VoCA) at Glenstone Museum, Potomac, MD, 2019

5 Liz Levine, Mia Locks, and Hannah Marshall, *Workplace Equity and Organizational Culture in US Art Museums: 2025 Report* (Museums Moving Forward, 2025), https://museumsmovingforward.com/data-studies/2024-2025.

Key Challenges and Opportunities

1 Access to Knowledge

Many artists and estate managers that the Foundation intersects with speak of not knowing how or where to begin when it comes to stewarding a legacy, even around activities they could potentially take on by themselves, such as selecting archival-quality materials when making artworks, or creating basic documentation and inventories of the work. Lisa Darms noted that education and information-sharing are among the field's most urgent needs: "People are very, very, very hungry for that. People need that information now." However, as Solana Chehtman noted in her opening remarks at *Creating Future Memory*, "The systems meant to support this labor are deeply underdeveloped, underfunded, and oftentimes completely inaccessible to artists [and professionals] working outside the mainstream."

These gaps point not only to an immediate need for resources and learning opportunities, but to a **longer-term structural shift**—one that will require sustained, field-wide awareness-building and transformation rather than quick solutions. As Ryan S. Flahive, faculty member and Archivist at the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA), noted, "Much of what we're trying to achieve is generational change that accompanies a major paradigm shift in education." These needs extend well beyond those of artists, to legacy and arts workers, and even market representatives, or others who have found themselves in stewardship roles without subject matter expertise.

> "Much of what we're trying to achieve is generational change that accompanies a major paradigm shift in education."
>
> —RYAN S. FLAHIVE

Students in collections storage at the Institute of American Indian Arts, Santa Fe, NM

WHAT TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES ARE THERE FOR ARTISTS?

Artists often begin thinking about legacy too late in life, when options are limited and decisions urgent. "When we reach the age of 50, and we start witnessing sickness and death with our parents and art world elders, we start thinking about our inevitable passing in real terms," reflected artist Miguel Luciano, who remembered working closely with his friend and mentor Hiram Maristany and is now supporting the photographer's family in managing Maristany's estate. This delay is not incidental: training in legacy stewardship is largely absent from the institutional pathways taken by artists in the development of their careers. Instead, "legacy planning needs to be part of artists' training from the beginning—and refreshed throughout their lives in their relationships with every support organization," Luciano reflected.

Formal art education—particularly BFA and MFA programs—rarely includes training in documentation, inventorying, or archiving. As one faculty member admitted, "Professors are just working hard to see if their students can even create art; logistics [of studio and legacy management] have no place." This omission reflects a persistent assumption that student artists are too early in their careers and their lives to find these professional skills relevant. As archivist Sam Bogner noted, "Academic studio art programs often do not stress the importance of artwork inventories and studio archives to their students, though these processes connect to the professional work of portfolio-making and applications," and are therefore relevant for artists at all ages and career stages to learn. For example, years after participating in the Joan Mitchell Foundation's CALL program, Jaune Quick-to-See Smith reflected, in a conversation with the Foundation's Board of Directors, that without the preparation that the program provided her, she would not have been able to seize the opportunity of her 2023 retrospective at the Whitney Museum of American Art—a major career milestone that took place less than two years before Smith's passing. Her experience underscores that legacy stewardship is not only about preserving the past for the future—it also shapes what is possible for artists in the present.

While still uneven, arts education has gradually expanded to include forms of professional training—from business skills to new technologies and media—indicating some responsiveness to the evolving needs of artists. Within this trajectory, there is clear potential for legacy stewardship and long-term archival thinking to be more fully integrated into existing curricula. Emerging examples point in this direction: at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC), professor Nicholas Lowe's class Archives and Legacy in the BFA program offers a practical model—it connects students with special collections and external artists' archives, providing hands-on training in cataloguing, documentation, and collections management while emphasizing both technical skills and the creative potential of archives. Another example is the Creative Legacy Fellowship program at Bennington College, which places students of any discipline in internship positions at artist-endowed foundations, complementing the hands-on experience with a broader curriculum.

More attention should also be given in studio courses to the impact that media and processes have on the longevity of artwork. Sam Bogner noted, "Younger artists often lack experience with archival materials and conservation practices, making it difficult for them to properly preserve their work as their career develops." Even small decisions—using acid-free paper, selecting appropriate adhesives, or understanding the properties of certain paints—can dramatically affect the durability of their artwork. Glenn Phillips observed that providing opportunities for artists to learn from conservators early in their careers would enable them to

make more informed decisions about how they make work and store it so that it can potentially stand the test of time.

A number of college and university representatives mentioned that what is missing is a curriculum template for artist legacy skills and practices that could be easily implemented and tested, as well as institutional buy-in and ideally some funding to come with it. The Helen Frankenthaler Foundation's two-year pilot Climate Initiative offers a model for how a grant program can include curriculum development, created and rolled out in partnership with the Association of Independent Colleges of Art and Design (AICAD).

Beyond formal education, affordable, accessible, and ongoing professional development opportunities for studio organization and legacy stewardship remain limited. Training is often locked behind paywalls, offered only through isolated workshops, or available exclusively to artists who have been selected to participate in a specific program. *Creating Future Memory* participants agreed that **residencies, fellowships, and studio programs**—which often serve a broader and more diverse group of artists than higher education—would be an ideal agent to fill these critical gaps.

An exceptional example worth mentioning is the residency program at the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA) in Santa Fe, NM, which not only provides culturally specific training in inventorying and archiving, but also offers an archive-specific residency for artists, supports portfolio development, and collects oral histories from artists at various career stages to ensure they are documenting a range of Indigenous artists' perspectives for the next generations. Another is NXTHVN in New Haven, CT, cofounded by artist Titus Kaphar and a private equity funder, which also offers training in inventorying and legacy stewardship, among other topics, to empower artists and curators as effective visionaries for legacy building.

Studio Fellow Fidelis Joseph at NXTHVN, New Haven, CT

Curatorial Fellow Marquita Flowers with High School Apprentice Loretta Tam at NXTHVN, New Haven, CT

Public libraries represent another key potential contributor to this field, serving not only as repositories but also as welcoming spaces for learning and engagement, particularly for artists. Through specialized archives and collections, and sometimes extending to curated exhibitions, public programs, and artist residencies, libraries could expand the preservation and promotion of artist legacies while functioning as vital community hubs for cultural heritage. Emerging initiatives within this sector are worth continued attention and mapping. For example, Curator of Special Collections and Archives at Denver Public Library, Emily Grace King, is working with a cohort of 25 artists to develop do-it-yourself (DIY) resources on inventorying and archiving work, as well as on broader aspects of legacy stewardship for the region.

Convening participants also focused on **museums and other larger non-collecting institutions** that present art to the public. These organizations often work with artists later in their careers and could help them plan for long-term care. Chelsea Spengemann, Co-Founder and Executive Director of Soft Network, noted that while mid-career retrospectives include research and catalogues, "rarely is there a separate initiative to look at the artist's legacy more broadly." One participant asked, "What if museums understood that artists are part of their audiences when they think about engagement and education opportunities?"

Finally, for those unable to access such programs, **DIY resources** do exist in the field—including publications such as the abovementioned Joan Mitchell Foundation's Creating a Living Legacy (CALL) guides, the Aspen Institute Artist-Endowed Foundations Initiative's *The Artist as Philanthropist*, CERF+'s *The Legacy Guide*, *The Artist's Estate: A Handbook for Artists, Executors, and Heirs* by Loretta Würtenberger, and *Creative Legacies: Artists' Estates and Foundations*, edited by Kathy Battista and Bryan Faller. Videos available on the websites of Artist Foundations & Estate Leaders List (AFELL), Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts, and other groups cover some of the practical aspects of legacy maintenance. However, artists are met with few culturally and geographically specific, multilingual, or accessible formats, and rapidly changing technologies further constrain access and long-term engagement with legacy work—especially for older artists. Furthermore, these written resources are not able to account for the intimate, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of this work, or the alternative approaches that some artists, families, and legacy workers may want to employ.

DIY Resources

Links to these resources can be found at the end of this publication on page 78.

Convening participants called for complementary, collaborative flexible offerings. For example, **independent workshops, mentorship programs, and study groups** could provide peer-to-peer learning, accountability systems, and mutual support—encouraging artists to "actually READ and act on the steps" of many of the existing guides and resources, as one survey respondent put it. Another idea that was put forward is for alumni from professional development programs to mentor new cohorts to multiply their expertise. But participants also highlighted that dedicated funding for these initiatives would be needed to compensate these efforts fairly and ensure their sustainability.

WHAT TRAINING DO "ACCIDENTAL ARCHIVISTS" AND ARTS WORKERS NEED?

Legacy stewardship rarely enters the art world as a clearly defined field of practice. Instead, it emerges in moments of transition—often unexpectedly—when responsibility for an artist's or collective's work is redistributed across family members, studio collaborators, and independent arts workers. These **"accidental archivists,"** as one Convening participant dubbed them, are frequently asked to navigate this terrain without prior training or shared frameworks, and often under conditions shaped by grief, urgency, and uncertainty, as well as—many times—a lack of understanding of the art world and the value of their own holdings.

Chelsea Spengemann notes that even experienced arts professionals are constrained by the highly individualized nature of this work: each estate operates differently, and estate managers are often working alone with very few resources, resulting in "idiosyncratic" organizational methods that are difficult to formalize or communicate across cases. While many legacy workers ultimately develop expertise over time—often through trial and error—this learning is largely informal and uneven, reflecting a critical lack of institutional support and consistent training structures.

Formal pathways into legacy work **training**, such as archival studies, library science, conservation, or appraisal, typically require enrollment in lengthy degree programs or participation in costly specialized workshops that remain inaccessible to many. One notable offering is the Aspen Institute's Artist-Endowed Foundations Initiative (AEFI)'s Seminar, a comprehensive program offered annually for the past eight years that has helped build a new generation and community of professional estate and foundation leaders. However, it comes with a significant cost and is focused on estates that aim to become artist-endowed foundations—both factors that are beyond the capacity, and not necessarily in the interest of most practitioners and organizations.

Against this backdrop, participants in the Convening called for a shift toward more accessible, flexible, distributed, and embodied forms of learning, grounded in practice. Lower-cost certification programs were identified as one potential pathway, alongside apprenticeship-style models, as Glenn Phillips noted, since "so much is not written down or online."

Cultural heritage consultant Leslie Guy underscored that participation in this work is less about formal credentials than sustained dedication, urging a reconsideration of the barriers that limit entry: "This has nothing to do with your profession and your background, but your commitment… I would like all of us in this room to invite more people into this work because we need them. I want us to think of all the barriers we have placed." In a complementary vein, Alex Klein, Deborah Dupré Head Curator and Director of Curatorial Affairs at The Contemporary Austin, reflected on how much archival and collections work is still learned through doing rather than formal training. "I'm not a trained archivist, but my curatorial practice has entailed multiyear oral history projects, and really listening to artists tell their stories. I just do it because this is the only way I know how to do my work. These experiences taught me that not everything has to look like an exhibition. We need to train the next generation to go talk to people, go look for things, go into the archive, and sometimes even become the bridge to the archive." Klein added, "These projects aren't easy. Institutions may not always value the work you're doing. It may not always be legible." Concluding with a key recommendation for further reflection, she said, "If you are the only holder of these things, they will not pass on. That baton passing is so important."

> We need to train the next generation to go talk to people, go look for things, go into the archive, and sometimes even become the bridge to the archive. That baton passing is so important.”
>
> —ALEX KLEIN

Alex Klein at *Creating Future Memory*

Many Convening participants called for **flexible, customizable implementation frameworks and toolkits** tailored to the needs of arts administrators and organizational practitioners. Templates for foundational documents—such as inventories, donation agreements, rights statements, or wills—could help reduce start-up costs, save time, and provide estate stewards and arts workers with a clear place to begin. Notable examples of this type of resources are the University of Massachusetts Boston's Roadmap for Participatory Archiving (RoPA), which proposes an easily replicable and scalable methodology that is offered for free online, and the Assessing the Affective Impact of Community Archives Toolkit of the UCLA Community Archives Lab.

Participants noted that broadening access to training is not only a practical necessity but also a matter of equity. For underrepresented artists and the communities closest to them, the scarcity of culturally responsive training and practitioners in fields such as conservation and archival practice further accentuates the gaps in legacy care, leaving them at a heightened risk of loss.

In parallel, **arts professionals working within larger institutions and the market** encounter similar deficits, as legacy-related responsibilities surface within their roles without being formally recognized or supported. “Create workshops for galleries entering estate representation,” urged one survey respondent, adding, “The work is NOT the same as living artist representation, and treating it as such does a disservice to the artist and their estate.” Another Convening participant wrote, “The artist estate field is expanding rapidly, but the commercial and legal sides NEED more education.” These professionals and decision-makers need training in ethics, legal and art-market issues, community engagement, and principles of care.

The same is true for collectors, who are also legacy stewards of their holdings, and tend to occupy additional roles as trustees or benefactors of large institutions. Sarah Roberts, Senior Director of Curatorial Affairs at the Joan Mitchell Foundation, noted that collectors and donors

often need to have a better understanding of the cultural impact of artworks: "Museums and cultural institutions do more than acquire objects for collections and host exhibitions; they sustain and help chronicle the histories of artists and communities who create and shape the culture that connects us all." In fact, based on updated research and data, journalists and researchers Charlotte Burns and Julia Halperin noted in 2026 that even though 47% of board seats at the museums they surveyed were occupied by women, that gender parity was not necessarily reflected in acquisitions or decision-making. "Beyond who has a seat at the table, it's about who is committed to change," they concluded.[6]

> "I've seen artwork taken out of studios and thrown into a dumpster and it's very painful to witness. Every one of us is vulnerable."
>
> —JUAN SÁNCHEZ

Juan Sánchez in his studio in New York

2 Funding and Resources

Funding is possibly the most urgent challenge to the advancement of artist legacy stewardship, given how fundamentally resource- and time-intensive the work is. According to the Joan Mitchell Foundation's *Career Documentation for the Visual Artist* (2022), the costs of legacy work can be divided into four main categories: **space, records** (analog and digital), **people**, and **time**. Each of these types of expenses surfaced consistently in the *Creating Future Memory* Convening, as well as in the research and planning conversations that led up to the event.

Securing safe, sustainable, climate-controlled, and energy-efficient **space** is a fundamental challenge for artists throughout their lives and is particularly crucial in stewarding their legacies. Artists' work and ephemera is often stored in homes, temporary studios, or makeshift environments vulnerable to flooding, fire, or displacement. Artist Juan Sánchez recalled that proper storage was simply out of reach financially throughout most of his life: "You don't have the finances or the conditions to store the work in a way that would maintain it in good shape," he said. Artist and writer Damien Davis has written movingly about the experience of losing his archive of sculptural components for his artwork when he missed a payment on his storage unit

6 Charlotte Burns and Julia Halperin, "Changemakers: Women Artists and the Gap between Visibility and Sustainability," Making Their Mark Forum, organized by the Making Their Mark Foundation, March 5–7, 2026, at the National Museum for Women in the Arts, Washington, DC, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vkKufGZpewU.

in Brooklyn. “The unit was auctioned off,” wrote Davis. “There was no intervention, no warning. The archive simply changed hands.”[7] This precarity intensifies when an artist dies. Studios are lost, leases lapse, and the physical integrity of the work is put at risk just as emotional demands on families and communities increase. “I’ve seen artwork taken out of studios and thrown into a dumpster and it’s very painful to witness,” said Juan Sánchez. “Every one of us is vulnerable.”

The same pressures shape the decisions of community organizations and even large institutions, where physical storage is chronically in short supply. Many museums and archives have stopped acquiring, or even accepting donations of artwork or records unless they come with dedicated funding.

Intrinsically linked to space costs are those of documenting, systematizing, and protecting **records**. Yona Backer, cultural strategist in the arts, characterized archiving as a persistent challenge for the field, observing that it “is such an expensive endeavor that, although it is clearly a core responsibility, it often does not get adequately resourced or prioritized as one, given institutional capacity constraints.” In particular, **digital records** pose significant challenges. Much of artists' correspondence and documentation, as well as some artworks and process-related materials, are now born-digital (created on a computer or other digital device), while analog works and papers also require digitization through professional photography, scanning, or recording to ensure accessibility and preservation over time.

This growing reliance on digital environments has introduced significant infrastructural and financial demands. The cost and complexity of database management, software subscriptions, hardware updates, and server space—to say nothing of digital preservation measures such as file integrity checks and format migration strategies—can be prohibitive for many artists, estates, and supporting organizations. These challenges are compounded by changing technologies, resource-intensive computer systems, and inconsistent preservation standards, all of which make long-term digital stewardship increasingly difficult to sustain. Even institutions with significant resources, such as the Getty, have expressed concern about the long-term sustainability of digital collections, particularly considering environmental demands and the rising cost of maintaining climate-controlled spaces for high-capacity servers. This is a timely topic that needs to be further researched and explored.

The costs associated with **support staff** and **professional services** also present challenges. Yet, across the field, the labor of organizing, preserving, and transmitting an artist’s legacy is currently sustained largely through unpaid or underpaid labor—sometimes by artists themselves, and later by those closest to them: family members, friends, peers, former students, independent arts workers. “Those are the people I see struggling,” said Chelsea Spengemann. “People working three jobs and taking care of estates.” Within institutions as well, this labor is often structurally undervalued: legacy workers frequently occupy term-limited roles without benefits, and positions rarely reflect the training, specialization, and responsibility required.

At the Convening, Ursula Davila-Villa expressed frustration at the structural inequities that create this situation: “I can feel the rage and the sadness and the urgency. There is so much wealth in this country…and sadly the wealthiest individuals are not committing to the civic duties that come with that responsibility.” As a result, philanthropic and private investment tends to concentrate around already-established artists and institutions, reinforcing existing

7 Damien Davis, “When Artists Lose Their Archives,” *Hyperallergic*, February 6, 2026, https://hyperallergic.com/when-artists-lose-their-archives.

hierarchies of visibility and value rather than expanding support to under-recognized practices. Instead, participants emphasized the need for dedicated funding streams for BIPOC, disabled, LGBTQIA+, or other historically under-recognized artists and practices, ensuring that financial resources and community priorities support culturally informed stewardship.

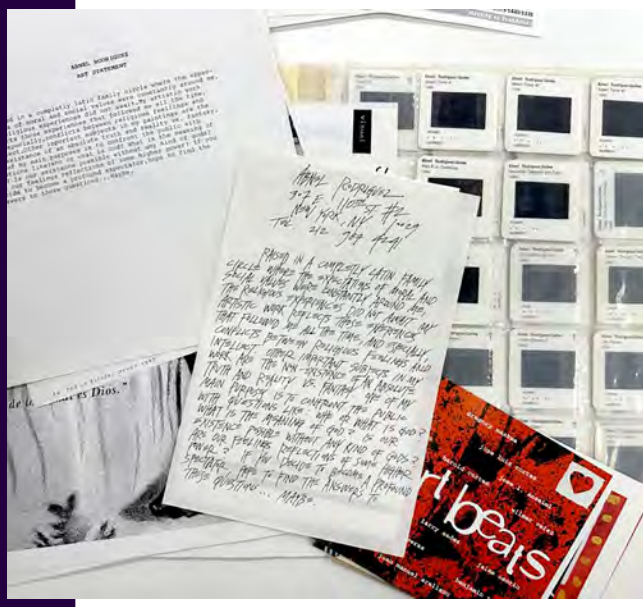
Additionally, access to highly specialized and knowledgeable legal, accounting, financial planning, conservation, appraisal, and archival services, as well as cataloguing assistance and technology training, is essential to responsible stewardship but rarely affordable for artists, estates, independent legacy workers, or small organizations. Legal guidance can be particularly costly, but is also crucial to establishing a legacy plan and navigating day-to-day operations, both as a studio and later as an estate. For example, creating a will, filing for copyright, and navigating federal and state-specific property, tax, and estate laws all require specific (and different) legal knowledge.

Finally, the **time** required to establish and sustain a legacy, often over years, is rarely anticipated or compensated. As Glenn Phillips noted at the Convening, "Artists are way more interested in the work they're making right now than something they did in 1976." The forward-momentum of creative practice—the next idea, exhibition, or opportunity—frequently takes precedence over the long-term work of reflection, archiving, or planning. Additionally, for many, the pressures of "survival mode"—managing studio and housing expenses, teaching, caregiving, and taking care of their health—further limit the time and emotional bandwidth required to initiate and sustain legacy efforts.

Nicholas Lowe reflected on some of the most challenging and time-consuming aspects of this work: "When I talk about archival work with students, I'm always thinking of that ecosystem of memory—it's not as straightforward as saying the material holds the memory. Instead, you have to make something new with the material to activate the archive. If you want to create a database, you curate it, you make an exhibition of it, you publish it. You do whatever you can do so the material comes into another format. To me, that's where the greatest costs lie—publishing, producing, activating." Alex Klein further reflected on the long-term nature of these costs, not only financially but also in terms of time, effort, and emotional labor: "My friends at the Kunsthalle Lissabon talk about how the exhibition is the moment when the relationship with the artist is made public. But it's everything that happens afterward that is actually the real work—it's the maintenance."

While the scale of the funding problem can seem unsurmountable, not all legacy projects need to incur all the expenses described above. At the Convening, Kyle Croft suggested simply working at a **scale** that requires fewer resources. He related how Visual AIDS decided to focus on documentation instead of collecting artworks. "By necessity we've always worked very small, but I'm starting to see that as a strength," he said, describing how they are often able to raise an artist's visibility in Google searches with a few digitized images and birth and death dates. Croft continued, "We're not trying to be comprehensive; we're building a foundation for things to happen in the future." This approach prioritizes meaningful visibility and access over sheer size and scope—doing more with less.

> “By necessity we’ve always worked very small, but I’m starting to see that as a strength. We’re not trying to be comprehensive; we’re building a foundation for things to happen in the future.”
>
> —KYLE CROFT



Materials in the Visual AIDS Artist Files Collection, New York, NY

WHAT CAN ARTISTS, ESTATES, AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS DO?

Few artists have the financial resources to plan for the stewardship of their work during their lifetime; even fewer can leave the financial assets, marketable artwork, or real estate required to sustain legacy operations after they pass. However, these resources are often central to the feasibility of sustaining this work. For example, Cathleen Chaffee, Chief Curator of the Buffalo AKG Art Museum, noted how the artist Marisol's (Marisol Escobar, Venezuelan and American, born France, 1930–2016) bequest of assets and property made it feasible for the museum to accept (and continue to successfully steward) a large collection of her work and archives. “She left her apartment to the museum,” Chaffee shared. “We sold the apartment and put the funds in an endowment, which helped underwrite storage costs.”

While key **personal financial strategies**—such as purchasing real estate, securing life insurance, saving, and investing early—were noted as potential means for funding later-stage legacy work, participants observed that these options are largely contingent on structural privilege or sustained commercial success, and therefore unevenly accessible. Moreover, while a healthy market for an artist’s work can provide recognition and some of the assets and tools necessary to support a legacy, many build careers in academic, institutional, social, or community-based contexts that resist sales-based models. Still others work in isolation without much support.

In response to these constraints, one Convening participant expressed the need for more **revenue-generating alternatives** to the market: “Funneling the high capital that exchanges hands in the art world into new and transparent funding models that don’t exclude artists is critical.” Some suggested direct online sales, while Dyani White Hawk highlighted the Santa Fe Indian Market as a powerful model created by and for Indigenous artists, allowing them to financially support themselves without the need for institutional recognition. “Native artists can

Marie Warsh and Paul Schwartz,
Soft Network studio, New York, NY

Artists Archives of the Western Reserve, Cleveland, OH

make a living and be joyfully employed through the act of creation without any people in the mainstream art world even knowing their names," White Hawk said.

As artist and legacy specialist Shervone Neckles observed, "[The degree of] physical distance from the art industry, and proximity to socioeconomic or environmental challenges, impact how practitioners envision and plan for the future." These uneven dynamics fundamentally shape who is able to prepare for legacy work.

Another approach relies on **resource-sharing**, such as in-kind exchanges of skills, training, contacts, and supplies. Lisa Darms noted, "One thing people have been talking about is sharing [storage] space: 'I can't afford a space individually. Maybe four of us can share a space.'" One successful example is the Artists Archives of the Western Reserve (AAWR), an archival repository and museum founded by artists in Northeast Ohio to preserve the visual art of their area. Artists apply to donate a representative portion of their work, and if accepted, make a one-time, often subsidized financial contribution to the organization's endowment. A "living archive," AAWR allows archived artists, after approval from the AAWR Board, to exchange or borrow their own work during their lifetime, and provides an inaugural exhibition, touring support, and other opportunities for their work to be seen, studied, and preserved. These repositories not only provide storage for artists but also benefit the public by creating a resource that serves scholars, art students, educators, curators, and other artists.

Another thriving example of space sharing is Soft Network, where five different estates share one office and split the associated expenses, including rent, utilities, supplies, and equipment. Members additionally contribute time and expertise to each other's projects. Soft Network is planning to make this model replicable by producing a guide so that others can implement the same structure.

Convening participants also recommended **coordinating fundraising efforts or grant applications**. Although there are failed experiments in this area—most vivid in recent memory being the disintegration of Artist Pension Trust, a pooled art collection meant to secure its

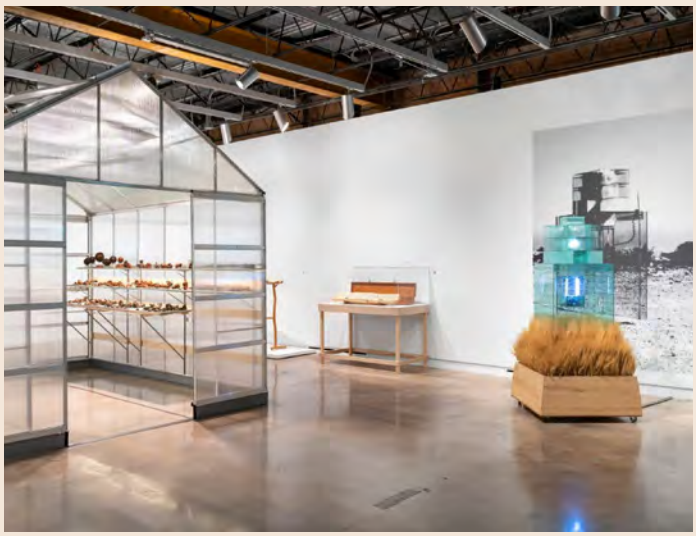
members' retirements—there are also some successes. One is the Coalition of Small Arts NYC (CoSA NYC), a group of 32 New York arts organizations formed in 2020 to respond to funding challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. It raised $1.6 million that has been shared equally among the coalition members. Although such efforts require high levels of responsibility, trust, collaboration, and organization, as well as initial funds and time, the results can be incredibly positive.

WHAT EFFORTS CAN LARGER INSTITUTIONS MAKE TO SUPPORT ARTISTS' LEGACIES?

Although most museums, archives, and libraries recognize collections acquisition, storage, and preservation as central to their missions, exhibitions and catalogues function as the primary mechanisms for presenting and interpreting artists' narratives. This model leaves the sustained, legacy-oriented work that extends beyond these formats—such as long-term documentation, oral histories, artist engagement, and broader contextualization over time—consistently under-resourced. This gap largely reflects capacity constraints and funding dynamics, as organizations often operate at or beyond their means and legacy work rarely attracts sustained support due to its long-term, process-driven nature and lack of discrete, marketable outputs.

Convening participants dreamed big about **dedicated institutional staff, departments, or programs** focused on legacy work, including archivists, program managers, and artist and community liaisons with ongoing professional development to understand the significance of artists' work, particularly for underrepresented communities. However, they acknowledged that much of the institutional legacy stewardship work ends up driven by a single passionate staff member or small team who champion it beyond their official job descriptions rather than as a long-term institutional commitment. For example, at the Convening, Alex Klein described needing to secure multiple outside grants to support a retrospective of the important but under-recognized artist Carl Cheng—an effort that required extensive collaboration with Cheng to document and contextualize his work. Much of this labor was only possible because of the external funding and the unexpected time afforded by COVID-19 closures. Even so, the project remained precarious: the exhibition was repeatedly threatened with cancellation and nearly moved forward without a catalogue.

Although far beyond the reach of most institutions, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art's Artist Initiative (2014–2019) can be taken as an aspirational template model. This was a Mellon-funded, limited-term project over a roughly five-year period, in which the museum engaged with artists in its collection to develop new approaches to conservation, interpretation, and exhibition of their work, including oral histories.



Installation view of *Carl Cheng: Nature Never Loses*, The Contemporary Austin – Jones Center, 2024

Convening participants also questioned **institutions' policies and collection systems**. Prevailing acquisition models are often ill-suited to supporting artist legacy stewardship in a holistic way. Specific funds are typically legally restricted to the purchase of artworks alone, precluding the collecting or care of contextual materials—such as archives, documentation, or exhibition records—that are essential to understanding and stewarding an artist's work over time. "The big challenge for institutions is how to move from museum acquisitions to community stewardship," one Convening participant noted. "And that means changing legal models as well as conceptual frameworks and approaches."

These constraints are reinforced by **philanthropic models and acquisition practices** shaped by donor expectations, which tend to prioritize the visibility and recognition associated with well-known artworks or collections. As art advisor Allan Schwartzman noted, "People tend to go to known routes; they are not very good at envisioning new ways to meet changing needs." While some collectors, patrons, and philanthropists are deeply motivated by ethical considerations and would be willing to support more comprehensive forms of stewardship, they are often unaware of these structural gaps. As a result, the ways in which they acquire and donate artworks or support institutions may inadvertently limit their potential to make a meaningful difference in sustaining artists' legacies.

Some institutions are beginning to **interrogate these structures**. Leslie Cozzi, Curator and Department Head of Prints, Drawings, and Photographs at the Baltimore Museum of Art, described efforts to create a "non-extractive institution"—one committed to representing the art of its time through an ethical collection management policy cowritten by a special board committee that recognizes the museum's responsibility to collect and preserve "on behalf of the communities we serve. The word we use often is 'canon correction.'" This means protecting works based on their contextual relevance, valuing the cultural significance of work by local, lesser-known artists, and reframing collaboration as shared stewardship of cultural memory rather than competition for the ownership of objects.

Marcia Minter, Co-Founder of Indigo Arts Alliance, remarked, "Those of us who are in larger legacy institutions, particularly white-led institutions, should help lift up, in meaningful ways,

> "Those of us who are in larger legacy institutions, particularly white-led institutions, should help lift up, in meaningful ways, the work smaller organizations are doing."
>
> —MARCIA MINTER

Valerie J. Maynard Legacy Interns with Legacy Specialist Antonia Perez

the work smaller organizations are doing. They are often doing the most culturally specific, community-embedded, and artistically innovative work, and operate on fractional budgets. White-led institutions typically hold power due to accumulated advantages from which Black- and Brown-led organizations have been actively excluded and chronically underfunded." An excellent example of this was provided by representatives from the Baltimore Museum of Art and the Valerie J. Maynard Foundation, who in the closing session of the Convening described how they successfully partnered to cohost interns who work for (and get trained by) both organizations.

Another area ripe for policy shifts is for museums to ensure they are budgeting to equitably compensate both artists and estates for their contributions to exhibitions and other legacy projects. At the Convening, estate representatives highlighted that they frequently receive no compensation for their labor when providing materials, documentation, or instructions to museums, galleries, or universities. Fees for packing, shipping, or travel are rarely built into exhibition budgets, leaving these stewards to shoulder costs and logistics on their own. Many Convening participants suggested practical steps: building fees into project budgets, forming partnerships with smaller organizations to share resources and expertise, and creating structures that recognize the ongoing care required to safeguard both art and archival materials.

HOW CAN PHILANTHROPY CONTRIBUTE?

On the nonprofit side, Convening participants emphasized a core reality: **grants for legacy work are extremely limited, hard to access, and often structurally misaligned with the work itself**. Some exciting examples in the field are worth naming: The Center for Art, Research and Alliances (CARA) Fellowship, initiated in 2023, provides direct support to living artists and recently formed estates. This initiative recognizes two mid- to late-career artists and artist estates across disciplines with unrestricted $75,000 grants and individually tailored support over a two- to three-year timeframe. In terms of direct support to archives, Soft Network's Archive-in-Residence program supports legacy stewardship for under-resourced artists and estates, by hosting them in their space to organize, preserve, and provide critical context to their collections, fostering new artistic perspectives. The Leon Levy Foundation provides financial support to organizations of all sizes for archival efforts by invitation, and Hauser & Wirth Institute until recently offered grants to creative archival initiatives—empowering nonprofits and collectives to expand access to collections on their own terms.

In spite of these promising efforts, **the scale of need remains far greater** than what existing institutional and philanthropic efforts can address. As Christine J. Vincent notes, "The expense involved in aggregating these oeuvres and supporting them would be major." Josh T Franco, Executive Director of the US Latinx Art Forum and Collector at Large at the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art, echoed the point, wondering if the task is "too big for anything but government"—and yet, in the United States, public investment in culture remains elusive.

Artist-endowed foundations are therefore particularly well positioned to invest in this work, ensuring that both living artists and emerging estates, as well as organizations and institutions of different sizes and complexities (museums, universities, residencies, and community

organizations), have the resources necessary to preserve, interpret, and share creative legacies with their respective constituents.

Participants highlighted multiple **structural barriers embedded in the existing funding system** that prevent this work from being supported. For example, grant requirements are often so extensive that they discourage less-resourced individuals and organizations from applying; Ryan S. Flahive noted that even for large organizations, such as the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA), "it feels like a privilege to apply for a grant." Mikiko Ino additionally stated, "Starting [to fundraise around this work] is hard, but continuing is much harder."

For example, grant systems require that applicants be formalized as a 501(c)3, often necessitating that artists, estates, and individual legacy workers obtain fiscal sponsorship from a larger charitable organization, which can be both hard to access and costly. **Eligibility criteria** both for individuals and organizations also tends to limit access, particularly due to narrow funding mandates. Conservators and archivists noted that legacy work is often not sufficiently public-facing to attract dedicated institutional funding, and instead needs to be folded into existing programs that already align with funders' priorities.

In addition, Convening participants asserted that the **timelines and expectations** of traditional grantmaking rarely align with the slow, iterative, and deeply relational nature of legacy stewardship. Multiyear unrestricted support is therefore essential—yet exceedingly rare. While capacity building and continuity are crucial for this type of work, commitments from even well-meaning organizations tend to be necessarily limited to a finite period of time. For example, from 2007 to 2017, the Joan Mitchell Foundation's Creating a Living Legacy (CALL) initiative helped artists inventory and document their work with the support of legacy specialists who worked with each artist's studio for one to two years. However, many of these artists later lost access to their data when organizational support ended and technologies shifted. Artists were unable to keep up with the tasks of documenting and inventorying their work without outside help.

At the same time, the **variability and lack of formal professionalization in legacy work** makes it difficult for applicants to estimate costs or structure budgets in advance, further complicating grant applications. Leslie Guy urged funders to reconsider requirements for predetermined outcomes in work that is inherently uncertain: "I can't see into the future to know my impact," she said. Others noted that even after funding is secured, reporting and compliance requirements can slow down work and divert scarce time away from stewardship itself.

Participants emphasized that **greater flexibility** in how funds are used could help address some of these constraints. Allowing artists, estates, and legacy workers to allocate resources according to their own priorities—whether for conservation, research, staffing, or documentation—would enable more responsive and strategic approaches over time, rather than forcing work into predefined programmatic categories. Given that many artists' archives live "in homes, studios, family collections, and community spaces," participants called for resources that support in situ preservation, oral history collection, culturally grounded methods, peer mentorship, and intergenerational exchange. Current grantmaking structures are rarely designed to accommodate this level of autonomy.

In response, Convening participants actively called for easier access to an expanded spectrum of grant funding, either legacy-specific or as a valued component of a larger project, particularly focusing on the need to streamline grant requirements and create **quick micro-grants to address specific needs**. Those limited funds would be helpful for things like emergency preservation and short-term legal or tax services. They could also help boost or sustain

small non-emergency aspects of the work, like finalizing documentation, preservation, and community-based projects that might otherwise be overlooked in competitive national funding pools.

Some others suggested developing **grants earmarked for specific needs**, such as climate-controlled storage, digitization labs, or archival services, among others. Programs like the Helen Frankenthaler Foundation's Climate Initiative and Teiger Foundation's Climate Action for Curators were referenced as models for targeted funding.

Ultimately, some grantmakers noted in conversation that challenges to providing funding stem not only from a lack of interest or capacity—many concentrate on also-crucial production, presentation, and support of artists through early stages in their lives and careers—but also reflect the **difficulty of evaluating, structuring, and sustaining long-term commitments** in a field where needs are highly individualized, distributed across individuals assuming multiple roles, and difficult to standardize, as well as from the inherent difficulty of **assessing readiness and capacity**.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE COMMERCIAL SECTOR?

Galleries have historically served as one of artists' most stable long-term partners. Multidecade relationships once provided continuity, professional advocacy, and in some cases, informal stewardship of archives, sales, and legacy planning. Yet this model has become increasingly rare. As Ursula Davila-Villa reminded Convening participants, the gallery world is "idiosyncratic" and "a nonregulated industry" undergoing consolidation, with mega-galleries expanding and smaller ones struggling to survive. In that context, artist-gallery relationships can deepen or unravel over time—"like a marriage," she noted—creating uncertainty around the long-term care of an artist's work.

Additionally, market success does not guarantee financial stability or historical recognition for artists. Participants noted that artists often lose money on exhibitions once costs are factored in, and market visibility doesn't necessarily ensure the institutional engagement or critical scholarship that often form the backbone of enduring legacies. During the Convening, many artists and representatives expressed frustration that for galleries, commercial priorities frequently overshadow long-term stewardship. "If it's not a very hot artist or estate, they fall to the bottom of priorities," said Davila-Villa.

> "If it's not a very hot artist or estate, they fall to the bottom of priorities."
>
> —URSULA DAVILA-VILLA

Ursula Davila-Villa (far right) speaking in the "Creative Funding Models" panel at *Creating Future Memory*

While some galleries do step in to support artists and estates, they are not all equipped or interested in managing the complexities. There is also an ever-present **risk of conflict of interest**, as previously noted. Alex Klein recounted working with an artist who felt her gallery was taking an opportunistic approach to selling works—undervaluing her practice and bypassing exhibition pathways essential to long-term visibility. Convening participant Oscar Blayton, brother of artist Betty Blayton and manager of her estate, shared a similar concern: "A lot of people who have never been involved in art before are being approached by galleries who are, frankly, predatory."

As another consideration, decreased market value can push estate representatives into difficult decisions between selling work to sustain operations and safeguarding an artist's legacy. As Antonio Lyons, Executive Director and Board President of the Valerie J. Maynard Foundation, explained, "It's heartbreaking, and it's scary to think about having to undersell to fund basic operations."

Still, especially in places outside major art world centers, galleries may be the only entities capable and willing to help by sharing knowledge, connections, and opportunities for legacy stewardship. Davila-Villa suggested that **galleries could contribute labor or services to legacy stewardship efforts** in advance of anticipated sales. "If cataloguing a lot of work is needed, and the artist or estate just doesn't have the capacity, and the gallery can do it, what has worked is for the gallery to use their expertise or team—their access to experienced people—to achieve something that is critical to building or sustaining a market. The cost of undertaking such a task could be shared between gallery and estate, once sales begin." However, it was also noted by the Convening participants that relying too heavily on a gallery's services can give the gallery disproportionate control over an artist's legacy. Many described how gallerists maintain incomplete or inaccurate inventories, might be intentionally opaque in their management, or withhold key information. Instability within the market further complicates stewardship. When galleries close, archives and unsold artworks can be lost, creating significant gaps in artists' historical records. The secondary market introduces additional opacity—once works are sold at auction, their locations, custodianship, and preservation conditions are often unknown.

Collectors can also use their funds and connections to actively support artists' legacies beyond artwork acquisitions. In addition to Ariel Aisiks' Institute for Studies on Latin American Art (ISLAA), previously discussed, and Komal Shah's Making Their Mark Foundation, gallerist-collector John Corbett acquires and preserves archival materials, and funds research, publications, exhibitions, fellowships, and public programs about the artists and works represented in his collections. In Chicago, Corbett established The Joseph J. McPhee Jr. Research Library and Listening Room, which shares space with his gallery, Corbett vs. Dempsey. Named in honor of the American jazz luminary Joe McPhee, the archive builds on Corbett's (and later, the gallery's) private collection of rare posters, publications, ephemera, and archival materials related to creative music in all its forms and 20th-century art in Chicago and the Midwest, assembled over the past 35 years. Corbett envisions The McPhee as a resource for artists, curators, and researchers conducting the kind of specialized analysis the collection uniquely supports. Initiatives like this one produce critical art historical documentation and contextualization that elevate under-recognized artists, often encouraging further scholarship.

LOOKING BEYOND THE ART WORLD

Creating Future Memory participants called for an expansive understanding of who contributes to artist legacy stewardship. "For artists like myself, many of those communities that initially uplifted us were not arts communities," said artist and Joan Mitchell Foundation Board Member Chitra Ganesh. "Organizations like the Audre Lorde Project, Queers for Economic Justice…Building archives with **organizations outside the domains of contemporary art** will be important for many artists and communities." Expanding collaboration to community organizations, activist networks, and cultural or social justice groups further enriches the record of artists' lives and ensures legacies are held by those who shaped them. This is also the case for funding: Kyle Croft described how Visual AIDS leverages documentation (photographs, biographies, ephemera) of individual artists' careers to address the HIV/AIDS epidemic. "If you can learn to articulate the significance of the individual story [and link it] to these larger narratives that many people are invested in, you can find support," he said.

Convening participants also proposed exploring the opportunity to engage with **corporations** that create digital technologies for reduced or no-cost tech solutions. One anonymous participant dreamed of "open source, accessible, and flexible database or data asset management software and best practices." Others suggested initiating conversations about collective support, or at least some sort of collective bargaining agreement with technology companies, especially those, like Adobe, that provide software, products, and services commonly used by artists. The risk with this type of agreement is that companies can shift their policies over time, changing the pricing structure or benefits once artists, estates, or legacy workers have become dependent on their products.

WHAT ABOUT GOVERNMENT AND POLICY?

With a steady decline in federal support for arts and culture, **state and local government funders have a big role to play**. Convening participants proposed targeted funding for artists, estates, and legacy organizations in smaller cities, rural areas, or regions outside major art centers.

The Minnesota Arts & Cultural Heritage Fund is an example of how state-level investment can provide targeted support for the preservation, archiving, and documentation of cultural materials. Funded by a voter-approved, state sales tax increase, this program could serve as a template for other regions and cities. Beginning in 2010, the fund will allocate more than $1.2 billion for arts and cultural heritage projects over its 25-year life.[8] While this support does not go directly to artist estates, it does buttress cultural heritage organizations such as the Minnesota Historical Society, the Somali Museum, and the Minnesota African American Heritage Museum and Gallery that contribute to the state's legacy stewardship ecosystem.

State archives and historical societies represent additional models for locally supported preservation. When funded adequately, these repositories can expand their capacity to acquire, catalogue, preserve, digitize, and provide public access to artists' papers, recordings, and other legacy materials, including photography and works on paper. By integrating legacy

8 "Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund," Minnesota's Legacy: Track the Progress, Minnesota State Legislature, Legislative Coordinating Commission, accessed May 26, 2026, https://www.legacy.mn.gov/arts-cultural-heritage-fund.

> “Artists should get a percentage of all secondary sales or auctions as standard practice.”
>
> —CONVENING PARTICIPANT

stewardship into their core missions, these institutions could ensure that the histories of local and regional artists, communities, and cultural movements are preserved and made available for research and public understanding over time.

Similarly, local governments can provide access to shared resources like digital equipment, including scanners, photography tools, and media-transfer technology. Public libraries in cities such as Los Angeles; Washington, DC; Lawrence, Kansas; and Broward County, Florida, already host digital memory labs that serve this function.

While the most important priority is securing actual, concrete funding for artist legacy stewardship, political advocacy in support of policies and laws that restore, continue, and newly allocate monies to the cultural heritage sector must be undertaken by everyone in the ecosystem and beyond. Recent court battles and campaigns have resulted in the restoration of some of the US government funding that was cut in 2025, including for the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), the Smithsonian Institution, and other agencies. We must continue to fight on all fronts for funding for the arts and artists’ legacies and to hold government leaders accountable for ensuring freedom of expression, accurate and inclusive histories, and equitable, ethical, and transparent distribution of funds.

Beyond these relatively concrete approaches, Convening participants also dared to dream of bigger-picture solutions. **Legal and structural reforms** recognizing artists and their work as a public good could allow artists to benefit financially from their own legacy, and at the same time reinvest in their stewardship efforts. For example, developing policies or laws that provide artists with resale royalties could result in more revenue to spend on legacy stewardship efforts. One Convening participant suggested, “Artists should get a percentage of all secondary sales or auctions as standard practice,” pointing to the reality that US artists currently receive nothing from the resale of their works. As this report was being written, Canada prepared to join more than 100 other countries in guaranteeing artists resale royalties.[9]

There have been efforts to address this issue in the United States, dating back to the 1960s and earlier, most notably The Artist’s Reserved Rights Transfer and Sale Agreement, also known as the Artist’s Contract or the Siegelaub-Projansky Agreement,[10] and the California

9 For a list of countries with a provision for artist resale rights, see “Countries with ARR,” Resale Right, accessed May 26, 2026, https://www.resale-right.org/countries-with-arr; for information about Canada’s artist resale right proposal, see “The Artist’s Resale Right,” CARFAC National, accessed May 26, 2026, https://www.carfac.ca/en/the-artists-resale-right.

10 For more information on this agreement, see Lauren van Haaften-Schick, “Conceptualizing Artists’ Rights: Circulations of the Siegelaub-Projansky Agreement through Art and Law,” *Oxford Handbooks Online: Law*, Oxford Academic, March 7, 2018, https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935352.013.27.

Resale Royalties Act (in effect between 1977 and 2018), as well as the currently proposed American Royalties Too Act of 2025.[11]

Similarly, **tax policy reform** regarding charitable donations is another area of focus that Convening participants mentioned might benefit artists and estates but would require extensive lobbying resources to enact. Currently, artists who donate work to a nonprofit museum or gala can only write off the value of the materials used to make the work, and then only if they also hand over the copyright. By contrast, buyers who purchase donated works as part of a nonprofit fundraiser—not through a gallery or an auction—can write them off twice: once upon purchase, and again if they donate the work to another institution. Advocating for artists to receive tax savings that more closely reflect the value of their work could free up more money to devote to legacy stewardship concerns.

Tax policy could also be reformed to include benefits specifically for artists' estates, some participants advocated. For example, Chelsea Spengemann proposed a **tax cut for artists' families or individuals managing estates**, acknowledging the personal investment required to advance a legacy for the benefit of the public. This would suggest legacy work be recast legally as a charitable cause to reflect its art historical impact.

Changes on this scale would be transformative for artists and legacy workers, but of course, tax law changes and legislative reforms require large-scale organizing, funding, and advocacy that the artist legacy stewardship ecosystem is not poised to undertake in the near future.

Countries with a provision for artist resale rights, as listed on resale-right.org.[10]

11 American Royalties Too Act, H.R.4017, 119th Cong. (2025). To read the bill, see Congress.gov, accessed May 26, 2026, https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/4017/text.

> “There is no individual in any of this. Every legacy is communal.”
>
> —JOSH T FRANCO

Emanuel Martinez with Archives of American Art staff reviewing papers at his studio in Morrison, CO.

3 Coordination and Collaboration

The third central challenge in artist legacy stewardship is the persistent lack of connection, communication, and coordination across the ecosystem. As mentioned above, legacy work is, by nature, a communal endeavor. As Josh T Franco highlighted, "There is no individual in any of this. Every legacy is communal." For example, when referring to his work at the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art, he said, "Every acquisition is a collaboration. The process of getting things in is a collaboration, and then the collaborative work that happens at the other end—not just the processing, but the reference team, the administrative team. Intellectual collaboration." Yet, throughout the *Creating Future Memory* Convening, artists, family members, and legacy workers described feeling isolated.

This fragmentation is intertwined with a series of broader issues: firstly, **the field's limited self-recognition**. "Folks involved with legacy work haven't always thought of themselves as a field," noted Thelma Golden. Because legacy stewardship spans multiple domains, expertise is often deep but dispersed, limiting opportunities to exchange knowledge, build trust, and coordinate efforts. Specialized individuals or professional organizations—such as the Catalogue Raisonné Scholars Association (CRSA), the American Institute for Conservation (AIC), and the Society of American Archivists (SAA)—do exceptional work in connecting their sectors but not necessarily in a multidisciplinary way. "I was trained as an art historian in the siloed world of great male artists where there's a full blown foundation and people are supported to do the work," continued Golden. "What we see for everyone else...is the absence of the network that makes those things possible." This disconnection, compounded by systemic inequities, makes it difficult to recognize the importance of artist legacy work as a whole, beyond the individual disciplinary silos, and to establish a shared sense of purpose. Without that collective grounding, legacy stewardship becomes harder to see, harder to name, harder to support, and harder to sustain.

Secondly, some of this isolation has to do with the **emotional challenges** that accompany legacy work. Conversations about legacy can be overwhelming, confronting artists with questions of mortality, impermanence, and worth. Some face self-doubt, impostor syndrome, the stigma of aging in a field that prizes youth and novelty, or the absence of institutional acknowledgment. As one legacy worker who attended the *Creating Future Memory* Convening noted, "A key idea is to convince artists that their work is worth remembering."

Artist legacy work demands a balance of emotional engagement and strategic planning that can feel at odds with the urgency of day-to-day practice. Within underrepresented communities, this emotional toll is often heightened. Curator Whitney Mashburn of Holding Space Archive, who works with chronically ill and disabled artists in contemporary Disability Art and who identifies as disabled, shared at the Convening, "Often, artists in our community have a shorter lifespan and have to start thinking about legacy sooner, making plans for how they want to be remembered alongside the active continuation of their work. The unpredictable nature of disability makes legacy planning more imminent. We witness the passing of our friends more often and earlier than most. It's difficult, and we have to learn how to equally hold grief alongside joy. But our shared experiences and grappling with hard realities also bring us closer to each other and our disabled ancestors." Such difficulty can discourage artists and

estates from engaging in legacy work in the first place, which in turn prevents them from reaching out for community and support.

Another barrier is the **lack of shared and accepted language**. Even the term "legacy" is contested. Some Convening participants questioned whether the word adequately captures the fluid, nonlinear, overlapping ways in which artists and communities experience time and history. A Convening participant asserted, "We need to find another term for legacy. It's about the past, the here and now, and the future all at once." Julie Ault reflected, "How do we engage historical work as urgent and alive? These questions call on us to use archives not just to preserve but to activate them to ignite the present." Teresita Fernández further noted the colonial roots of terms like legacy, canon, and estate, which reinforce hierarchies of ownership and produce invisibility. "How can we separate legacy from the legal form of its origin, and imagine more protected forms of evocative permanence?" she wondered. Antonio D. Lyons expressed that for him the term remains vital in the context of historical erasure, particularly in relationship to the history of the transatlantic slave trade: "Legacy is a living thing for us."

> "How do we engage historical work as urgent and alive? These questions call on us to use archives not just to preserve but to ignite the present."
>
> —JULIE AULT

American Sampler: Activating the Archive at the University of Michigan Museum of Art, curated by Julie Ault

This tension around language underscores a deeper challenge: without shared terms, it is difficult for artists, communities, and institutions to communicate about this work in ways that are accurate, inclusive, and actionable. Maybe, as Seitu Ken Jones suggested, "We actually need to develop another kind of term for this work, to think about it as an art form. We need to turn it over to our poets, our writers, to help us come up with a term for this thing." A participant in one of the open dialogue moments at the Convening shared that we need "a word that is about the here and now, and the past and the future all at once. And I think it's also about how our community—especially these days—develops a culture of care for the people with whom we work."

An additional barrier is the **lack of field-wide data and shared understanding** of the ecosystem's deficits. Convening participants emphasized the need for updated, systemically researched information about the current legacy landscape. A national survey or other data-collection effort could map artists' necessities and regional disparities, and identify priority areas for investment. It would also help increase recognition of the ecosystem as a whole. The abovementioned Aspen Institute Artist-Endowed Foundations Initiative (AEFI)'s National Study of Artist-Endowed Foundations has begun this process,[12] although it is limited to artist-endowed foundations, and as such, doesn't capture the full scope and diversity of the artist legacy ecosystem.

Strengthening the connective tissue of the field—through shared language, communication channels, infrastructure, and data collection—is therefore essential. These efforts would enable more equitable and effective stewardship (making resources accessible to those who do not already have them), while affirming that legacy stewardship is urgent and valuable work that requires visibility, resources, and sustained support.

CENTRALIZATION VS. DECENTRALIZATION: WHAT BASIC INFRASTRUCTURE IS NEEDED?

One of the key tensions that emerged at the Convening when discussing future governance infrastructure for the field was between centralization and decentralization. Those in support of **centralization** called for greater standardization and coherence: a more unified organization of artworks, archives, and resources across the ecosystem that would enable broader, more equitable access and less insularity. From this perspective, decentralized systems can lead to further fragmentation—dispersed authority, uneven distribution of resources and accountability, limited incentives for collaboration, and disproportionate risk placed on individual cultural workers.

A collectively funded, staffed, and visible hub could consolidate materials, reduce duplication of effort, and provide shared tools and frameworks for the field. To ensure broad accessibility, a centralized hub could support multilingual access, host culturally specific adaptations, and create a platform where legacy workers could contribute—adding to, contextually expanding, and refining the knowledge base. Dyani White Hawk described a vision for a "Center for Generational Continuity," a dedicated institution that could train legacy workers and support long-term stewardship; while Josh T Franco imagined a large-scale repository staffed with hundreds of archivists.

Other participants emphasized that centralization alone cannot adequately support the diversity and specificity of artistic practices. No single institution can hold the full range of knowledge, relationships, and legitimacy required to sustain this work. For them, a **decentralized approach** is essential: one that supports place-based stewardship, cultural specificity, and local autonomy, while allowing for experimentation and responsiveness to community needs. Ursula Davila-Villa, for example, noted that it is necessary to move away from traditional philanthropic models that concentrate resources in institutions: "I think maybe we're in a different moment where we need to be less top down and more grassroots." In this view, decentralization is not

12 Vincent, *The Artist as Philanthropist: Study Report Supplement 2018*.

a limitation but a strength—enabling plural, context-driven approaches that more accurately reflect the ecosystems from which artists emerge.

Rather than positioning these models in opposition, at the Joan Mitchell Foundation we are interested in **coordination** as a way to hold both. This approach does not seek to resolve the tension, but to build a connective infrastructure across a distributed field. Coordination can take many forms: expanding channels for communication, fostering mentorship and peer learning, developing shared frameworks and interoperable tools, and supporting public–private partnerships that allow resources, knowledge, and responsibility to circulate more effectively. In this sense, coordination operates as a form of synthesis—leveraging the scale and visibility of centralized efforts while preserving the flexibility, agency, and cultural specificity of decentralized ones. Such an approach reframes the question from where legacy stewardship should be located to how it can be connected—ensuring that no one person or group bears the full burden, while enabling a more resilient, inclusive, and adaptive ecosystem over time.

> “We can't build a field if we can't even find each other.”
>
> —CONVENING PARTICIPANT

Daisy Murray Holman, Mira Friedlaender, Neal Ambrose-Smith, and Cat Gardère, all children of artists managing their parents' legacies

INFORMATION PLATFORMS

The lack of shared visibility across the field points to the need for baseline infrastructure—**digital platforms, maps, and repositories to increase awareness of existing resources**. There are innumerable individuals and organizations working in artist legacy stewardship without significant recognition. This obscures the field itself, making it difficult for individuals to understand how their work fits into a broader ecosystem. As one Convening participant put it, “We can’t build a field if we can’t even find each other.”

Cat Gardère shared that while she manages her father’s estate in isolation, it was wonderful to recognize in the gathering that “ultimately there are so many others like me. And together we actually form a massive network, we are sort of like many sleeper cells, and collectively an incredible repository of knowledge and experience and love.” At one point during the Convening, Daisy Murray Holman, daughter of artist Elizabeth Murray, Trustee of her estate, and Executive Director of the Artists’ Legacy Foundation, asked that every family member of

an artist stand up so that she could identify them, and made a plea to other children of artists: "If you'd like to be in touch, just to talk about what it feels like to be in this position, I'd like to continue that conversation." She has since been working on a shared website for "Artists' Kids" and connecting to exchange information specific to their vantage point.

With this need for more connection and information sharing in mind, alongside this report the Joan Mitchell Foundation is launching an online Legacy Field Map to identify nonprofit organizations throughout the country moving legacy work forward in different capacities, many of which are proposing innovative and interesting models that others can learn from. Under the principle of shared responsibility, organizations can submit their information directly to the Foundation and suggest others to be added. As the directory grows organically over time, the goal is to provide visibility, as well as facilitate connection and information exchange between organizations across the country.

Participants also brought up the important role of networks in circulating and contextualizing artists' work. They expressed a need for **shared digital platforms or repositories** to store, browse, and learn about under-recognized artists. "How will you discover these artists?" asked Komal Shah. "There doesn't seem to me to be a common platform, a way to discover these stories and to learn what has already been done." She noted that learning about an artist's story is often the first step toward building support for their legacy, highlighting the need for a digital hub connecting myriad online archives. Researchers such as Agustín Diez Fischer, Senior Manager of Research and Archives at ISLAA, observed that, while specialized indexes (such as Artstor, Art Index, Research Works, among others) exist, they remain incomplete and access to their contents reflects unequal knowledge distribution, with uneven representation.

One model that could guide this work forward is the Social Networks and Archival Context (SNAC), a free, online aggregator of biographies and histories of creators that helps users find primary source documents, such as photographs, letters, and sound recordings from all over the world, across time and place. For creators who are artists, SNAC can be used to map their existing artifacts and artworks in archives and museums worldwide, as well as their social networks, facilitating innovative approaches to documenting and forefronting artists' legacies. While most of its contributing members are academic and institutional archives, it provides a Wikipedia-style collaborative, online resource for exploring multiple artists' legacies.

Help Map the Field

The Joan Mitchell Foundation is launching a Legacy Field Map, a crowd-sourced directory to support connection, knowledge-sharing, and community among those working to preserve and celebrate artists' lives and work. Learn more and submit an organization here.

joanmitchellfoundation.org/legacy-field-map

FORUMS FOR DIALOGUE

Creating Future Memory participants also noted the near-total absence of c**ommunication channels** through which artists and legacy workers might further connect, exchange knowledge, or collaborate. This situation is particularly hard on artists and estates outside established art centers, echoing widespread disparities in the art world that mirror and are impacted by local and regional disparities.

An excellent reference model that does consolidate legacy-geared conversations is Soft Network's Artist Foundations & Estate Leaders List (AFELL). AFELL has made peer learning and connection much more accessible and available for living artists, family members, professionals, and arts workers doing legacy work at all levels through a shared listserv where members exchange information on legacy work. AFELL also organizes member-led online educational sessions and regional meetups that foster visibility, learning, and community building. Recordings of the sessions, crowd-sourced resources, and a member directory are all archived online.

The Aspen Institute's Artist-Endowed Foundations Initiative (AEFI) also functions informally as a network and resource hub for leaders of artist-endowed foundations, in addition to its research and professional education work.

In addition to these online tools, an overwhelming number of participants asked for more **convenings**, both national ones like Creating Future Memory, and smaller ones. For example, Shannon Brunette, Founder of Office of Cultural Work (OCW), noted that intimate gatherings—particularly when they are organized around affinities or are culturally specific—foster more lasting and meaningful engagements and mitigate some of the power imbalances that can appear in larger groups. Other Convening participants highlighted the value of connecting in person to build trust and initiate conversations that might lead to future collaboration. "In order to really get the juice from what happened, we need to continue to get together," said Tempestt Hazel, Co-Director/Co-Founder of Sixty Inches From Center.

Although many of these gatherings already exist by discipline and professional practice, participants expressed that the power of multidisciplinary conversation and connection at Creating Future Memory, especially for those working individually, was huge. Although they are expensive and labor-intensive to organize, participants stated that convenings that span the field are where relationships deepen, ideas are tested, and alignment happens.

SHARED SERVICES

Finally, shared services provide **coordinated operational support** that enables individuals and organizations to access resources, expertise, and capacity that are difficult to sustain independently. Free or membership-based subsidized legal support models already exist, including "legal clinics" such as those hosted by the different local chapters of the Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts (VLA). Although these offerings require considerable organization and resources to start and sustain, they add value by connecting artists to vetted experts and handling many administrative aspects of the relationship. This is also the case with other pro bono or low-cost specialized service providers, like the National Heritage Responders (NHR), which delivered critical support to artists affected by the 2025 Red Hook fires in Brooklyn by assessing damage and stabilizing at-risk materials.

Similarly, University of Delaware professor Joelle Wickens's proposed Community Conservation Initiative would place trained community conservators in public libraries, "expanding access for artists and community archives, as well as public art collections, private individuals, historical societies, small museums, art centers…anyone who needs free conservation guidance and training." Traveling archivist programs (which exist around the country in Connecticut, New Jersey, North Carolina, Montana, and other states) are another interesting model, providing organizations with in-depth consultations with professional archivists.

> "We urgently need alternative, artist-centered infrastructures for archival care, estate planning, and cultural transmission."
>
> —CONVENING SURVEY RESPONDENT

HOW CAN COLLABORATION BE MODELLED FOR SUCCESS?

Ultimately, what Convening participants emphasized most is the need for stronger collaboration across the ecosystem—among artists, institutions, legacy workers, and funders. "What can we learn from artists right now about how to make sense of the world we're all experiencing?" a Convening participant asked. Another shared, "Most artists work outside traditional market systems and capitalist logic, yet existing legacy models are built around wealth and market validation." "We urgently need alternative, artist-centered infrastructures for archival care, estate planning, and cultural transmission," noted one survey respondent.

These challenges underscore the need for new strategies that respond to the evolving realities of artists' lives, and those of the cultural sector (and our societies) more broadly. Artists and legacy workers are already experimenting with more democratic and cooperative models, including collectives, alliances, and networks that bypass traditional hierarchies. These approaches prioritize mutual learning, shared authorship, and distributed care, and can be an important alternative as large institutions are under more political scrutiny and operating within even tighter budget constraints.

Community archives are a great example of this, and the research publications that Michelle Caswell, Co-Director of UCLA's Community Archives Lab, has been spearheading on feminist and liberatory memory practices offer evidence of their success and impact.

SOME BARRIERS TO OVERCOME

While the benefits are clear, it is important to acknowledge that collaboration is far from easy. A major barrier arises from persistent **mistrust and misalignment between artists and institutions**, particularly when institutions misrepresent artists' work or intentions, whether through inappropriate language, framing, or practices that fail to honor cultural protocols, or by undervaluing the relational and process-based aspects of artists' work and how it reflects their communities.

Ryan S. Flahive highlighted the "general apprehension" many Native artists feel toward predominantly white institutions, citing a long history of museums appropriating and displaying Indigenous cultural material without benefit to or the consent of the communities to whom it belongs. Similarly, Shannon Brunette recalled how Seitu Ken Jones declined to give his archives to the local historical society because "he didn't believe they would steward his legacy in a way that was true to his practice."

Lack of alignment between organizations is also a hindrance. At the Convening, Alex Klein noted that institutions sometimes feel competitive with one another. "Museums can be quite territorial because of resources or the prestige of being the ones who 'own' things," she said.

Even when values are aligned and the will to work collectively exists, doing so may feel challenging. Tempestt Hazel described how exhaustion itself becomes an obstacle: "There are a lot of social, political, and economic factors that make what is needed for collective mutuality to really flourish so challenging. Our bandwidth for giving—for contributing to non-monetary exchange as a way to sustain the work that we're doing together—is just harder to come by." For many artists and organizations (and even for some larger institutions), simply surviving leaves little energy for collaboration.

Several Convening participants suggested that a pool or a coalition of funders could combine resources to make a significant difference in the field. However, collaboration can also be difficult among **philanthropic funder**s because they have narrow missions and highly individualized priorities and interests; it can be difficult to get them to coalesce, even when they have a shared overall objective.

Models for this approach already exist: Artist Relief was a coalition of funders that came together at a massive scale, distributing more than $25 million to artists during the COVID-19 pandemic. More recently, a coalition of institutions and individuals led by the Getty banded together to provide financial relief for the Los Angeles art community in the wake of the devastating wildfires of January 2025. The Joan Mitchell Foundation was part of both of those efforts and is currently looking for other foundations, artist-endowed or otherwise, to join in funding artist legacy stewardship in the future.

Wikipedia Edit-a-thon event with Black Lunch Table

Working with artwork bequest by Marisol at Buffalo AKG Art Museum

BUILDING MOMENTUM

Among the more ambitious, yet achievable solutions shared at the Convening was Ryan S. Flahive's suggestion that legacy work training could be cocurated or cohosted by multiple residency programs by **establishing a network** among them. Smaller-scale collaborations—such as shared storage solutions, joint internship programs, or coordinated staffing and expertise exchanges—were similarly seen as practical avenues for collective impact. There was also strong interest in connecting artists and estates with archival and curatorial training programs within universities, and in building more intentional relationships between archivists and artists through ongoing training and knowledge sharing. In that sense, **cross-program collaborations** between MFA, curatorial, conservation, library science, and archives programs within or across academic institutions could support artists or estates embedded in their communities.

Equally collaborative solutions involve **creative financing approaches**, such as shared endowments, challenge grants, or matching fund models that leverage private contributions. Museums could set aside resources for legacy work within acquisitions and exhibitions budgets, particularly for retrospectives (allowing for conservators and curators to partner more extensively and intentionally with artists).

Although it is an outlier, the example of Marisol's estate is one that could potentially be adapted by other institutions at a different scale. After receiving a bequest by Marisol of her collection and property, the Buffalo AKG Art Museum raised funds for legacy stewardship in part through the fees garnered from organizing a traveling retrospective (as well as selling the artist's property, as mentioned on page 43).

Many participants urged larger institutions to coordinate efforts and invest in shared knowledge, tools, and infrastructure. **Shared stewardship agreements** were mentioned as an option to maximize impact while reducing the financial burden for any one party. Examples of this include the joint acquisition of Robert Mapplethorpe's archives by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) and the Getty, and the shared stewardship of the Johnson Publishing Company Archive by the Getty and the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC). While these arrangements deal with very high-profile collections, the model could also be applied to smaller estates that aren't as well-known.

Convening participants further dreamed of establishing a shared value of **collective responsibility** across the ecosystem that would hold individuals and organizations accountable for preventing and redressing historical and cultural erasure. What form this effort might take—a common statement of values, an official certification, or professional oath—is still unclear, but an initial agreement on shared values and principles would go a long way toward building and cementing connection across the ecosystem.

Conclusion

Echoing the many voices reflected throughout this publication, we at the Joan Mitchell Foundation believe that artist legacy stewardship is an essential, communal responsibility. It shapes how cultural memory is formed over time: what inspires us, what endures, and whose stories are valued, made visible, and carried forward. We operate within a field (and a society) shaped by long-standing structural inequities, where patterns of omission and uneven recognition have influenced what is preserved and shared. Engaging critically with these histories—and working to address their ongoing impact—is an integral part of this work. Without sustained attention to artist legacy stewardship, we risk losing entire ways of seeing, knowing, and relating to the world and to one another. If this field is to support a more representative cultural record, it must be resourced and structured in ways that more equitably distribute care, responsibility, and opportunity over time.

At the Joan Mitchell Foundation, we have been listening, learning, and recommitting to artist legacy support through this process. Moving forward, we are taking several steps towards this vision:

- Alongside this publication, we are launching a Legacy Field Map to give visibility to nonprofit organizations doing work in this area, so that we can find each other, connect, exchange, learn, and hopefully collaborate.
- We are expanding legacy-related training and curricula for artists through our fellowships and residencies, and will keep making these resources available to others publicly.
- We are exploring deeper training and funding models to return to supporting artists directly in legacy work. We expect to pilot a new "CALL Intensive" program in 2029.
- We are currently providing short-term space in our offices for estates and collectives to process their archives, and intend to continue incubating and providing resources for new legacy initiatives in the future.

These efforts are only a beginning.

Creating Future Memory Convening, May 14–16, 2025

Building the future of this field requires capacity building on all fronts. That means investing in widespread training, developing accessible tools, and promoting knowledge sharing so that artists, legacy workers, arts professionals, organizations, and institutions more broadly are better equipped to carry legacy work forward. It also means bringing more capital into the field—through creative funding models, pooling funds, and rethinking the ways artists and organizations earn and allocate their resources.

Building that future also requires sustainability. As many said during our conversations, money, time, emotional bandwidth, and capacity are finite. Instead, we need to connect people, organizations, and resources so that legacy work is not carried out in isolation, but as part of a shared, mutually reinforcing ecosystem. This work needs the commitment (and responsibility) of an intergenerational continuum—of individuals, community-based organizations, and also, most importantly, of large institutions. This requires raising awareness, shifting cultural understanding of legacy work, and building a collective infrastructure—sustained through collaboration and thought partnership, and guided by a shared commitment to cultural continuity. No one can do this alone.

The work ahead is clear: let's recognize its importance, resource it sustainably, and develop the capacity to carry it forward. We look forward to continuing conversations and developing collaborations to ensure we can reach the scope and scale that this work necessitates. Let's learn from artists, and look at creative, care-centered models. Together, let's build something that we can collectively imagine and believe in.

About the *Creating Future Memory* Convening

Creating Future Memory was an invitational convening hosted by the Joan Mitchell Foundation on May 14–16, 2025, at BRIC in Brooklyn, NY, with support from the Mellon Foundation. This gathering brought together 145 visual artists, archivists, curators, administrators, artist estate stewards, funders, and other cultural workers in a series of curated conversations, and an open forum for exchange around the topic of artist legacy planning.

AGENDA AND PRESENTERS

Wednesday, May 14

Site Visits
The Easton Foundation, The Fales Library and Special Collections, Gochman Family Collection, Institute for Studies on Latin American Art (ISLAA), and Spacetime

How to Become an Ancestor
Artist Amalia Mesa-Bains in conversation with Josh T Franco, US Latinx Art Forum and Smithsonian's Archives of American Art

Thursday, May 15

Who Gets to Be Remembered: Expanding Notions of Value
Chair: Thelma Golden, Studio Museum in Harlem; Panelists: Sam Gordon, Gordon Robichaux Gallery; Glenn Phillips, Getty Research Institute; Komal Shah, Making Their Mark Foundation; Dyani White Hawk, artist

Artists and Estates on Navigating Challenges and Vulnerability
Chair: Chelsea Spengemann, Soft Network and AFELL; Panelists: Cat Gardère, Paul Gardère Estate; Seitu Ken Jones, artist and The Black Gate; Juan Sánchez, artist

Lunchtime Think-In: "What would a robust legacy stewardship field look like?"

Living Legacies: Voices from the Field
Kwame Brathwaite, Kwame Brathwaite Archive; Teresita Fernández, artist; Theaster Gates, artist (virtual); Francis Greenburger, Art Omi Pavilions; Lisa Le Feuvre, Holt/Smithson Foundation

Paradigm Shifts: Centering Diverse Cultural Approaches to Legacy Stewardship
Chair: Ego Ahaiwe Sowinski, artist and archivist; Panelists: Drew Kahuʻāina Broderick, artist and legacy worker; Whitney Mashburn, curator (virtual)

Creative Legacies: Voices from the Field
Julie Ault, artist; Judy Baca, artist and SPARC (Social & Public Art Resource Center); Hailey Loman, LACA; Betty Yu, artist and Chinatown Art Brigade

Friday, May 16

Building Ecosystems of Stewardship
Chair: Ryan S. Flahive, Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA); Panelists: Josh T Franco, US Latinx Art Forum and Smithsonian's Archives of American Art; Alex Klein, The Contemporary Austin; Nicholas Lowe, School of the Art Institute of Chicago

Creative Funding Models
Chair: Ursula Davila-Villa, Davila-Villa & Stothart; Panelists: Ariel Aisiks, Institute for Studies on Latin American Art (ISLAA); Cathleen Chaffee, Buffalo AKG Art Museum; Kyle Croft, Visual AIDS; Mikiko Ino, KINOSAITO

Lunchtime Think-In: "How can we realize the legacy field we envision?"

Collective Stewardship: Voices from the Field
Andrew M. Elder, Roadmap for Participatory Archiving (RoPA) at UMass; Heather Hart, artist and Black Lunch Table; Anita Sharma, Women Artists Archive Miami (WAAM) (virtual); Sreedevi Sripathy, South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA); Mindy Tousley, Artists Archives of the Western Reserve (AAWR)

A Collaborative Approach for the Future of the Field
Chair: Tempestt Hazel, Sixty Inches From Center; Panelists: Zakiya Collier, archivist; Leslie Cozzi, Baltimore Museum of Art; Antonio D. Lyons, artist and Valerie J. Maynard Foundation; Marilyn Nance, artist and Valerie J. Maynard Foundation

ADVISORY COUNCIL

Lisa Darms, independent archivist and appraiser, former Executive Director of Hauser & Wirth Institute

Ryan S. Flahive, faculty member and Archivist at the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA)

Josh T Franco, Executive Director of the US Latinx Art Forum, Collector at Large at the Smithsonian's Archives of American Art, and Board Member at the Joan Mitchell Foundation

Tempestt Hazel, Co-Director/Co-Founder of Sixty Inches From Center

Seitu Ken Jones, artist and Founder of The Black Gate, with collaborative support of Shannon Brunette, Founder of Office of Cultural Work (OCW)

Chelsea Spengemann, Co-Founder and Executive Director of Soft Network

CONVENING FACILITATORS

Morgan Bassichis, performer and writer

Yanira Castro, choreographer and interdisciplinary artist

CONVENING PARTICIPANTS

Neal Ambrose-Smith, Jaune Quick-to-See Smith Foundation, Santa Fe, NM

Rocío Aranda-Alvarado, Ford Foundation, New York, NY

Elise Armani, Stony Brook University, New York, NY

Anicka Austin, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, Atlanta, GA*

Yona Backer, Third Streaming, New York, NY

Jamie Bennett, Lord Cultural Resources, Toronto, ON, Canada

Ted Berger, New York, NY

James Bewley, The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, New York, NY

Oscar Blayton, Estate of Betty Blayton, Williamsburg, VA

Steven D. Booth, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, CA

Simon Castets, LUMA Arles, Arles, France*

Pilar Castillo, Social and Public Art Resource Center, Venice, CA

Jackie Clay, Mellon Foundation, New York, NY

Ian Cofré, National Academy of Design, New York, NY*

Deborah Cullen-Morales, Mellon Foundation, New York, NY

Suzy Delvalle, New York, NY

Ashlyn Diaz, Marilyn Nance Archive, New York, NY

Agustín Diez Fischer, ISLAA, New York, NY

Allison Elliott, The Feminist Institute, New York, NY

David Ellis, Black Artists Archive, Detroit, MI

Dyani Feige, Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts, Philadelphia, PA

Cheryl Finley, AUC Art Collective, Atlanta, GA

MacKenzie Foy, Valerie J. Maynard Foundation, Baltimore, MD

Mira Friedlaender, Estate of Bilge Friedlaender, New York, NY

Chitra Ganesh, New York, NY

Alex Gartelmann, John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, WI

Ben Gillespie, Smithsonian's Archives of American Art, Washington, DC

Joy Glidden, Center for the Preservation of Artists' Legacies (CPAL), New York, NY

Margaret Graham, Voices in Contemporary Art (VoCA), New York, NY

Leslie Guy, Leslie Guy Consultancy, Chicago, IL

Deana Haggag, Mellon Foundation, New York, NY

Leslie Halaby-Moore, Samia A. Halaby Foundation, New York, NY

Deidre Hamlar, Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus, OH

Frances Harrell, Myriad Consulting, Gainesville, FL

Larissa Harris, Teiger Foundation, New York, NY

Diedra Harris-Kelley, Romare Bearden Foundation, New York, NY

Anne Helmreich, Smithsonian's Archives of American Art, Washington, DC

Melissa Ho, Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC

Belinda Holden, Yinka Shonibare Foundation, London, United Kingdom

Anthony Huberman, Giorno Poetry Systems, New York, NY

Kemi Ilesanmi, KGI Projects, New York, NY

Joan Jeffri, The Entertainment Community Fund, New York, NY

Claire Kim, Asia Art Archive in America / The Here and There Collective, New York, NY

Lisa Kim, Ford Foundation, New York, NY

Lindsay King, Asian American Art Initiative (AAAI), Stanford University, Stanford, CA

Ileen Kohn, Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros, New York, NY

Chava Krivchenia, John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygan, WI

Miranda Lash, Museum of Contemporary Art Denver, Denver, CO

Nhadya Lawes, Knight Foundation, Miami, FL*

Mary Anne Lee, Ellsworth Kelly Foundation, New York, NY

Sandy Lee, New York, NY

Shaun Leonardo, Socrates Sculpture Park, New York, NY

Melissa Levin, Jerome Foundation, New York, NY

Ruby Lopez Harper, Craft Emergency Relief Fund (CERF+), Washington, DC

Miguel Luciano, New York, NY

Nicholas Martin, New York University Special Collections, New York, NY*

Rachel Martin, Gochman Family Collection, New York, NY

Lissa McClure, Woodman Family Foundation, New York, NY

Cintia Mezza, Fundación Klemm and Universidad Nacional de San Martín, Buenos Aires, Argentina

Susette Min, University of California, Davis, CA

Marcia Minter, Indigo Arts Alliance, Portland, ME

Nyeema Morgan, Arlene Burke-Morgan Estate, Chicago, IL

Rachell Morillo, ICA Philadelphia, PA*

Manuela Moscoso, Center for Art, Research and Alliances (CARA), New York, NY

Clifford Murphy, Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, Washington, DC

Daisy Murray Holman, The Estate of Elizabeth Murray & Artists' Legacy Foundation, San Francisco, CA

Hannah Myall, Hauser & Wirth Institute, New York, NY*

Shervone Neckles, New York, NY

Steven O'Banion, Glenstone, Potomac, MD

Pepón Osorio, Philadelphia, PA

Chris Park, Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, New York, NY

Ebony G. Patterson, Chicago, IL

Antonia Perez, New York, NY

Ysabel Pinyol Blasi, Monira Foundation, Jersey City, NJ

Fernanda Pitta, Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo (MAC USP), São Paulo, Brazil

Hana Porter, Theodore Roszak Estate, New York, NY

Ellie Porter, London, United Kingdom

Cynthia Post Hunt, Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art & the Momentary, Bentonville, AR

Jacob Proctor, Smithsonian's Archives of American Art, Washington, DC

Rachel Reichert, Ruth Foundation for The Arts, Milwaukee, WI*

Hallie Ringle, ICA Philadelphia, PA

Sur Rodney (Sur), New York, NY

Katy Rogers, Dedalus Foundation, New York, NY

Julia Schwartz, Julia Schwartz Fine Art Services, San Francisco, CA

Nellie Scott, Corita Art Center (Corita Kent), Los Angeles, CA

Rashid Shabazz, Critical Minded, New York, NY

Lauren Shadford, Voices in Contemporary Art (VoCA), New York, NY

Jean Shin, New York, NY

Jess Solomon, Valerie J. Maynard Foundation, Baltimore, MD

Jill Sterrett, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI

Mary Clare Stevens, Mike Kelley Foundation for the Arts, Los Angeles, CA

Anna Stothart, Davila-Villa & Stothart, New York, NY

James Merle Thomas, Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, New York, NY

Joelle Wickens, University of Delaware, Newark, DE

Zola Yi, Ruth Foundation for the Arts, Milwaukee, WI

Kibra A. Yohannes, Mellon Foundation, New York, NY

* Indicates affiliation at the time of convening.

About This Publication

This document is coauthored by Solana Chehtman, Director of Artist Programs, Joan Mitchell Foundation and Sharon Mizota, an art critic and archival consultant, with editorial support from Jenny Gill, Director of Communications, Joan Mitchell Foundation and Christa Blatchford, Executive Director, Joan Mitchell Foundation.

The publication draws on the insights and stories from the Convening presenters and participants—both named and anonymous. It was additionally informed by individual conversations and interviews conducted by Solana Chehtman between 2023–25 and by Sharon Mizota in 2025. The text further reflects the Foundation's institutional learning from the Creating a Living Legacy (CALL) program (2007–present), and ongoing reflection on the needs of artists, practitioners, and institutions.

HOW WERE CONTRIBUTIONS COLLECTED AND PROCESSED?

To ensure the Convening was a safe space for participants to share experiences and ideas without fear of repercussions, the sessions and conversations were not recorded. Instead, two notetakers were engaged to write down salient points and quotes during the gathering. These notetakers were coauthor Sharon Mizota, and Reina Gattuso, a PhD student in cultural anthropology at The City University of New York. Their notes necessarily reflect their perspectives and biases.

Convening participants were asked at various moments to write down their thoughts on note cards that were collected and posted during the event in three displays: the Wall of Whys ("Why do you do this work?"), the Wall of Questions, and of the Wall of Ideas. Participants also took notes on iPads that were provided during the participatory lunchtime sessions, following the prompts: "What would a robust legacy stewardship field look like?" and "How can we realize the legacy field we envision?" Comments were also gathered via open forum moments at the program, a post-Convening survey, and over e-mail.

Finally, in the time it took to produce this publication, Solana Chehtman continued attending conferences and convenings in the field, as well as reading on the topic. Some relevant contributions are referenced in this text.

Where speakers and contributors are known, all direct quotes were vetted with the person to whom they are attributed. If someone was uncomfortable revealing their name, role, or organizational affiliation in association with a quote, that information was removed or generalized in consultation with them. Other anonymous quotes were sourced from cards, the survey, and from digital notes, and no name was attached to the contribution.

REPORT REVIEWERS

Jamie Bennett
Lisa Darms
Ursula Davila-Villa
Teresita Fernández
Ryan S. Flahive
Josh T Franco
Kemi Ilesanmi
Melissa Levin
Glenn Phillips
Sarah Roberts
Katy Rogers
Lauren Shadford
Jean Shin
Chelsea Spengemann
Christine J. Vincent

ADDITIONAL RESEARCH INTERVIEWEES

Philip Aarons, collector, Millennium Partners

Tomie Arai, artist◊

Negar Azimi, Bidoun

Miguel de Baca, Getty Foundation

Sam Bogner, Neuberger Museum of Art, Purchase College, SUNY

Kalia Brooks, NXTHVN*

Christian Camacho-Light, A.I.R. Gallery

Michelle Caswell, UCLA Community Archives Lab

Robin Clark, Wolf Kahn Foundation

David Conway, David C. Driskell Center, University of Maryland, College Park

Matthew Deleget, MINUS SPACE

Tom di Maria, Creative Growth Art Center*

Leah Dickerman, Museum of Modern Art (MoMA)

Marcos Dimas, artist◊

Jason Dubs, Museum of Modern Art (MoMA)*

Francesca Esmay, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum

Turry M. Flucker, Terra Foundation

Libertad Guerra, The Clemente Soto Vélez Cultural & Educational Center

Madison Halaby Gordon, Samia A. Halaby Foundation

Andrea Hanley, Native Arts and Cultures Foundation (NACF)*

Paige Heurtin, Alternate ROOTS*

Samuel Hoi, Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA)*

Mildred Howard, artist◊

Arlan Huang, artist◊

Marci S. Kwon, Asian American Art Initiative, Stanford University

Joan Lander, Nā Maka o ka ʻĀina

Kathleen Landy, The Feminist Institute

Mia Locks, Museums Moving Forward

Marina Dias Lujan, Alternate ROOTS

Carolyn L. Mazloomi, artist, writer, independent curator, Women of Color Quilters Network

Sarah Milligan, Oklahoma Oral History Research Program (OOHRP), Oklahoma State University

Amanda Murray, Documentary Heritage and Preservation Services for New York (DHPSNY)

Deborah Obalil, Association of Independent Colleges of Art and Design (AICAD)

Wendy Olsoff, P·P·O·W

Julie Pearson Littlethunder, Oklahoma Oral History Research Program (OOHRP), Oklahoma State University*

Gabriel Perez-Barreiro, Museo Universidad de Navarra

Paul Pfeiffer, artist◊

Emily Wei Rales, Glenstone

Paul Rucker, artist

Mary Sabbatino, Galerie Lelong

Wendy Shenefelt, Alternate ROOTS

Allan Schwartzman, Schwartzman&

Yayoi Shionoiri, Powerhouse Arts

Mimi Smith, artist◊

Wendy Red Star, artist

Sally Szwed, The Clemente Soto Vélez Cultural & Educational Center

Jack Tchen, Rutgers University – Newark (RU-N)

Jodi Throckmorton, John Michael Kohler Arts Center (JMKAC)

Susanne Vielmetter, VIELMETTER LOS ANGELES

Christine J. Vincent, Artist-Endowed Foundations Initiative, Aspen Institute

Amy Whitaker, New York University (NYU)

Marie Williams Chant, The Feminist Institute

Xiaoyu Weng, Art in General

Mariam Zulfiqar, Artangel

* Indicates affiliation at the time of interview

◊ Indicates artists who participated in the Joan Mitchell Foundation's Creating a Living Legacy (CALL) initiative

IMAGE CREDITS

All photos from *Creating Future Memory* Convening by Heather Cromartie

Page 4 - Photo by Christopher Wormwold, courtesy of LACA

Page 18 - Photo by Elisabeth Bernstein, courtesy of Teresita Fernández

Page 20 - Photo by Wyatt Conlon, courtesy of Theaster Gates Studio

Page 22 - Photo by Ira Graham, courtesy of the Columbus Museum of Art

Page 22 - Photo by Chika Kobari, courtesy of KINOSAITO

Page 23 - Photo by Mel Yimeng Chu, courtesy of Cai Studio

Page 25 - Photo by Stefano Castro, courtesy of ISLAA

Page 25 - Photo by Olympia Shannon, courtesy of ISLAA

Page 27 - Photo by Neal Ambrose-Smith, courtesy of Jaune Quick-to-See Smith Foundation

Page 28 - Photo by Ryan Edmund Thiel, courtesy of Sixty Inches From Center

Page 28 - Photo by Sancia Miala Shiba Nash, courtesy of Pu'uhonua Society, KEY Project and its Living Library

Page 31 - Photo by David Ellis, courtesy of Dyani White Hawk

Page 33 - Photo by Dylan Lorenz, courtesy of VoCA

Page 34 - Photo by Jason S. Ordaz, courtesy of Institute of American Indian Arts

Page 36 - Photos by John Dennis, courtesy of NXTHVN

Page 40 - Photo by Carla Velazco, courtesy of Juan Sánchez

Page 43 - Courtesy of Visual AIDS

Page 44 - Photo by Chelsea Spengemann, courtesy of Soft Network

Page 44 - Courtesy of Artists Archives of the Western Reserve

Page 45 - Artwork © Carl Cheng, photograph by Alex Boeschenstein, courtesy of The Contemporary Austin

Page 46 - Photo by Antonio Lyons, courtesy of Valerie J. Maynard Foundation

Page 54 - Photo by Josh T Franco

Page 56 - Photo by Charlotte Smith, courtesy of the University of Michigan Museum of Art

Page 58 - Photo courtesy of Daisy Murray Holman

Page 63 - Via Wikipedia Commons user Heathart, CC BY-SA 4.0

Page 63 - Artwork: Collection Buffalo AKG Art Museum; Bequest of Marisol, 2016 (2021:54a-v); image courtesy Buffalo AKG Art Museum, photo by Cathleen Chaffee

Glossary of Referenced Organizations & Initiatives

A

American Institute for Conservation
culturalheritage.org

Aminah Robinson Legacy Project, Columbus Museum of Art (CMA)
columbusmuseum.org/aminah-robinson-legacy-project

Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution
aaa.si.edu

Art Index
about.ebsco.com/products/research-databases/art-index

Art Omi Pavilions
artomipavilions.org

Artist Communities Alliance (ACA)
artistcommunities.org

Artist Foundations & Estate Leaders List (AFELL), Soft Network
softnetwork.art/afell-home

Artist Initiative, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA)
sfmoma.org/artists-artworks/research/artist-initiative

Artist Relief
artistrelief.org

Artist-Endowed Foundations Initiative (AEFI), Aspen Institute
aspeninstitute.org/programs/philanthropy-and-social-innovation/artist-endowed-foundations-initiative

Artists Archives of the Western Reserve (AAWR)
artistsarchives.org

Artists' Legacy Foundation
artistslegacyfoundation.org

Artstor
jstor.org/site/artstor

Asia Art Archive
aaa.org.hk/en

Asian Cultural Council (ACC)
asianculturalcouncil.org

Association of Independent Colleges of Art and Design (AICAD)
aicad.org

Audre Lorde Project
alp.org

B

Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA)
artbma.org

Black Lunch Table
blacklunchtable.com

Buffalo AKG Art Museum
buffaloakg.org

Burns Halperin Report
studioburns.media/series/the-burns-halperin-report

C

Cai Foundation
cai-foundation.org

Cai Guo-Qiang Archive
caiguoqiang.com/archive

Canadian Artists' Representation/Le Front des artistes canadiens (CARFAC)
carfac.ca

Catalogue Raisonné Scholars Association (CRSA)
catalogueraisonne.org

Center for Art Law
itsartlaw.org

Center for Art, Research and Alliances (CARA)
cara-nyc.org

Chinatown Art Brigade
chinatownartbrigade.org

Coalition of Small Arts NYC (CoSA NYC)
aaartsalliance.org/coalition-of-small-arts-nyc

Community Conservation Initiative, University of Delaware
sites.udel.edu/jwickens/community-conservation-initiative

Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts (CCAHA)
ccaha.org

Corbett vs. Dempsey
corbettvsdempsey.com

Craft Emergency Relief Fund (CERF+)
cerfplus.org

Creative Legacy Fellowship, Bennington College
bennington.edu/news-and-features/announcing-2025-field-work-term-fellows

D

Davila-Villa & Stothart
dvs.art

Denver Public Library
history.denverlibrary.org

Digital Memory Lab, Broward County Library
broward.org/library/DigitalMemoryLab

Digital Preservation (Memory Lab), DC Public Library
dclibrary.org/using-the-library/digital-preservation-memory-lab

DIY Memory Lab, Lawrence Public Library
lplks.org/diy-memory-lab

DIY Memory Lab at Central Library, Los Angeles Public Library
lapl.org/fil/node/50226

E

Estate of Betty Blayton
bettyblayton.com

Estate of Elizabeth Murray
elizabethmurrayart.org

Estate of Paul Gardère
paulgardere.com

F

Fales Library and Special Collections, New York University (NYU)
library.nyu.edu/about/collections/special-collections-and-archives

Frick Art Research Library
frick.org/library

G

Getty Research Institute
getty.edu/research-institute

Gochman Family Collection
gochmancollection.com

H

Harry Bertoia Foundation
harrybertoia.org

Hauser & Wirth Institute
hauserwirthinstitute.org

Helen Frankenthaler Foundation
frankenthalerfoundation.org

Historic Artists' Homes and Studios (HAHS), National Trust for Historic Preservation
artistshomes.org

Holding Space Archive
holdingspacearchive.com

Holt/Smithson Foundation
holtsmithsonfoundation.org

I

I is for Institute, ICA Philadelphia
iisforinstitute.icaphila.org

Indigo Arts Alliance
indigoartsalliance.me

Institute for Studies on Latin American Art (ISLAA)
islaa.org

Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA)
iaia.edu

Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS)
imls.gov

J

J. Paul Getty Trust
getty.edu/about

Joan Mitchell Foundation
joanmitchellfoundation.org

John Michael Kohler Arts Center
jmkac.org

Joseph J. McPhee Jr. Research Library and Listening Room, Corbett vs. Dempsey
corbettvsdempsey.com

K

KINOSAITO
kinosaito.org

Kwame Brathwaite Archive
kwamebrathwaite.com

L

Leon Levy Foundation
leonlevy.org

Los Angeles Contemporary Archive (LACA)
lacarchive.com

Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA)
lacma.org

M

Making Their Mark Foundation
makingtheirmark.org

Minnesota African American Heritage Museum and Gallery
maahmg.org

Minnesota Arts & Cultural Heritage Fund
legacy.mn.gov/arts-cultural-heritage-fund

Minnesota Historical Society
mnhs.org

Minnesota Legislature, Legislative Coordinating Commission
lcc.mn.gov

Museum of Modern Art Archives
moma.org/research/archives

Museums Moving Forward (MMF)
museumsmovingforward.com

N

Nā Maka o ka ʻĀina
namaka.com

National Heritage Responders
culturalheritage.org/resources/emergencies/national-heritage-responders

National Museum of African American History & Culture, Smithsonian Institution
nmaahc.si.edu

National Trust for Historic Preservation
savingplaces.org

Native American Artists Resource Collection at the Billie Jane Baguley Library and Archives, Heard Museum
heard.org/native-american-artists-resource-collection

NXTHVN
nxthvn.com

O

Office of Cultural Work (OCW)
officeofculturalwork.org

P

Powerhouse Arts
powerhousearts.org

R

Research Works
researchworks.oclc.org/archivegrid

Roadmap for Participatory Archiving (RoPA), University of Massachusetts Boston (UMass Boston)
ropa.umb.edu

Romare Bearden Foundation
beardenfoundation.org

RxART
rxart.org

S

Santa Fe Indian Market, Southwestern Association for Indian Arts (SWAIA)
swaia.org

Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library (NYPL)
nypl.org/schomburg

School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC)
saic.edu

Sixty Inches From Center
sixtyinchesfromcenter.org

Smithsonian Institution
si.edu

Social Networks and Archival Context (SNAC)
snaccooperative.org

Social & Public Art Resource Center (SPARC)
sparcinla.org

Society of American Archivists (SAA)
archivists.org

Soft Network
softnetwork.art

Somali Museum
somalimuseum.org

South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA)
saada.org

Spacetime
spacetimecc.com

Studio Museum in Harlem
studiomuseum.org

T

Teiger Foundation
teigerfoundation.org

The Black Gate
seitujonesstudio.com/legacy

The Contemporary Austin
thecontemporaryaustin.org

The Easton Foundation
theeastonfoundation.org

The Valerie J. Maynard Foundation
valeriejmaynardfoundation.org

U

UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center
chicano.ucla.edu

UCLA Community Archives Lab
communityarchiveslab.ucla.edu

University of Delaware
udel.edu

US Latinx Art Forum
uslaf.org

V

Visual AIDS
visualaids.org

Voices in Contemporary Art (VoCA)
voca.network

Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts New York (VLA)
vlany.org

W

Women Artists Archive Miami (WAAM)
wearewaam.org

Y

Yinka Shonibare Foundation
yinkashonibarefoundation.com

Z

Zero Art Fair
zeroartfair.com

Legacy Planning Resources

The Artist's Estate: A Handbook for Artists, Executors, and Heirs, by Loretta Würtenberger (Hatje Cantz, 2016)
hatjecantz.com/products/17876-the-artists-estate

Aspen Institute, Artist-Endowed Foundations Initiative | AEFI, *The Artist as Philanthropist Vol. 1, Findings: Overview of the Field* (free downloadable publication)
aspeninstitute.org/publications/volume-one-artist-philanthropist-strengthening-next-generation-artist-endowed-foundatio

Aspen Institute, Artist-Endowed Foundations Initiative | AEFI, *The Artist as Philanthropist Vol. 2, Considerations in Practice* (free downloadable publication)
aspeninstitute.org/blog-posts/artist-philanthropist-strengthening-next-generation-artist-endowed-foundations/

CERF+, *Legacy Guide* (free downloadable publication)
cerfplus.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/cerf-business-legacy-finalweb4.pdf

Creative Legacies: Artists' Estates and Foundations, edited by Kathy Battista and Bryan Faller (Lund Humphries, 2020)
lundhumphries.com/products/creative-legacies

Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts, Recorded Webinars and Presentations (online resource
ccaha.org/recorded-webinars-and-presentations

Joan Mitchell Foundation, CALL: Creating a Living Legacy, *Career Documentation for the Visual Artist: A Legacy Planning Workbook & Resource Guide* (free downloadable publication and audiobook)
joanmitchellfoundation.org/career-documentation-for-the-visual-artist

Joan Mitchell Foundation, CALL: Creating a Living Legacy, *Estate Planning for Visual Artists: A Workbook for Attorneys & Executors* (free downloadable publication)
joanmitchellfoundation.org/estate-planning-for-visual-artists-a-workbook-for-attorneys-executors

Joan Mitchell Foundation, CALL: Creating a Living Legacy, *Estate Planning Workbook for Visual Artists* (free downloadable publication)
joanmitchellfoundation.org/estate-planning-for-visual-artists

UCLA Community Archives Lab, *Assessing the Affective Impact of Community Archives: A Toolkit* (free downloadable publication)
communityarchiveslab.ucla.edu/toolkit

University of Massachusetts Boston, Roadmap for Participatory Archiving (RoPA) (online resource)
ropa.umb.edu

JOAN MITCHELL
FOUNDATION

137 West 25th Street, 2nd Floor
New York, NY 10001

212-524-0100

www.joanmitchellfoundation.org
info@joanmitchellfoundation.org

Artwork detail featured on cover:
Troy Montes Michie, *Knickknacks*, 2025.
Cut paper, photograph, thread, acrylics on paper, magazine pages, ink, graphite paper, staples, and clip, 25 × 25 inches.
©Troy Montes Michie, courtesy of the artist.