

CiMAM 2024  
ANNUAL CONFERENCE

DEC 6-8  
LOS ANGELES

**CiMAM  
2024**

**Annual  
Conference  
Proceedings**

AT MOCA, HAMMER  
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# Day 1 , Part 1

## Friday, December 6

### The Geffen

### Contemporary at MOCA

## *What is our Agency? The Contemporary Art Museum and Climate Crisis*

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Keynote Speech: Mark Bradford, Artist, Los Angeles, USA. *Arts Education and the Potential for Impact.*

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J Fiona Ragheb, Deputy Director for Curatorial and Exhibitions, Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), Los Angeles. *Sustainability ≠ Sacrifice*

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Kelsey Shell, Environmental & Sustainability Strategist, MOCA, Los Angeles. *Cultivating Empathy in Sustainable Museum Practices*

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Daniel Vega, Deputy Director for Exhibitions and Conservation, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, Bilbao. *Environmental Sustainability at the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao*

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Cecilia Winter, Project Specialist, Getty Conservation Institute, Los Angeles. *Managing Collections Environments for a Sustainable Future (and Present)*

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John Kenneth Paranada, Curator of Art and Climate Change, Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia, Norwich. *Ecological Awakening of the Museum: Curating Art & Climate Change at the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia*

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## Friday, December 6

### The Geffen

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Michael Maltzan, Principal, Michael Maltzan Architecture, Inc., Los Angeles. *Two Museums, and the Potentials of Time and Distance*

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Andrea Lissoni, Artistic Director, Haus der Kunst, Munich. *Another Kind of Monument*

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Sara Zewde, Principal, Studio Zewde, New York. *What Are Museum Landscapes?*



Day 2  
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Manuel Segade, Director, Museo Nacional Centro  
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Mai Abu ElDahab, Director, Mophradat, Brussels.  
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Ibrahim Mahama, Artist and Founder, Savannah  
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Studio, Ghana, in conversation with Yesomi Umolu,  
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Andrea Fraser, Professor, UCLA, Los Angeles.  
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Walid Raad, Artist and Professor, Bard College,  
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Two drops per heartbeat: A free-fall in the Thyssen-  
Bornemisza collection.*

Day 3  
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*Sustainable Communities:  
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Keynote Speech: Candice Hopkins, Executive Director  
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Edgar Calel, Artist, San Juan Comalapa, Guatemala.  
*Man runojelta k’o modo ni K’ ayix / No todo se puede  
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Pablo José Ramírez, Curator, Hammer Museum,  
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Taloi Havini, Artist, Brisbane. *Meeting the Matriarchy.  
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Djon Mundine, Artist, Curator, Activist and Writer,  
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**Day 1, Part 1**

**Friday, December 6**

**The Geffen Contemporary  
at MOCA**

***What is our Agency?***

***The Contemporary Art***

***Museum and Climate Crisis***



# *Arts Education and the Potential for Impact*

Mark Bradford,  
Artist, Los Angeles, USA.

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## *Biography*

Mark Bradford (b. 1961 in Los Angeles; lives and works in Los Angeles) is a contemporary artist best known for his large-scale abstract paintings created out of paper. Characterized by its layered formal, material, and conceptual complexity, Bradford's work explores social and political structures that objectify marginalized communities and the bodies of vulnerable populations.

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## *Arts Education and the Potential for Impact*

I'm going to talk about sustainability, and I'm going to take you through how I came to be passionate about social justice from an artist's point of view. This has probably been something that I've been thinking about my whole life. It was always there, but I felt I had to focus a little bit more on the art career part of it. And so I'm just going to take you through my thinking. It's more than a slide presentation, because I think that's more important now. There will be moments where I'll show you when it was great, and sometimes when it wasn't so great, when working with different communities and talking about class.

I basically grew up in Foxyé Hair. And for me, this [beauty shop] was a safe space. It was the first





space where I understood a community that was safe. And that safe space was mainly matriarchal. I had hair back then, so this was in the eighties, and in the eighties AIDS was ravaging the black community, ravaging the gay community. And people were telling me constantly that I had no value, my body had no value, there wasn't even a name for it. They wouldn't even utter the name. So, this idea of working against the grain when people are telling you that you don't have value, I feel like we're experiencing that right now. So, this idea stayed in my head, of creating safe spaces in a community.

I went to CalArts and, for my graduate degree in 1997, for the first time I was thinking wouldn't it be interesting to pull something from another community? So, I brought a marching band from Watts that I knew, and they performed at the closing of the CalArts fashion show. It was great for the institution, and it was great for me as an artist, but it was a failure because I did not protect my partners. These were young, underage people, and I did not make a space to protect them from all the wild nudity and crazy stuff that CalArts does. It was like, "We're Cal Arts people, and this is what we do." So, very early on I got in my head that, for a real partnership and collaboration to work, everybody must be at the table. So, I thought very much about the idea of collaborations and partnerships, and power and access, and who has it and who doesn't, and how to make everything more equitable.

I was part of the *Maleteros* project at inSite. And I consider this more of a successful project, although I was the artist and at the top of the pyramid. But to be honest with you, this was inSite and a big thing. I was *just* an artist. And the partnership was *Maleteros*. The reason why it was successful is because I was able to navigate with inSite. I was able to have conversations with them. But let me be very clear: artists are often not at the top of the pyramid. Often, you have to navigate, and do what you can do, but you're just one of the artists and you hope that you can push through. You hope that the institution listens. This was very early in my career, but I was working with baggage handlers and we were able to cast more light onto them, make them part of the union. It was a successful project. People didn't even know that there were baggage handlers at the border. And I met them only when I was undergoing secondary inspection, because as a black man going back and forth across the border, you get pulled out. And I said, well, what are you doing? Oh, we're *maleteros*, we do bags. So, I was able to throw light on this informal economy.

But you have to do a lot of listening to what they need. And sometimes what they need is not very sexy,

and it's not made for an art journal. It's really basic. We want space, we want uniforms, etc. So, returning to this idea of having real collaborations, you have to understand that, no matter how open we think we are, the power dynamic is not equal. So, you need to find ways of having real conversations about what they need and how to make that partnership more equitable. I consider this one more successful.

Okay, so on to the Venice Biennale. I feel like this was the first time I was at the top of the pyramid. That I was going to dictate. That I was going to decide how to do this and what I was going to use my voice for. And it is very interesting to have a stage that big and decide that the partnership with Rio Terà — a prison co-op — is going to be at the same level as the pavilion. You have to really push. You have to demand a kind of equity, because often in museums there's a director and somewhere down the line is the education director, but they don't have the same power. They're not on the same level. And this hierarchical thing, which is an older model, gets replicated, and replicated. But people who come to museums, especially on school buses, usually look like me. So, I was introduced to art usually on a school bus, but it is not at the same level that we get exposed to exhibitions. So, these are the kind of things that I was always thinking about.

When working with women, they were very clear. It is interesting, when you really work with people, they're very clear about what they need. And you have to give them what they need first so that the collaboration takes off and becomes a living vessel. People sitting there and feeling grateful is a colonizer. That's colonizing. But for a person to own a project, you have got to listen to them, and you've got to be willing to deconstruct your ideas of what you need. You know, we use the words partnership and collaboration all the time, but what do they mean? It's really just a conversation between two entities, or two people, or two partners. But for everyone to be heard, you must do more listening in the beginning.

I was very uncomfortable about going to Venice, doing the whole three months thing, and then leaving them. How is that creating a sustainable model? I felt like five years, and then we extended it because of the pandemic. So, it became seven years — completely sustainable. We have enough to run the store, to run the programs, and have increased their budget. And so, for me, that's a success. But as an artist, I did not start off with this type of confidence 25 years ago. It's something you move through as you get more confidence in yourself. You're able to make bigger moves. That's all I can say. I can now make more



things central to the conversation, but I didn't start there. You don't start there. You just hope down the line that you'll have the possibility of certain things.

I'm showing you different models. You have a show at a gallery, Hauser & Wirth, and they're interested in selling your artwork. I can make the decision just to sell the artwork or I can make the decision to do something else. And since this was in Menorca, on the news at the time I was seeing boat after boat capsizing in the Mediterranean. I felt that I wanted to collaborate with an organization that works with refugees, and I wanted a project that we could all do together. I took half the gallery and, through working every day, we had conversations about policy. It's an education lab. And most of these children were refugees or were on the island, but in a working-class environment — not art, but I would say they were art-adjacent. And so, it was really interesting to work on a project with them. I really worked on this. But you have to be there quite a bit or it doesn't work. Every single day, and you have these breakout conversations with them, but you have to be there.

I believe in going where I want to go. If I want to do something, I get on a plane and I go somewhere. I'll knock on a door if I'm interested. I don't wait for you to knock on a door and then come back to me. If I want to do something, I just do it. I was in Guadalajara and I like Guadalajara, and I thought, oh, it would be really nice to have a show here. And I knocked on this door and said I'd like to have a show here, you down for it? And they said yes. But let me explain something to you. It was very important to work with Viviana, because I had an idea. In a museum space, I wanted to do a collaborative project with young artists, who were either in school or were art-adjacent from a different background. Some were in university and some in foster care. It was a large group. And I put an ad in the paper. I paid for the whole thing. I got 300 people. We whittled it down and we did two sessions, one in the morning, one in the evening. But what we worked on together every day was a project. A mural. But they also brought their own work. And we had breakout sessions. So, after we'd worked on Mark Bradford, we'd have breakout sessions. They'd bring their work and I'd critique it, and we'd go back and forth. They were paid. Nothing was sold. I understood who I was. I knew that I was Mark Bradford and I was taking that power and lending it: giving young people access to the critiques that I could offer them. And at the end, we would have lunch every day together, then we would work. But it took a certain type of director to allow me to do something that wasn't a "Mark Bradford show."

I mean, everybody must be on board in a partnership: from the director to the artist, to the partnerships, to the people you work for. Everybody must be in agreement that we all philosophically feel the same. And I think it's still important today that philosophically, globally, if we agree, we have to find a way to work together.

At the end, they had a show of their work. I asked the director to give me some space, and they had their opening. So, obviously, with this kind of navigating power and understanding, I'm not the same Mark Bradford as I was in the beauty shop a long time ago. But back when I was creating bridges and giving access to different classes, having different people enter into this, conversation is what I think will make it vital. I was fascinated by the idea of sustainability. But how do we sustain real partnerships? I grew up in a business, a little business, a beauty shop that was not sustainable: we never bought it, and once the landlords raised the rent, we'd move and move and move. So, this idea of sustainability has always been central to me. And, how do we sustain a partnership so that the partners feel heard? We talk about collaboration. I am interested in sustainability. How do we sustain what we do? And right now, when things are not looking good, how do we sustain and keep bridging those bridges between people, even when they agree? We are not all coming to the table with the same tools, but we're all coming to the table with the same desire to be here.

Speaking of that, back to Leimert Park. I wanted to create a safe space for art because I believe that what we do and the ideas that we put on the table are important. I believe you put them in a local community and let the community decide. You bring local people in. The little boy going to the store, he can go in and see a contemporary art show. But here's the funny thing: that used to be where I bought beauty supplies, straight across the street from the hair salon. And now it's an art space.

Young people come in and we give contemporary lectures. People from the local community come in. But what's important for me is that it's just *in* the community. I believe in what we do. If we believe in what we do, we don't stop doing it. Now, we can move what we do to other communities, and that is a different thing. Sometimes we can get spoiled because we want everybody to come to us: we feel completely open and completely comfortable. Generally, that's not usually going to work. They're going put on their best clothes and come to MOCA and stand like this. But if you go to them, it makes us more vulnerable and it makes them feel they have a

little bit more solid ground. And it's not always going to go the way you think it's going to go. And we have to be okay with that.

So, we give lectures and the community comes. And sometimes they agree and sometimes they don't. But that for me is the beauty shop. And creating safe spaces for us, but not acknowledging that sometimes right outside of those safe spaces is violence. Because when I was a kid, sometimes I'd walk right out of that door of my safe space, my beauty shop, and be called a faggot. So, we still need to acknowledge that there is a threat of violence in what we do. Not everybody is going to believe, but that's okay.

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# *Sustainability ≠ Sacrifice*

Fiona Ragheb, Deputy Director  
for Curatorial and Exhibitions, Los  
Angeles County Museum of Art  
(LACMA), Los Angeles, USA.

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## *Biography*

J. Fiona Ragheb is a museum administrator and registered architect with a dynamic background in art, architecture, and museums. Currently Deputy Director for Curatorial and Exhibitions at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, she oversees the Museum's curatorial staff, exhibition programs, national and international partnerships, and exhibition planning for the new David Geffen Galleries designed by Swiss architect Peter Zumthor. She previously served as Director of Art Programs at Public Art Fund in New York City. In that role she bridged cultural, corporate, and civic communities and commissioned contemporary art works for Lincoln Center's David Geffen Hall and Newark Airport's New Terminal A. Over the course of her career, she has collaborated extensively with artists and architects including Nina Chanel Abney, Jenny Holzer, Jacolby Satterwhite, and Frank Gehry to realize their creative visions. During her tenure as Associate Curator for Exhibitions and Collections at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, she organized numerous exhibitions including the award-winning *Frank Gehry, Architect*, and *Dan Flavin: The Architecture of Light*, and oversaw the opening of the Guggenheim



Museum Bilbao. She has also advised on several new museum and cultural facilities including the Meixihu International Culture & Arts Center, Changsha (China), the Saadiyat Island Cultural District, Abu Dhabi (UAE), and the Williams College Museum of Art (Massachusetts).

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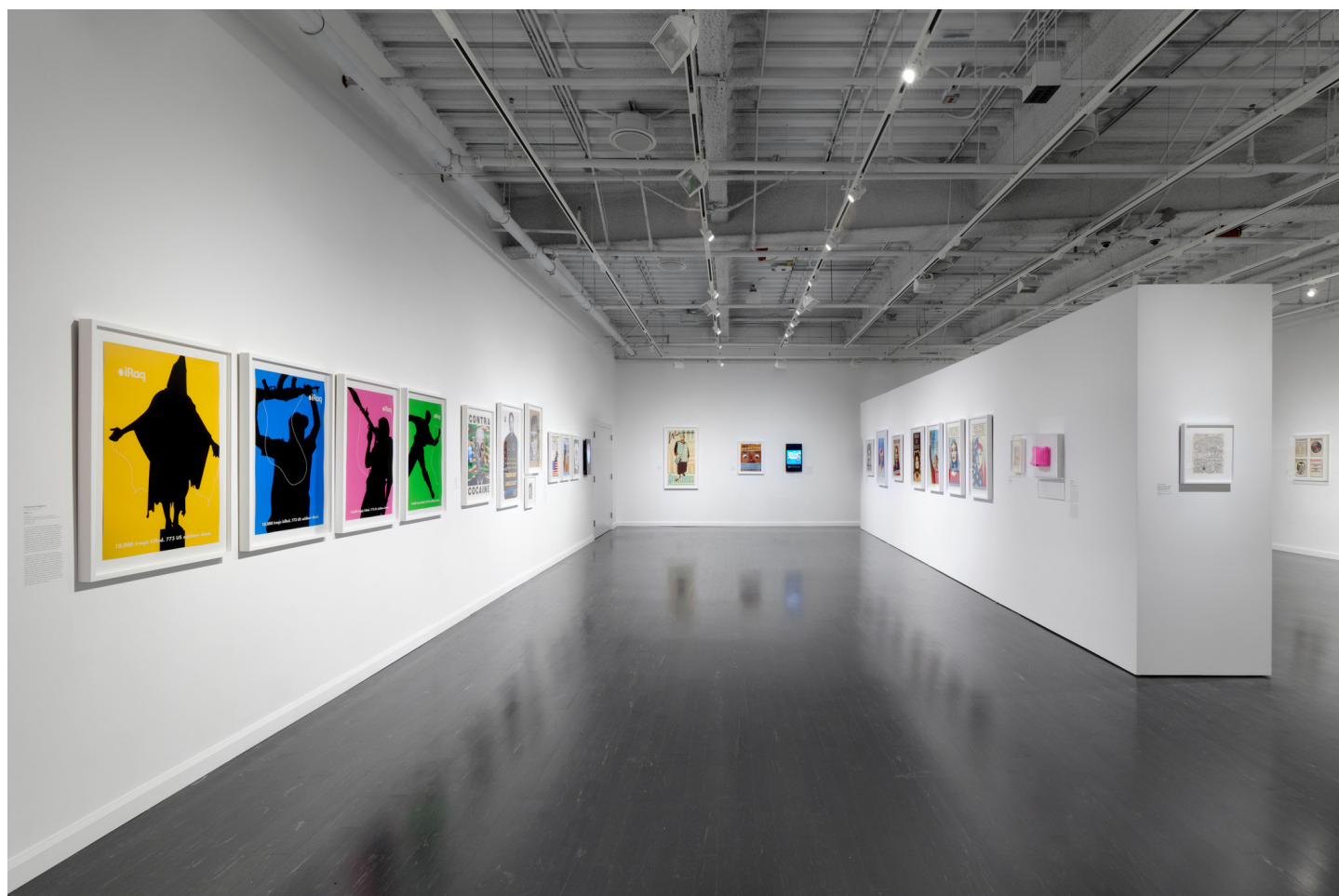
### *Sustainability ≠ Sacrifice*

Today, we recognize the imperative to forge institutional cultures that place equal importance on stewarding not only collections, but also the planet by minimizing the environmental impact of our practices. Although this is slowly changing, too often sustainability is an afterthought or an add-on that is layered atop existing practices, rather than a fundamental rethinking of those practices. Too often, sustainability is characterized in terms of hardship or sacrifice, whether in standards of care, quality of output, or by simply doing without. Too often, sustainability is approached in a piecemeal fashion or with stopgap measures, rather than holistically. And too often, sustainability involves additional work and an

administrative burden that comes with tracking and reporting statistics and impacts.

I would like to shift the sustainability conversation away from a focus on data and reporting to consider what a sustainable practice might look like for a museum that actively collects as a fundamental part of its mission to preserve, present, and interpret significant works of art across sweeping expanses of time, history, and culture. Sustainability conversations that target minimizing impacts and conserving resources can seem to be at odds with institutional appetites for continually increasing storage space and the attendant demands of climate control. Over the last 20 years alone, LACMA's collection has increased in size by nearly 50% across more than a dozen curatorial areas, so this is an issue that we know all too well. Instead, we might consider ways that sustainability, rather than an additive afterthought, can become embedded in institutional practice. At LACMA, certain of those practices have become so embedded as to be nearly invisible and often unrecognized.

For collecting institutions, two mainstays of conversation are exhibitions and storage. LACMA's participation in the Art Bridges Cohort Program



Installation photograph, *What Would You Say?: Activist Graphics from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art*, Vincent Price Art Museum at East Los Angeles College, March 25—June 24, 2023. Photo by Paul Salvesson, courtesy of the Vincent Price Art Museum





Walter De Maria: *The 2000 sculpture* in the Lynda and Stewart Resnick Exhibition Pavilion at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), © Estate of Walter De Maria, Photo © Museum Associates/ LACMA, by Alexander Vertikoff

addresses both aspects through a sustainability lens. The Cohort Program's many goals include reimagining the way museums collaborate and reducing the barriers to exhibition development. There are 12 lead institutions across the US, and each have chosen to partner with regional museums in different ways. For instance, the High Museum of Art in Atlanta has a very broad reach, partnering with institutions in the South, Midwest, and Northeast, while the Smithsonian American Art Museum's reach is even larger, stretching across the country to partner with institutions in the western US. LACMA has chosen to work very regionally, in our own backyard rather than across the county. Under the moniker of "Local Access," we initially partnered with a cohort of four institutions: the Cal State Northridge Art Galleries (CSUN), the Lancaster Museum of Art & History, the Riverside Art Museum, and the Vincent Price Art Museum at East LA College.

From a sustainability perspective, working regionally has obvious benefits because we are eliminating the costly impacts that come with packing and shipping exhibitions around the globe. And because we are working in our own backyard, meeting our communities where they are and fostering access to art, we are in a position to develop meaningful

exhibitions that resonate more powerfully. *What Would You Say? Activist Graphics from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art* (2023) explored the intersection of political activism and design primarily through the work of California-based artists and collectives to reveal the way artists and designers championed civil rights and advocated for social change. The exhibition demonstrated that art is a powerful tool that can galvanize political movements, and Art Bridges Learning & Engagement Grants supported an additional program to amplify that impact and connect with audiences. At CSUN, they partnered with organizations across campus such as Chicano House, CSUN Feminist Club, and Black House in advance of the 2022 midterm elections, and organized zine and poster making workshops with the local activist artist collective Artists 4 Democracy.

For the second phase of our participation launching next year, the cohort will expand to seven institutions. Another of the Program's goals is to reimagine the way museums collaborate. Working collaboratively, and at a range of scales, creates a more resilient and sustainable ecosystem. LACMA isn't just presenting major exhibitions like *ED RUSCHA/NOW THEN*, the retrospective we co-organized with MoMA, we are also working at the





Installation photograph of the exhibition *Eye for the Sensual: Selections from the Resnick Collection*, at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, October 2, 2010 – January 2, 2011. Photo © Museum Associates/ LACMA



Installation photograph of the exhibition *Olmec: Colossal Masterworks of Ancient Mexico*, at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, October 2, 2010 – January 9, 2011. Photo © Museum Associates/ LACMA



Installation photograph of the exhibition *Fashioning Fashion: European Dress in Detail, 1700–1915*, at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, October 2, 2010 – March 27, 2011. Photo © Museum Associates/ LACMA



Installation photograph, *Frank Gehry, Architect*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, May 18 – August 26, 2001. Photo by Ellen Labenski, courtesy of the Solomon R. Guggenheim





Installation photograph of the exhibition *Imagined Fronts: The Great War and Global Media*, at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, December 3, 2023 — July 7, 2024. Photo © Museum Associates/ LACMA



Installation photograph of the exhibition *We Live in Painting: The Nature of Color in Mesoamerican Art* at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, September 15, 2024 — September 1, 2025. Photo © Museum Associates/ LACMA



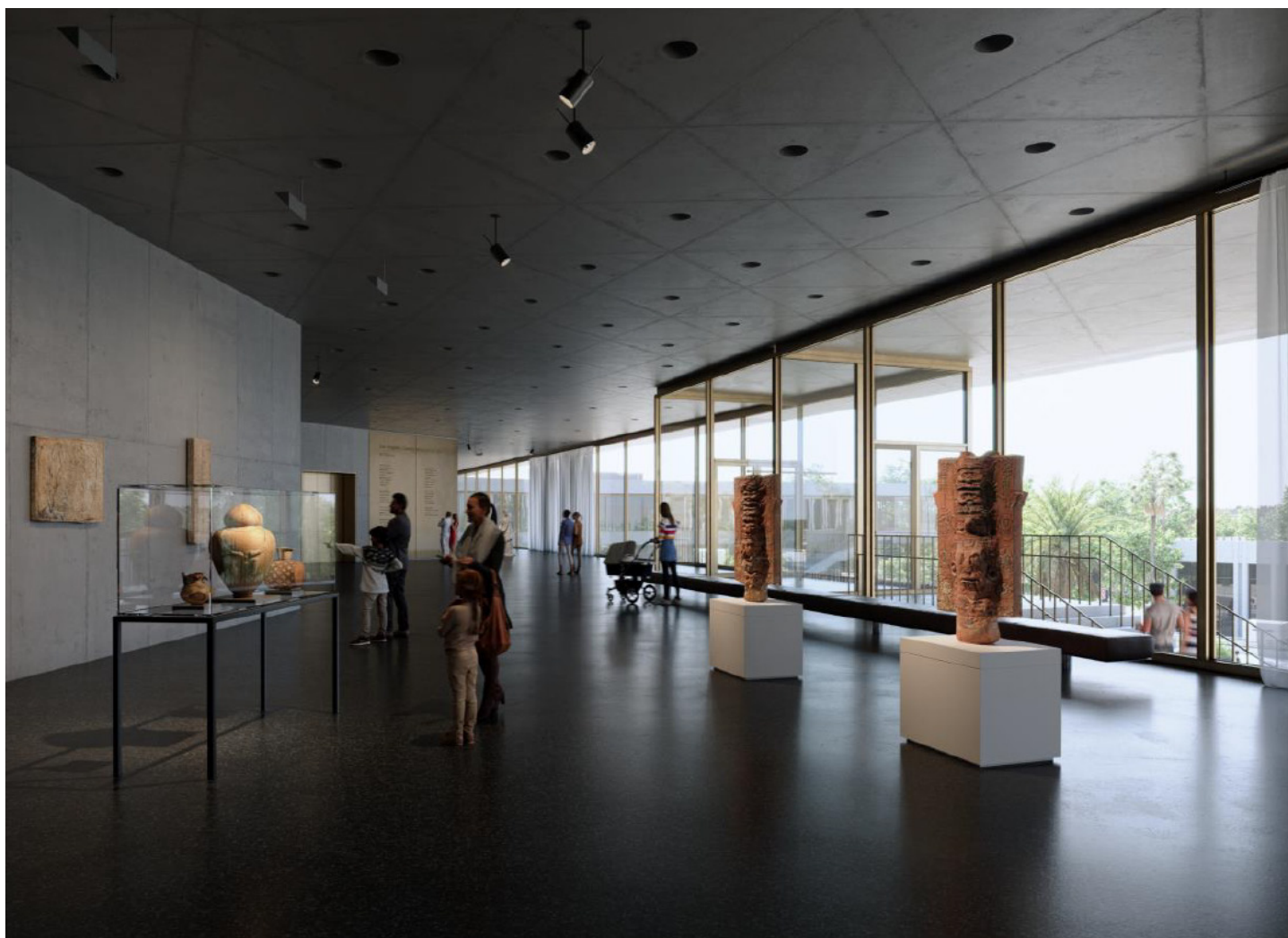
Digital rendering of the ground-level plaza of the David Geffen Galleries, Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Photo © Atelier Peter Zumthor / The Boundary

scale of our immediate communities, and collaborating with our partners to develop the projects and their interpretive framework. In this way, we are contributing to the sustainability of our community and cohort partners as well.

The ethos of LACMA and Los Angeles is very much about collaboration, as the cohosting of the CİMAM conference demonstrates, as does the Getty's ambitious PST Art initiative. You may also have heard the recent announcement of MAC3, a collection that

will be founded through the acquisition of more than 250 works from the collection of Jarl and Pamela Mohn, and jointly owned and managed by LACMA, MoCA, and the Hammer. By recognizing collections as a resource to be shared, as we do with our Local Access program, this landmark model of institutional collaboration benefits the museums, the artist communities in LA, and our audiences. Sharing, rather than storing collections, pioneers a more sustainable solution to the perennial problem of storage.

I'd like to shift again to consider the form of exhibitions and the architecture they inhabit. Before LACMA's Resnick Pavilion was inaugurated with the first series of exhibitions in October 2010, the building was "tested" with the installation of Walter de Maria's *The 2000 Sculpture* (1992). The second building on LACMA's campus by the Renzo Piano Building Workshop, the single-story pavilion approximates to an industrial shed, capped by a series of north-facing skylights often found in factory settings. Although new, ground-up construction, it emulates the open space and abundant light that make former industrial buildings, like Dia Beacon, so hospitable to showing art.



Digital rendering of the exhibition level of the David Geffen Galleries, Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Photo © Atelier Peter Zumthor / The Boundary



When the Resnick officially opened in the fall, the vast open space had been subdivided along the column line into three main spaces. The central space remained largely open with the exhibitions *Olmec: Colossal Masterworks of Ancient Mexico* and *Fashioning Fashion: European Dress in Detail, 1700–1915* articulating space through the use of large-scale casework and design components, while *Eye for the Sensual: Selections from the Resnick Collection* was presented in a space that had been subdivided, wall-papered, and pilastered to create a setting in which the important eighteenth-century century paintings and sculpture would be at home. As with any new museum building, it takes time to learn and tune it, and these three exhibitions tested and stretched the pavilion to understand how it might perform at the extreme ends of the spectrum.

The Resnick building, and the flexibility it demonstrated by way of these inaugural exhibitions, is the antithesis of sculptural buildings like Frank Lloyd Wright's Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, where I began my career as a curator. And yet, its total inflexibility is a critical lesson in sustainability: the lesson of installing to the architecture, rather than modifying the architecture to accommodate the exhibition. We've all heard colleagues asking about systems for temporary walls, which is better than repeating the cycle of building walls only to tear them down a short time later, but leaving the architecture untouched and learning to tune the exhibition to the space is an even more sustainable practice.

It's ironic then, that having demonstrated the flexibility of the Renzo Piano design, we have since found the pavilion's sweet spot with a configuration that remains unchanged exhibition after exhibition, whether *Beyond Line: The Art of Korean Writing* (2019) and *Fiji: Art and Life* (2019–21), or *Imagined Fronts: The Great War and Global Media* (2023–24) and *We Live in Painting: The Nature of Color in Mesoamerican Art* (currently on view as part of PST Art). It is in this sense that sustainability has become so embedded in this aspect of our exhibition making, that it has become invisible, in the best sense of the term. It doesn't require additional labor, additional tracking and reporting, and it isn't an afterthought. Rather, it is the foundational assumption on which our programming in the Resnick Pavilion is based.

Of course, we retain the option of tearing the walls down in Resnick should we wish, but in our new Geffen Galleries that will be much harder. The building is entirely poured-in-place concrete, so there are no temporary walls, and thus as with the Resnick Pavilion, we will avoid the cycle of building

and demolishing walls. Concrete also has the added benefit of high thermal mass, which contributes to environmental stability in the galleries and a reduced demand on energy-hungry HVAC systems. In this time of climate change, the new building will also contribute to an expanded 3.5 acres of new park and outdoor space, much of it shaded and programmed; a public, admission-free amenity that will further establish our campus as LA's living room.

I would also note that at LACMA, we are always very conscious of our place in the world, located on the Pacific rim, adjacent to Mexico, and looking toward Latin America and Asia, which you will see reflected in our programs. In this sense, many aspects of what is considered sustainable has more to do with rooting the museum more deeply in our locale. For example, the exhibition-level floor of the new building is a black concrete made from all local materials, including the aggregate, sand, and pigment. While many would look at this and measure it in terms of the distance traveled to the site, we look at it and also see the connection to place. While there is certainly a place for measuring and reporting data in our fight against climate change, I would encourage everyone to consider practices such as these that can capture an institutional ethos as well.

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# *Cultivating Empathy in Sustainable Museum Practices*

**Kelsey Shell, Environmental & Sustainability Strategist, MOCA, Los Angeles.**

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## *Biography*

Kelsey Shell is the Environmental & Sustainability Strategist at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) in Los Angeles. In this role, she weaves sustainability into the exhibitions and operations of the museum. She initiated MOCA's Green Team and acts as the liaison to the MOCA Environmental Council, an affinity group that supports museum-wide sustainability initiatives. In concert with the Operations team, she is working to decarbonize MOCA's campus through infrastructure retrofits and revised energy-use habits. She created the ongoing public programming series MOCA Climate Conversations and recently launched a hands-on learning workshop called Sustainable Skillbuilding. She also supports the Curatorial, Production, and Registration teams in imagining more responsibly-built exhibitions that foreground climate stories. Prior to MOCA, Kelsey Shell was the Director of Public Art at Zlot Buell + Associates where she worked on large scale projects with Stanford University, the Dallas Cowboys, and the State of California, among others. She is the co-lead of the Los Angeles Chapter of the Gallery Climate Coalition, a founding member of Art + Climate Action, and an organizing member of the Climate Convening of Los Angeles Museums.





### *Cultivating Empathy in Sustainable Museum Practices*

In my role as the Environmental & Sustainability Strategist at The Museum of Contemporary Art, I braid environmental responsibility into the exhibitions, operations, and programs at the museum. In this work I rely on soft skills including facilitation, empathy, collaboration, and storytelling. People often ask me how should my museum get started with sustainability? A good place to start is by asking these questions:

*What is our baseline?* In order to chart your progress towards a goal, you need to understand where you started. There are a range of options to establish a baseline depending on staff capacity, budget, and institutional goals. A baseline could be a full institutional carbon calculation by an external party, a staff-led calculation using a free online carbon calculator, an exhibition-specific impact report, or a careful review of your electrical bills year upon year. Your goal is to understand current emissions in order to set reduction targets and measure your progress.

*How will we fund this?* From a baseline study, you will likely learn that the biggest piece of the pie for museums is building energy. There are many low-cost projects to address building energy—for example, switching to LED lightbulbs or using efficient power strips—but in order to meaningfully reduce emissions, you will need to invest in infrastructure retrofits. Funding for sustainability work at MOCA has been a combination of the museum's operating budget with grants from organizations including the Frankenthaler Climate Initiative and the Manitou Fund. We also have a powerful engine in the MOCA Environmental Council, a support council that funds and guides sustainability at the museum. You could propose including a sustainability "rainy day fund" in your Operations department budget, research eligibility for rebates through the Inflation Reduction Act, or explore green philanthropic partners beyond the art world. Your goal is to identify funding that will accelerate meaningful emissions reduction.

*Who should be involved?*

This is a blend of leadership who can greenlight and guide initiatives and colleagues who can design and implement them. Johanna Burton, the Maurice Marciano Director of MOCA, has made environmental responsibility a part of our mission and institutional identity, which has smoothed the path for emissions reduction and storytelling efforts. Her decision to hire a full-time sustainability director reaffirmed this commitment, particularly by creating a role that works across both operations and programs. Meaningful progress was already underway when I started at

MOCA, but it was very siloed. I knew I needed to bring our efforts together under one roof and foster interdepartmental collaboration. Your goal is to build a team to carry sustainability projects forward, connecting to the mission and purpose of the institution.

These three questions will catalyze action, but there is an essential fourth question that is often overlooked: *why?*

*Why am I doing this? And why are we doing this at a museum?*

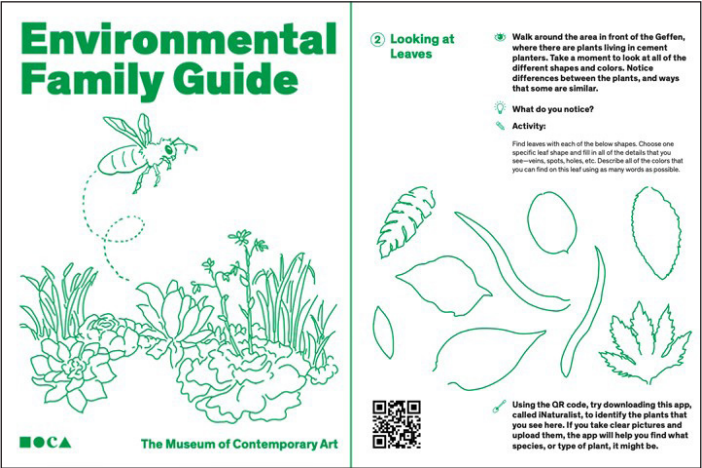
We are expected to find room in our budgets and bandwidth for sustainability efforts, but those expectations are often uncoupled from clear motivation, leading to resentment and burn out. In order for sustainability to be sustainable it needs to have a motivation and purpose beyond the devastating fact that, yet again, this is the hottest year on record. Because when managing a tight exhibition budget, you are going to be more motivated by cost savings than by desertification in the Amazon. So, I suggest you start with *why* before moving on to *how*.

This shift means speaking to motivations instead of values. The values-centered approach says: *I need to reduce building energy for the sake of our planet earth—and because my boss told me to.* In this framework, employees are motivated by shame and social pressure. Any green projects are an add-on, not an intrinsic part of the work, so they will be the first thing to go when working under a deadline or over budget. The motivations-centered approach instead says: *If I reduce building energy, my monthly bill will go down, which positively impacts my bottom line. (plus yay Earth!).* Motivations could include cost savings, increased community impact, positive press, access to funding opportunities, and more. Every staff member is an expert in their role and has a unique understanding of how it feeds into institutional sustainability. It is imperative that they are given the opportunity to explore how their role connects to the institution's goal, knitting sustainable thinking into their workflow.

A green team or sustainability group is a great way to build from individual motivation to shared purpose. It is a place for experimentation, trust building, dialog, and staff leadership, allowing staff to self-identify priorities based on their individual expertise and shared needs. This autonomy empowers staff to take ownership of, and therefore pride in, the sustainability work at the museum, creating greater stability and longevity. MOCA's green team spans nearly every department at the museum and is broken down into interdepartmental working groups. Some examples of green team initiatives include updating temperature and relative humidity in our



Sustainable Skillbuilding: Creative Reuse. Photo: Michelle Shiers, 2024



The MOCA Environmental Family Guide, written and illustrated by Michelle Antonisse, designed by Carina Huynh



Sustainable Skillbuilding: Visible Mending. Photo: Sean MacGillivray, 2024



galleries, spearheaded by the Decarbonization working group; creating green onboarding packets for new hires by the Staff Experience working group; and the Circular Exhibitions working group's efforts to divert materials from landfill. Along with these initiatives, the core work of the Green Team has been connecting to motivations and to one another, building trust and purpose.

Zooming out one step further, we can look at environmental purpose and action at an institutional level. Museums, as we know well, are places of trust and reflection, education and discourse. It is in the DNA of contemporary art museums to platform urgent narratives and question our moment in time. There is no issue more contemporary nor more urgent than the polycrisis of climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental justice. For those who ask *why are we doing this at a museum?* I rely on the words of someone wiser than myself. In his statement on climate change, Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh says “the Earth is not something outside of us...look around you — what you see is not your environment, it is you.” This work is not simply about preserving nature in some far-flung place, it is also about air quality in Los Angeles and microplastics in our blood. It is about caring for our neighbors and for ourselves.

Acknowledging the urgency of the crisis and the unique opportunity for museums to be agents of change, MOCA has mapped environmental frameworks onto three familiar programmatic channels. The museum organizes free public programming to create space for education and dialog with two ongoing series, MOCA Climate Conversations and Sustainable Skillbuilding. The MOCA Climate Conversations series presents year-round talks, screenings, and symposia on topics including urban oil extraction, land back, sea level rise, and green economics. These programs are designed to bring voices from outside of the art world — scientists, community organizers, filmmakers, anthropologists, historians — into the museum and in dialog with artists. As a counterpoint to these more academic programs, the Sustainable Skillbuilding workshops offer all-ages learning opportunities for a more environmentally responsible life. These free workshops provide a different entry point to climate action, through hands-on learnings about visible mending, composting, pickling, creative reuse, and more.

There is a natural kinship between sustainability and education, as both occupy a space of growth, problem solving, and dreaming. The Education team were immediate collaborators and readily incorporated this work into their existing programs. Ongoing

collaborations include workshops through the MOCA Teens program with environmental artists Debra Scacco & Joel Garcia, Aidan Koch, and iris yireh hu. We have also created family projects foregrounding environmental thinking by connecting native plants and ecology through hands-on art making. The Environmental Family Guide, created by artist and Manager of Pedagogy & Practice Michelle Antonisse, is distributed to families and visitors of all ages at both museum buildings. The Guide encourages connection to the environment and nonhuman beings on our campus through close looking and field journaling. Building sustainability into the existing structure of successful and familiar programs brings these concepts to new audiences and gives younger generations a vital sense of agency and imagination around the climate crisis.

Most notably for museums, and particularly in the context of CÍMAM, a key platform for environmental storytelling is through artist-led projects. As such, I offer a few ways for curators to spark sustainability conversations in their practice:

My first message is clear: *find willing partners*. There are many incredible artists who engage with mycology, chaotic weather, water use, environmental racism, botany. There are just as many artists whose work is not overtly environmental, but whose studio practice and values are decidedly so. Seek out and support these artists.

Secondly, I encourage you to introduce material lifecycle considerations into project conversations as early as possible. The time to think about disposing of exhibition materials is during installation planning, not deinstallation. It is never too early to make a plan, but it is sometimes too late.

Lastly, wield your power of suggestion! When planning an exhibition, suggest opting for sea freight, using a virtual courier, reusing existing walls, not making exhibition merch. Even if the conventional route is ultimately taken, a suggestion begins to normalize foreign ideas.

I will end with two examples of artist-led projects at MOCA that have incorporated these ideas. *Olafur Eliasson: OPEN* illustrates the importance of artist partnerships and the power of suggestion. Olafur Eliasson is a dedicated climate activist; through his work and the workings of his studio, Eliasson challenges the status quo and shifts culture — talk about a willing partner! We seized the opportunity to use the exhibition as a vehicle for a larger conversation about museum environments. During the run of *OPEN*, the museum is piloting an expanded and responsive temperature range in order to reduce building energy





Installation view of *Sun & Sea*, presented by the Hammer, MOCA, and CAP UCLA, October 14 – 16, 2021 at The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA. Photo by Elon Shoenholz



Josh Kline, *Erosion* (detail), 2019, glass, urethane paint, light box, reinforced steel, color filter gel, blackout fabric, silicone, dollhouse miniatures, fabricated miniatures, objects cast in New York beach sand, cyanoacrylate glue, silicone epoxy, 89.75 x 48 x 33 in. Courtesy of the artist and 47 Canal.



consumption, in alignment with the Bizot Green Protocol. We anticipate meaningful energy reduction during the run of the show, which is the first step in an institution-wide reevaluation of these industry standards. Without Olafur's willingness, and outright excitement, we would not have been able to take this first step.

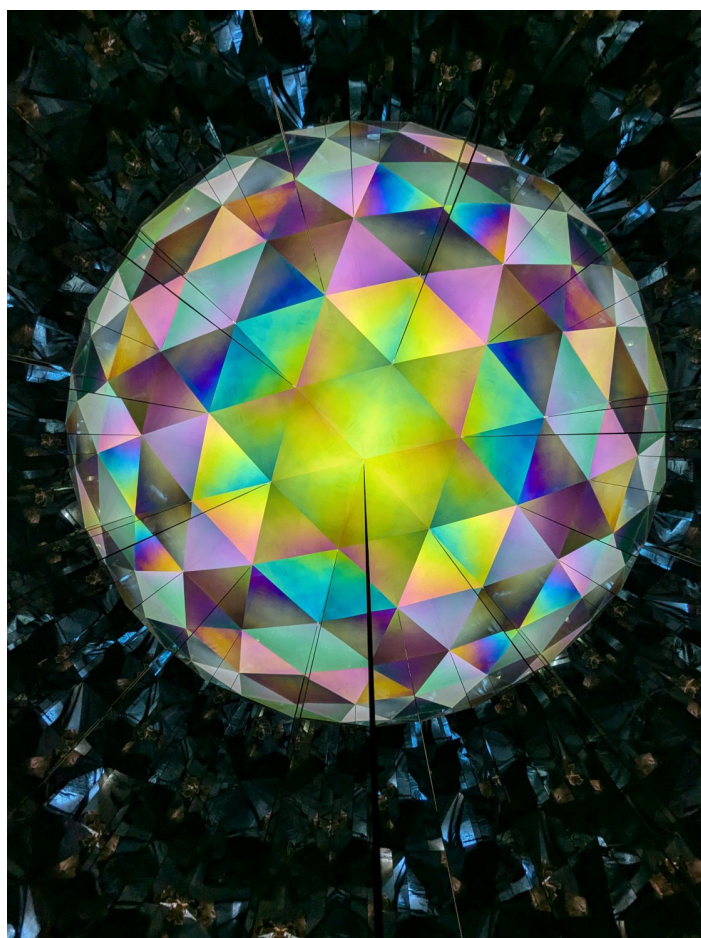
The newly announced Eric and Wendy Schmidt Environment and Art Prize is another exciting evolution of artist-driven storytelling at MOCA. The Prize is a biannual award to artists working at the intersection of climate, ecology, and environmental justice, resulting in a new commission at the museum. The inaugural recipients are Cecilia Vicuña and Julian Charrière, whose diverse practices are united by a deeply felt dedication to environmental action and imagination. Their projects are both invitations to engage with these urgent issues through awe, curiosity, and connection. Sustainable exhibition practices are also an essential part of the Prize, which will foreground material lifecycle considerations from the outset with both artists. There will be three award cycles over the course of six years, which keeps environmental practice at the center of the museum through 2030 and beyond.

When these stories are told in the galleries, they reverberate through the rest of the museum, to exhibition-related programs, cleaner production and operational choices, greener retail and events, not to mention connections with values-aligned donors. This storytelling is not just about awareness raising, it is about cultivating empathy, connection, and activism within our institutions and in our broader community.

This approach to museum sustainability, from staff collaboration to visitor experience, operates from a place of compassion and connection. Our internal team and external audiences are made up of individuals with unique needs, interests, preconceptions, and connections to climate change and the environment. We must create onramps toward shared action and imagination, meeting people where they are and bringing them along for the journey. I encourage you to reflect on how your expertise, passion, and purpose intersect with environmental responsibility. We need you.



MOCA Teens environmental workshop with artist iris yirei hu.  
Photo: Ray Barrera, 2024.



Olafur Eliasson, *Kaleidoscope for plural perspectives*, 2024; installation view: Studio Olafur Eliasson, Berlin. Photo: Studio Olafur Eliasson; Courtesy of the artist; Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York/Los Angeles; neugerriemschneider, Berlin. © Olafur Eliasson

# *Environmental Sustainability at the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao*

**Daniel Vega, Deputy Director  
for Exhibitions and Conservation,  
Guggenheim Museum Bilbao,  
Bilbao, Spain.**

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## *Biography*

Daniel Vega graduated in Fine Arts, Conservation-Restoration of Works of Art, from the University of the Basque Country and took postgraduate studies at Universidad Complutense (Conservation) and at Leicester University (Museum Studies). In 2016, he was selected to participate in the Executive Education Program for Museum Leaders, at Getty Leadership Institute.

Vega joined the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao team in 1998. During his tenure, the museum has improved work efficiency and the optimization of resources, greatly developed its exhibition program, and established and consolidated a strong international network. He has overseen the organization of over three hundred modern and contemporary art exhibitions and has led several key projects such as the development of a transversal project-based coordination methodology for exhibition's management and the creation of an external art storage facility for GMB's Collections.

Vega has recently led the development of GMB's Strategic Framework for Environmental Sustainability, the measurement of the museum's carbon footprint, and the implementation of annual Action Plans. Among other sustainability initiatives, he has managed the transition to LED technology for the lighting of works of art, the testing of new materials and technologies for exhibition production and collection care, the





development of collaborative circularity projects with local partners, and the recent implementation of more flexible climate control parameters at the MGB.

For a number of years, he has been a guest professor in the master's degree in Curatorial Studies at the University of Navarra and in the CYXAC master's degree at the University of the Basque Country. Between 2008 and 2022, he was a member of the Steering Committee of the International Group of Exhibition Organizers (IEO).

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### *Environmental Sustainability at the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao*

It is my pleasure to participate in this conference and share with you our efforts in Bilbao to make our museum more sustainable.

Aside from my main responsibilities as Deputy Director for Exhibitions and Conservation, for the last three years I have been leading the museum strategy in the field of environmental sustainability with the goal of moving towards climate neutrality by 2030.

In 2021, following the inclusion of environmental sustainability as one of the pillars of our Strategic Plan 2021–23, we created a Green Team with members from the different museum departments. The main responsibility of the Green Team is the definition and implementation of the initiatives included in our yearly Sustainability Action Plan.

Our first task was the elaboration of an Environmental Sustainability Framework with the support of an external consultant. This document is in line with the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda. The framework has six main axes and three transversal working areas, and has allowed us to develop our yearly Sustainability Action Plans since 2022.

To understand better our impact on the environment and be able to set the goals of the Action Plans we have been measuring our carbon footprint since 2019. Every year, we increase the scope of our carbon footprint calculation and aim to have our first complete measurement by next year.

Currently, in addition to direct and indirect emissions related with energy consumption, our measurement also covers scope 3, which includes indirect emissions related to staff daily commuting, travel, and the crating and transportation of all artworks included in our exhibition program, as well as the construction of temporary walls, pedestals, cabinets and wall painting.

In 2023 the energy involved in running the building and climatizing the museum collection and the temporary exhibition spaces was 84% of our total carbon footprint. Although we have reduced our energy consumption by more than 60% over the last 20 years, gas and electricity use is still by far the area of our activity with the greatest impact on the environment.

For this reason, we have gradually adopted more flexible control parameters for relative humidity and temperature, following the recommendations of the IIC and the Conservation Group of ICOM. In 2022, with fuel and gas prices rising out of control because of the war in Ukraine, we decided to apply a more responsive and dynamic approach and align our temperature and RH as much as possible with the prevailing external climate conditions, which do not necessarily respond to seasonal patterns any more due to climate change. We did implement the broader parameters of  $21^{\circ} \pm 3$  degrees Celsius and 40–60% relative humidity with a maximum fluctuation of 5% in 24 hours within this range. This rather modest change in our climate control parameters, resulted in much lower energy use. The museum has reduced its total gas and electricity consumption by around 30% and 6% respectively. This fall we have decided to go a step further and increase the relative humidity fluctuation percentage to 10%, still within the recommendations of IIC and ICOM. We are monitoring the results and will shortly be sharing updated metrics on the reduction of our energy use and its impact in the museum's carbon footprint.

Another area on which we have focused our decarbonization efforts is lighting, as the museum had been equipped with halogen luminaires since its opening in 1997.

We carried out initial research and tests on LED technology as early as in 2010, but only in 2015 were we able to confirm that LED lighting was sufficiently evolved to be able to respond to the technical needs posed by the unique exhibition spaces created by Frank Gehry.

At that time, we started a long research process involving several lighting suppliers and with four main objectives: (1) to improve the quality of lighting, (2) to ensure the conservation of the works of art, (3) to increase the efficiency of our work processes, (4) and to contribute to the financial and environmental sustainability of the museum.

In 2018, we finally selected the Austrian manufacturer Zumtobel through a public bidding process. The total investment in more than 3,000 lighting fixtures had a cost of approximately 1.2 million euros

over a three-year period. The useful life of the new lighting equipment is estimated at about 30,000 h. (20 times more than halogen lamps!). But what is most important, our LED light system consumes only 8% of the energy that the original halogen equipment required. We have seen total annual saving of around €250,000 (€170k in reduced electricity consumption and €80k in reduced maintenance work), which has recouped the initial investment within the very short period of five years. The estimated annual reduction of our carbon footprint is about 335 tons of CO<sub>2</sub>.

Moreover, the transition to LED technology has substantially improved the quality of our lighting, allowing us to reduce its damage factor, use color temperatures closer to natural light, regulate equipment wirelessly, accurately, and instantly, while eliminating the need for replacing lamps and filters.

As a next step, we are now working on a Dynamic Lighting System. Throughout 2025 we will install mechanical screens in our skylights and connect them via Bluetooth with the LED fixtures so that we can maximize the use of natural light at certain times of the day for the enjoyment of our visitors, while reducing our energy use, or dim or even completely block the entry of natural light when necessary to ensure the conservation of the works of art.

The museum has also recently completed the installation of 300 solar panels on its roofs, which will save around 5% of the its electricity consumption and will cover the lighting needs of all the exhibition rooms.

The solar panels are located on the two largest roofs, making them invisible from the street and integrated into the building's architecture.

This initiative completes our solar panel project that began in January of this year with the installation of 90 photovoltaic panels in the museum's external warehouse, which now provide an average of 30% of the total electricity demand of this building, although on sunny days the panels cover the entire electricity needs of the warehouse.

To conclude this selection of initiatives to reduce our carbon footprint, we have recently completed the installation of several electric vehicle charging stations in the vicinity of the museum, both for museum visitors and staff members.

Another area of our activity where we are trying to improve from an environmental perspective is museography. We have implemented a transversal system of work to reuse the temporary walls in exhibitions staged in the same galleries.

Under the coordination of the exhibition department, the curators and designers involved in each project approach the spatial design by trying to adapt

as much as possible to the wall configuration proposed for the exhibitions immediately before and after. This also requires the collaboration of external partners, be they curators or even the artists themselves.

It is a complex task, which obviously has its limits, but which has worked very well in the recent sequence of temporary exhibitions dedicated to Lee Krasner, Bilbao and the Painting, Alice Neel, and Jean Dubuffet.

A few weeks ago, in collaboration with the Department of Culture of the Basque Country, we launched a simple digital platform for museums and exhibition centers in our area to share and reuse pedestals, showcases, and all kinds of furniture and exhibition material.

We are also trying hard to test and implement more sustainable materials in our exhibitions as 100% recyclable wood fiberboard, recycled paper board, eco-friendly paint, and PVC-free vinyl.

Making exhibitions, traditionally meant making art crates. Transportation cases are a very environmentally unfriendly solution, as they are usually destroyed when the works are finally returned and contain elements that are difficult to recycle. To reduce this impact, since 2019 we are trying to increase the use of rental crates.

For this purpose, we have modified our loan agreements to raise this possibility with lenders from the outset of the negotiation of loan terms and have included this possibility as a priority in our public bidding documents.

We are also developing our ability to monitor loans to our exhibitions through virtual couriering. The use of technology as tracking devices and apps, live-stream cameras inside trucks, and 360° cameras for conservation condition checks, offers solutions to many of the common objections to replacing physical couriers with virtual supervision.

But despite all our efforts to work in a more sustainable way at the museum, when we organize a large exhibition with international loans and oversized objects the impact on the environment is huge.

In 2022 we did present in Bilbao the exhibition *Motion. Autos, Art, Architecture*, which I believe makes a good case study.

This ambitious show celebrated the artistic dimension of the automobile and explored the visual and cultural links to the parallel worlds of painting, sculpture, architecture, photography, and film. Curated and designed by Norman Foster, this exhibition brought together nearly forty automobiles, each the best of its kind in such terms as beauty, rarity, technical progress, and a vision of the future.



This project was by far our less sustainable exhibition that year with an estimated carbon footprint of over 500 tons, almost 60% of the total carbon footprint of our 2022 exhibition program, and 15% of the museum's total carbon footprint.

We were very mindful of this, and we thought that one way to compensate this reality could be to raise awareness among our visitors on the climate impact of our current mobility model.

This is why we developed "Future of Motion," a concluding section to the exhibition that could help reflect on a future with more sustainable mobility.

Fifteen international schools of design and architecture from four continents were given complete freedom to share their visions for the future of mobility, in collaborations with industry partners, designers, artists, and architects.

The proposals on display in this gallery reflected a variety of models, films, renderings, drawings, and manifestos.

The Museum also organized in collaboration with the University of the Basque Country the Symposium "Future Mobilities," where the representatives of these design schools discussed the global economy and the future of human societies with an eye on sustainable innovation and energy transition.

Another example of how we are addressing the climate crisis in our programs is *Arts of the Earth*, an exhibition curated by Manuel Cirauqui that will open in Bilbao at the end of 2025.

*Artes de la Tierra* considers the current concern for the health of our planet, and especially for the survival of the soil — its living, sensitive, and fertile matrix — as the backbone of a journey through artistic manifestations across global geographies.

A journey that connects artifacts made with earth, wood, leaves, roots, and plants — ancestral means that today take on new relevance — with interventions on the territory that transcend what for some decades has been called Earthworks or Land Art.

The exhibition will bring together historical works from 1970 to the present, addressing media such as sculpture, installation, photography, moving image, and performance.

In addition to collaborations with pioneering artists and design studios in the field of sustainability, the exhibition will seek synergies with local entities committed to ecological regeneration in the territory.

The project not only aims to illustrate and represent, it also wants to be an example of carbon footprint reduction, energy efficiency improvement, and integration of artistic practices in the circular economy. There will be an emphasis on the use of local materials

and circular productions, and on the employment of sustainable logistic and museography solutions.

As an example, the wood from the wall construction for Paul Pfeiffer's exhibition (in collaboration with MOCA) will be repurposed to fabricate the internal structure of an oversized installation by Delcy Morelos.

In addition to this exhibition, the artistic programming, educational activities, and public programs for the coming months will contain elements directly linked to environmental sustainability. Workshops, conferences, creative sessions, talks with experts, and specific courses will explore different aspects of the climate issue.

I would like to finish by sharing with you the obstacles that you will possibly need to overcome to be able to implement these kinds of changes:

- Lack of available case studies and practical information
- Lack of financing for R&D and technological upgrades
- Lack of internal communication between different museum departments
- Lack of quality time to analyze necessities and possibilities

But.... on the very positive side, working towards environmental sustainability also has other less obvious but equally encouraging benefits:

- Provides opportunities for excellence, creativity, and innovation
- Offers new ways of rethinking old problems
- Contributes to financial stability
- Creates opportunities for collaboration and alliances

I hope that the work we are doing at the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao has been of interest to you. You can find more detailed information about many of these initiatives in the environmental sustainability section of our website, which we have created with the aim of sharing our institutional compromise and disseminating our initiatives and new projects.

# *Managing Collections Environments for a Sustainable Future (and Present)*

Cecilia Winter, Project Specialist,  
Getty Conservation Institute,  
Los Angeles, USA.

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## *Biography*

Cecilia Winter holds degrees in History and Museum Studies from the University of São Paulo in Brazil and a master's in Painting Conservation from the University of Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne.

She has worked as a registrar and a conservator in Brazil and France since 2004, focusing on preventive conservation and collection care, documentation, exhibitions, and loans. She joined the Managing Collections Environment at the Getty Conservation Institute in 2022.

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## *Managing Collections Environments for a Sustainable Future (and Present)*

The intricate relationship between museum collections and their environmental conditions has long posed challenges to museum professionals and collections managers. These challenges are further magnified by the current climate crisis, which demands an urgent reassessment of how museums approach collection care. As a former registrar and painting conservator





focused on preventive conservation, I have experienced firsthand the tension between preservation and the implementation of sustainable practices in cultural heritage institutions. This paper, informed by recent research from the Getty Conservation Institute's Managing Collections Environments (MCE) Initiative, explores how evidence-based processes, risk management strategies, and a holistic perspective can help institutions address these challenges and embrace sustainable approaches to environmental management.

The MCE initiative was established over a decade ago, responding to growing concerns about the environmental impact of museums and cultural institutions. The initiative emerged alongside key developments in the field, such as the National Museum Directors' Council's call for energy reduction in the UK, the International Council of Museums—Committee for Conservation (ICOM—CC) and the International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (IIC) Environmental Guidelines in 2014, and the Bizot Green Protocol in 2015. These milestones underscored the necessity of reducing museums' carbon footprints while acknowledging the complexity of addressing collection and material environmental requirements and the need for conservators and conservation scientists to actively unpack these complexities.

Our primary aim is to unpack these complexities and provide museums, galleries, archives, and libraries with evidence-based tools and strategies to support sustainable environmental management. The initiative seeks to address the broader goals of sustainability while respecting the specific needs of collections. By emphasizing context-specific analysis, institutional decision-making, and risk management, we foster a shift away from rigid parameters toward more adaptable and sustainable solutions.

Scientific research has been a cornerstone of our work, investigating material mechanical responses to environmental changes through innovative methods, including the testing of standardized mockups, historical samples, and the modeling and monitoring of objects subjected to controlled environmental fluctuations.

Case studies of different collection types complement this laboratory research by examining real-world impacts of environmental changes on these collections. For instance, the National Gallery of Victoria in Australia transitioned from strict ( $50\pm3\%$ ) environmental parameters to broader Bizot Green Protocol ranges ( $40\text{--}60\%$ ) without observable damage to its collections and great savings in energy consumption. Similarly, ongoing research at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London demonstrates that most of the objects exposed to large fluctuations

in temperature and relative humidity are more resilient than assumed.

These findings challenge the long-held belief that strict environmental control is necessary for preservation. We are not asserting that risks associated with environmental conditions are nonexistent; rather, we emphasize the importance of addressing them through a comprehensive risk management perspective.

Risk management principles have gained prominence over the past two decades as a means of developing value-based collection care policies. This approach prioritizes mitigating the most critical risks—many of which are unrelated to environmental conditions—rather than enforcing one-size-fits-all standards.

This marks a departure from the historical emphasis in Western conservation practice, which has long prioritized preserving objects at all costs, driven by a desire to maintain them in perpetuity. This mindset has led to the creation of strict “best practice” guidelines. While well-intentioned, these guidelines often limited access, marred the building fabric, strained staff and budgets, and increased environmental impacts.

Flexible environmental management practices are yet to be widely adopted. Resistance is often rooted in risk aversion and the precautionary principle, which seeks to avoid uncertainty at all costs. As a result, institutions frequently adhere to narrow environmental parameters, even when evidence suggests that broader ranges are safe and more sustainable.

To change this, we need to reframe the role of conservation and collection management within institutions. Rather than treating conservation as a series of isolated technical decisions for which individual conservators and registrars are personally accountable, we need a collective, interdisciplinary approach. One where the role of the conservator and collection manager is to inform the decision-making process, but the institution takes responsibility for it.

Moving forward, we should reconsider why we conserve objects and redefine preservation beyond material loss mitigation. Material change does not necessarily equate to a loss of value, and our practices should consider broader goals, such as enhancing accessibility, fostering social engagement, and addressing inequality.

The heritage field is often described as prone to risk and loss aversion. However, this tendency is not unique to the heritage sector but reflects a broader human cognitive bias known as loss aversion. Behavioral economics research demonstrates that people generally perceive losses as more emotionally

and psychologically impactful than equivalent gains. This asymmetry means that the fear of losing something valuable often outweighs the potential benefits of innovation, experimentation, or change.

By shifting the narrative from avoiding (or mitigating) loss to fostering the creation and increase of value, conservation can reframe change as an opportunity rather than a threat.

The focus on potential gains can help institutions and professionals to rethink long-standing practices and adopt strategies that expand the reach and significance of collections, such as facilitating loans to non-traditional spaces, showcasing exhibitions outside dominant Western circuits, and implementing programs that engage underrepresented audiences.

In this spirit, the Bizot Green Protocol was introduced partly to promote international loans, and to enhance access to collections. While this direction is a positive step, we must critically consider what “increased access” truly entails. Is it simply about increasing the number of viewers, even if they belong to the same demographic background? Or should access focus on inclusivity and equity, offering opportunities to communities historically excluded from the cultural heritage narrative? Similarly, the concept of “future generations” deserves scrutiny: why should a privileged few in the future have access to heritage that remains inaccessible to less privileged communities today?

Sustainable strategies that address both environmental and social responsibilities can lead cultural institutions to move beyond a narrow focus on energy efficiency. Conservation can become a powerful tool for addressing global challenges like inequality and social injustice. In this way, conservation can ensure collections are not only safeguarded for the future but are also relevant, accessible, and meaningful in the present.

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# *Ecological Awakening of the Museum: Curating Art & Climate Change at the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia*

John Kenneth Paranada, Curator of Art and Climate Change, Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK.

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## *Biography*

John Kenneth Paranada, a British-Filipino curator and researcher, holds the pioneering role of Curator of Art and Climate Change at the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia. His appointment marks a significant step in the UK's museum landscape, emphasizing a dedicated response to the climate crisis through innovative curatorial practices. He combines social and environmental sciences with artistic exploration, adopting an interdisciplinary strategy to pivot towards planetary reciprocity and address the crisis of relevance of museums and cultural institutions in the twenty-first century.

His curatorial philosophy centers on accelerating ecological awareness by merging art with various disciplines and lived experiences from both inside and outside the academy, offering tangible pathways and new solutions to our myriad poly-crises. This approach allows him to explore complex themes such as the Anthropocene, sustainability, modernity, Indigenous wisdom, land use, and the overarching challenges of the climate emergency. Paranada's work significantly propels discussions on empowering art and culture to boost climate awareness and offer practical solutions as the impacts of unprecedented climatic shifts increasingly permeate everyday life.



Paranada aims to show how museums can contribute to sustainable development and motivate museum professionals worldwide to enhance or initiate ecologically-minded practices. Additionally, as a researcher at the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research, his curatorial projects benefit from profound collaborations between the arts and sciences. Paranada is the curator of “Sediment Spirit” and co-editor of *Planet for Our Future* (Sainsbury Centre, 2023). His recent essays include: “A Path Forward: Curating Art & Climate Change at the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia,” in *Museums, Sustainability and Sustainable Development* (International Council of Museums’ Museum International, 2024); “How Do We Begin a Meaningful Conversation About Art’s Place in the Climate Crisis?,” in *Design for Our Planet* (Design Council, 2023); and “Collisions: Art and Climate Change,” in *Adaptation: A Reconnected Earth* (Museum of Contemporary Art and Design Manila MCAD, 2023).

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*Ecological Awakening of the Museum:  
Curating Art & Climate Change at the Sainsbury  
Centre, University of East Anglia*

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*Can Museums Serve as Catalysts for Climate  
Awareness?*

The establishment of a dedicated curatorial position in Art and Climate Change at the Sainsbury Centre marks a significant shift in the institution’s commitment to addressing one of the most pressing global crises of our time. Launched in November 2022, this pioneering role integrates the interpretative power of art with the empirical rigour of scientific inquiry and interdisciplinary collaboration. Its mission is to confront the risks of anthropogenic climate change while charting pathways toward ecological regeneration and sustainability.

This initiative, developed in partnership with the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research at the University of East Anglia, exemplifies a forward-thinking approach to curatorial practice. Named after John Tyndall, the scientist who first described the greenhouse effect, the Tyndall Centre brings together experts across environmental science, economics, and engineering to address the socio-environmental impacts of fossil fuels and develop adaptive strategies for a rapidly changing climate.



The Sainsbury Centre and Sculpture Park. Photo: Andy Crouch



The Sainsbury Centre Living Area. Photo: Kate Wolstenholme



The Sainsbury Centre and Sculpture Park. Photo: Andy Crouch



Beuys’ *Acorn*, Ackroyd & Harvey, *Sediment Spirit: The Activation of Art in the Anthropocene* at the Sainsbury Centre. Photo: Andy Crouch





Planet For Our Future: Sainsbury Centre, 2023. Alice Daisy Pomfret



John Kenneth Paranada, Curator of Art and Climate Change, Sainsbury Centre, UEA. Photo Blaine Valencia



Sediment Spirit: The Activation of Art in the Anthropocene at the Sainsbury Centre. Photo: Andy Crouch





Photo: Soul City, (*Pyramid of Oranges*) Roelof Louw, 1967. *Sediment Spirit: The Activation of Art in the Anthropocene* at the Sainsbury Centre. Photo: Andy Crouch



Claudia Martínez-Garay, *Sediment Spirit: The Activation of Art in the Anthropocene* at the Sainsbury Centre. Photo: Andy Crouch

As Curator of Art and Climate Change, I lead a range of initiatives that merge artistic practice with scientific discourse. Through exhibitions, publications, events, and symposia, I foster transdisciplinary collaborations and engage with local and international communities. This dual approach — rooted in the arts and sciences — aims to leverage the communicative power of museums to inspire behavioural change, foster climate resilience, and advance sustainability.

## *Building Collaborative Practices to Address Global Challenges*

At the Sainsbury Centre, we are reimagining the museum as a hub for interdisciplinary experimentation, tackling global challenges through creative practices. This approach integrates thematic, experimental, and applied methodologies, establishing a strong framework for knowledge exchange and advancing our social mission.

Our programme promotes collaborative, practice-led initiatives that confront pressing global issues while addressing their social, political, and ethical dimensions. By posing society's most urgent questions and exploring them through the lens of art, culture, and other disciplines, we challenge existing norms, reflect on shared values, and engage with broader discourses. This process nurtures relational, networked practices that prioritise the collective well-being of both human and non-human worlds.

### *Case Study: Sediment Spirit: The Activation of Art in the Anthropocene*

This presentation highlights how university museums like the Sainsbury Centre can address anthropogenic climate change through interdisciplinary approaches, participatory engagement, and strategic collaborations with communities and heritage institutions.

At the core of this work is *Sediment Spirit*, the inaugural exhibition I curated for the *Planet for Our Future: How Do We Adapt to a Transforming World?* season in 2023. As part of the *Living Art Sharing Stories* initiative, the exhibition challenged audiences to critically engage with ecological concerns through art. It reimagined the Earth as a sentient, dynamic entity, encouraging viewers to rethink humanity's relationship with the planet.

The exhibition's title reflects its dual themes: *Sediment* represents the Earth's material flows that sustain biodiversity, while *Spirit* captures art's ability to provoke profound intellectual and emotional responses. Featuring over 20 international artists and collectives — including Karrabing Film Collective, SUPERFLEX, Derek Tumala, Tabita Rezaire, Claudia Martínez Garay, and Ackroyd & Harvey — the exhibition explored themes of environmental renewal, resilience, and ways to adapt to a world constantly in flux. To deepen engagement, empower action, and connect with local communities, we curated a range of impactful programmes and collaborations including:





MAMELLES ANCESTRALES, 2019, Tabita Rezaire, *Sediment Spirit: The Activation of Art in the Anthropocene* at the Sainsbury Centre. Photo: Andy Crouch

- **Climate Cafes:** In partnership with MIND, we created safe spaces in Norwich to address eco-anxiety and climate grief, offering a platform for community dialog and collective healing.
- **Workshops for Young Associates:** International artists led sessions with young people from Norwich and nearby areas, inspiring creative responses to the ecological crisis and fostering a new generation of eco-conscious thinkers.
- **Community Collaborations:** Partnering with grassroots organisations and local schools, we co-developed projects that reflected residents' lived experiences while tackling global climate challenges.
- **Guided Tours and Museum Lates:** Programmes like *Wild Perspectives: Imagining Ecological Crisis from Nature's Point of View* brought local audiences together to explore innovative ways of engaging with environmental issues.
- **Artist Residency:** Claudia Martínez Garay

worked closely with Norwich communities to re-home elements of the collection in soil, symbolising humanity's interconnectedness with the Earth.

This problem-focused, question-driven approach has attracted leading artists to collaborate across all display areas, sculpture parks, and programmes. By incorporating the voices and experiences of Norwich's communities, we ensured *Sediment Spirit* resonated both globally and locally, creating meaningful connections and fostering engagement.

Through *Sediment Spirit* and its associated programmes, we empower communities — locally and globally — to confront the ecological crisis with creativity, resilience, and hope. This embodies the Sainsbury Centre's mission to use art as a catalyst for transformative change.

*Towards a Sustainable Future:  
Can the Seas Survive Us?*

The upcoming 2025 season, *Can the Seas Survive Us?*, highlights the critical importance of coastal ecosystems in both local and global contexts. This programme showcases the Sainsbury Centre's dedication to cross-sector collaborations, with partners including Norfolk and Waveney MIND, The Mo in Sheringham, the Dutch artist collective De Onkruidenier, the Norfolk Record Office, The Fitzwilliam Museum, the Nieuwe Instituut, the Time and Tide Museum of Great Yarmouth Life, the National Trust Collection, and an impressive roster of artists such as Josh Kline, Julian Charrière, Maggi Hambling, Olafur Eliasson, and many others. These partnerships enhance climate awareness, foster creative engagement, and bolster community resilience through grassroots initiatives like the Mile Cross Community Garden in Norwich.

The Sainsbury Centre is transforming from a repository of cultural artefacts into a dynamic hub for critical discourse, public education, and environmental activism. Museums possess the unique ability to inspire hope and galvanise collective action. In this era of escalating ecological crises, museums must step up as facilitators and leaders of meaningful change.

This vision is not merely institutional — it is an ethical imperative. By embracing inclusivity, reflexivity, and participatory engagement, museums can become pivotal agents in global efforts toward decarbonisation, climate adaptation, resilience building and promoting social justice. Through the *Can the Seas Survive Us?* season, the Sainsbury Centre seeks to ignite an “eco-wakening” that inspires systemic transformation and paves the way for a sustainable and equitable future for all.

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**Day 1, Part 2**

**Friday, December 6**

**The Geffen Contemporary  
at MOCA**

***Sustainable Ecosystems:  
Rethinking Museums within the  
Urban and Social Realm***



# *Two Museums, and the Potentials of Time and Distance*

Michael Maltzan, Principal,  
Michael Maltzan Architecture, Inc.,  
Los Angeles, USA

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## *Biography*

Michael Maltzan founded Michael Maltzan Architecture in 1995. His work spans a range of typologies, from cultural institutions to housing and city infrastructure. Notable projects include the Moody Center for the Arts, MoMA QNS, the Winnipeg Art Gallery Inuit Art Centre, UCLA's Hammer Museum, One Santa Fe, and the new Los Angeles Sixth Street Viaduct. A graduate of Harvard GSD and Rhode Island School of Design, he is a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects, a recipient of the 2016 AIA LA Gold Medal, and was elected to the National Academy of Design in 2020. He was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 2023. His work has received five Progressive Architecture awards, 51 AIA citations, the Rudy Bruner Gold Medal, the Zumbel Award, the 2020 AIA LA Millennium Honor Award and the 2025 Cooper Hewitt National Design Award. Maltzan's work has been exhibited internationally at MoMA, the Carnegie Museum of Art, the Canadian Centre for Architecture, the Heinz Architectural Center, MOCA LA, and the Venice Biennale. His designs are held in the permanent collections of the Carnegie Museum of Art, MoMA, the Art Institute of Chicago, and LACMA.





He has designed exhibitions for multiple museums and has worked with artists Catherine Opie and Lari Pittman to design spaces and structures for solo exhibitions.

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*Two Museums, and the Potentials of Time and Distance*

The traditional role and historical cultural position of the museum has often been defined by the museum's mandate around permanence. This is largely focused on the institution's collection, on the very idea of a museum having a permanent collection. This forms the foundation, often, of the museum's identity and responsibility to its patrons, its culture, and to museums as a whole. A physical manifestation of this idea often resides in the museum's buildings, and in its posture and position in its context, whether city or landscape. There have been many stylistic iterations architecturally of that projection of permanence, and while many of those examples are older, there are many newer versions of that ambition as well... and in a contemporary context the ambition to communicate permanence can, by extension, be seen as suggesting a non-throwaway future, and a parallel idea to the idea of sustainability.

But depending on how it is employed, that historical fixity can also hinder the ability to adapt... and adaptation, or the capability for adaption, is a core value (maybe "the" core value) of sustainability.

We know that sustainability is more than the physical firmness and longevity of a building. The museum today must take into account cultural and social concerns, environmental concerns, and especially its relationship to community and the city.

This fundamental shift in the perception of permanence begs a question, how might the museum create a more sustainable and more inclusive approach to its roles and responsibilities, one that allows genuine evolution and greater responsiveness over time and space?

Flexibility, as a concept, has in the past been one way that the goal of allowing for change has been explored in museums. Spatial flexibility, the ability for a space to accept and support the widest range of content was a central tenet of modernism.

But that resulting flexibility was often generic spatially leading to a one-size-fits-none reality. Maybe, then, another way of thinking about flexibility is not about the creation of a "neutral canvas," but instead a greater investment in a kind of specificity... one that bores down into the complexities of cultural and social frictions, and the sometimes-messy intersections of narratives, histories, geographies, and artistic

practices, as a way of making a museum that provides for other opportunities to engage and connect.

Following that line of reasoning, I want to talk about two museum projects we have worked on: The Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, and Quamajug in Winnipeg, Canada.

The first, the Hammer Museum, grapples with the question, "how would you approach the design of a museum if you knew it would take 24 years (and 7 phases) to complete?"

The Hammer has been a comprehensive remaking of the existing museum, all in response to the goals of creating a more accessible, dynamic, and responsive institution that could keep pace with constantly evolving artistic and curatorial practices.

But when we were first hired, we found a largely moribund and inward facing museum, detached from the life of the metropolis around it. Physically connected to the hi-rise corporate headquarters of the Occidental Petroleum Company, the Hammer wasn't exactly transmitting signals to the outside world that inside a dynamic view of culture was rapidly developing. In fact, whenever I mentioned to friends that we had been commissioned to redesign the museum, they always said that they thought the building was the parking garage for the office tower.

Even though the Hammer was completed in 1990, I've argued that the Hammer might have been the last nineteenth-century museum built in North America. It didn't have classical columns and a grand staircase, but it was conceived of as an insular safehouse for a mostly European-focused collection, starting from the Renaissance.

From the beginning, there was a complexity inherent in the existing building in that it had three entrances, at the south from Wilshire Boulevard, from Lindbrooke Drive to the North, and from the subterranean parking garage underneath. I began to think that this in fact could be the Hammer's greatest attribute. It could be approached by almost anyone from any direction. Its lack of hierarchy could reinforce its sense of openness to the city around it.

The courtyard which was empty of life, and a little post-neutron-bomb like, could be recast as a connective civic space in a city that had few precedents for that kind of space, creating a social and civic heart for the Hammer. Not as an equivalent to the traditional museum plaza, but a new type of open and inclusive public space at its very core.

One of the first things Annie Philbin said to me at the start was that the Hammer was going to focus on the artists, and if the museum did that well an audience would follow.

An example of this philosophy was that the very first thing we did was to create a small project space at the corner of Wilshire and Westwood for young and emerging artists. That space had enormous visual exposure, being at the most highly-trafficked intersection in Los Angeles. We also made modifications in the lobby to the mural-sized stair wall to create a canvas for a new wall drawing program. This made the artists process and work the “front façade” of the Hammer. Both initial moves put art front and center in the city and had the effect of announcing the Hammer’s intentions of making art a part of daily life.

The creation of the Billy Wilder Theater happened soon after, which gave the newly formed collaborative venture between the museum and the UCLA Film and Television Archive an animated, and pink, home for a wide array of live and projected programs that range from films and lectures to guided meditation. The Wilder’s design also set a number of the architectural themes that were amplified in subsequent phases, including the creation of more visual transparency throughout the museum as an alternative to the opaque box of the original building, the creation of more vigorous physical connections between programs, and also between indoor and out, making stronger interactions in a building that felt almost suburban in how separated and discreet things were.

For technical reasons, we couldn’t cut into the exterior much at all, so transparency occurs more between interior spaces and programs. You see these ideas playing out when looking through the large glass walls of the Wilder lobby and back of the theater, where views extend from the courtyard all the way to the stage. You also get a sense of it in the details of the architecture... in the perforations of leather seats, and at the black metal wall paneling that is perforated as well, all invoking a sense of permeability, that something is always beyond the surface.

One of the real challenges was that to create space for expanding programs we literally needed more physical square footage, but we couldn’t add space by pushing out beyond the perimeter of the building, or by adding on top of the museum. Instead, we had to look at ways of reimagining underutilized and found spaces anywhere we could find them. We filled in parts of the existing colonnade surrounding the courtyard to create a new café. We enclosed the Lindbrook Terrace to create a new space for artist installations on the upper floor, adding a shaped curvilinear ceiling for acoustic purposes. We even took the empty space under the main staircase, and added a flexible education room that has a glass façade that can fold out of the way, allowing the space of that

room to flow in and out between it and the courtyard.

Large glass walls that fold, slide, and pivot have been a way of making spaces that can be both intimate and expansive, discreet or connected. It allows the Alice Waters restaurant, Lulu, to spill into and enliven the courtyard, and the Bay/Nimoy Studio to become a space where everything from dance to exhibitions is visually and physically accessible to anyone walking through the courtyard.

The Bay/Nimoy Studio is also one of the few places where we could cut open the black-and-white striped façade of the museum to insert a large picture window, connecting the life of the street outside to the life and activity of the museum courtyard inside.

At the center of all the transformations at the museum, physically and metaphorically, is the John Tunney Bridge. While the bridge wasn’t completed until 2015, it was the very first design element I thought of when we began the master plan. It’s a short bridge in length, but has had an outsized impact on the way museum goers and curators use the museum. After the bridge was installed (which was an event in itself, having been prefabricated in a factory and craned into place overnight), it created a kind of short circuit to the original long traverse around the courtyard with a new direct connection between the permanent and changing exhibition galleries. This one short move unlocked a whole new range of intersectional exhibition possibilities. It also created a vantage point for the first time where you could just stand and be in the middle of everything at the Hammer.

The galleries the Tunney Bridge connected were transformed in 2016 in both subtle and significant ways. We added to the floorplans wherever possible to gain exhibition floor space, but we also found a way to raise the ceilings 2.5 feet to create the ability to exhibit a wider range of scales of work. This was essential as contemporary art practice was beginning to move beyond what the original galleries could accommodate. We reconfigured the skylights in those spaces to make controlled natural light possible from a conservation standpoint, and we remade the floors with a wide-plank oak that is comfortable to be on, and forgiving to repeatedly install on.

In contrast to the large scale of the main galleries, the new Works on Paper Gallery has a very different proportion and is a more intimate exhibition space. Its direct connection to the new Grunwald Study Center expands again interconnections between the curatorial and educational potentials for the Hammer.

Finally, in the last phase of work we moved back out to the perimeter of the museum, broadening its presence along Wilshire Boulevard and amplifying the



Hammer's goal of creating a more transparent and accessible museum for all. At the corner of Wilshire and Westwood we have made a new front entry "porch" for people to meet before they enter the museum. From this porch you enter a reconfigured lobby space with its curved visitor contact desk, and while this space is a lobby, in true Hammer fashion it is an exhibition space as well, with the original wall drawing project redefined and expanded. The lobby has new more energy efficient and transparent exterior glass along the entire façade, which allows your view from the street to be drawn inward to the art, making the wall drawings and installations again the true face of the museum.

The open visibility from the city into the Hammer continues with a new Hammer Project Gallery visibly anchoring the eastern half of the ground floor, and is extended beyond the confines of the existing building for the first time by a new outdoor sculpture courtyard at the corner, where the extraordinary Sanford Biggers sculpture was set at the opening, emphatically demonstrating that the Hammer has finally evolved from a closed and largely inward facing institution to a new form of museum in dialog with its city.

And back to that initial question about the length of this project. What I think is germane here is that with that longer iterative process a responsiveness was enabled between the restless evolution of the museum and its physical space. If we had started with a clean slate and built a new museum for the Hammer at that nascent moment in its development there would have inevitably been parts of the design that were out of date or function almost immediately because they would have been responding to what we all thought a museum should probably include, and not what the Hammer would actually need.

But with each subsequent phase, we could adjust and tailor the museum space to respond to the Hammer at the pace of its evolution. It's one of the reasons I believe the Hammer continues to feel like such a contemporary space with a palpable sense of great purpose and presence.

Quamajuq, in Winnipeg, is a new center for Inuit art and culture at the Winnipeg Art Gallery, and which houses the largest collection of post war Inuit art in the world. The collection had 7,000 objects when we began, and has grown to over 14,000 works since we began.

The ambitions around this project must be seen in the context of the deeply troubled history of the Inuit community within Canada, and the ongoing questions of reparations still in question there. In that context, the creation of Quamajuq represents

a profound architectural and cultural collaboration that transcends the traditional process of museum design, driven by a commitment to authentic representation of Inuit artistic and cultural traditions.

It was a process characterized by place and distance, given the extreme distance between the community of the Art Gallery in Winnipeg and the diaspora of Inuit communities at the Arctic circle.

Each of these different and faraway places informed the design ambitions of Quamajuq, beginning with Winnipeg, where the physical site for the building, which was to be built as an addition to the WAG, is surrounded by an emerging culture, arts, and education center of the city.

Right across the street is the enormous building of the Hudson Bay Company. The Bay Company's role is an important and extremely complex part of this story, as it was the major trading connection with the Inuit communities, and it was the original Hudson's Bay Company who first brought Inuit sculptures to the WAG, beginning the collection in the 1950s.

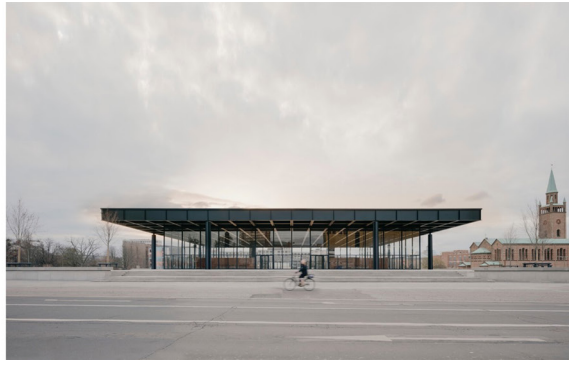
Just as historically complex is the proximity to the Manitoba Provincial Headquarters at the top of Memorial Boulevard.

The architectural design process began with a fundamental principle: the space must be more than a building—it must be a living narrative of Inuit cultural expression, and to support that aim the Quamajuq project initiated an extensive engagement process that placed Inuit voices at the center of every design decision.

This engagement process was multilayered and intentional. From the very beginning of the project's conception, gallery leadership, representatives, and subsequently the design team traveled to multiple Inuit communities across Nunavut and the Canadian Arctic, engaging in conversations that went far beyond typical design discussions. These dialogs were structured primarily to listen deeply to the cultural narratives, spatial memories, and artistic traditions of Inuit communities and artists.

Elder consultations were particularly crucial. These conversations explored not just architectural form and space preferences, but deeper cultural concepts of space, light, community, and artistic expression. Elders shared stories about traditional living spaces, the significance of natural light in Arctic environments, and the spiritual connections between physical spaces and cultural memory. They were also particularly forthcoming about their criticisms of traditional Western ideas about space.

Inuit artists were equally instrumental in the design process. They shared their perspectives on



The Metropolitan Museum of Art / Neue Nationalgalerie / Whitney Museum



Quamajuq, the Inuit Art Centre at the Winnipeg Art Gallery. Photo Credit: İwan Baan



Quamajuq's three-storey Visible Glass Vault. Photo Credit: İwan Baan





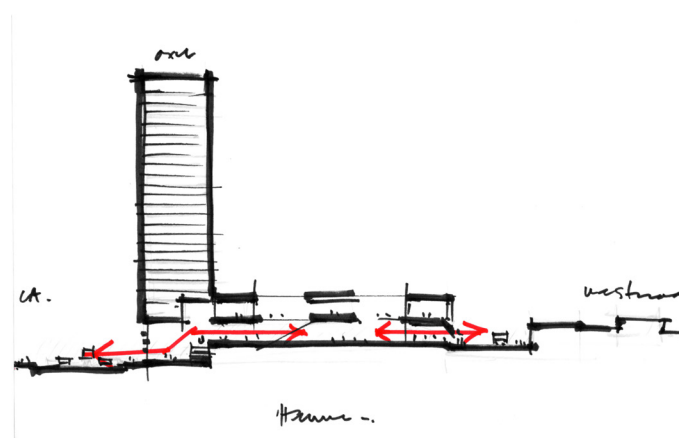
The North / An Inuit artist at work. Photo Credit: Michael Maltzan, İwan Baan



The North / An Inuit artist at work. Photo Credit: Michael Maltzan, İwan Baan



Quamajuq's gallery is intended to reflect the natural environments of the North  
Photo Credit: İwan Baan



Hammer Museum sketch by Michael Maltzan



Hammer Museum courtyard and John V. Tunney Pedestrian Bridge. Photo Credit: Michael Maltzan Architecture





Hammer Museum lobby with installation by Eamon Ore-Giron  
Photo Credit: Brian Forest courtesy Hammer Museum

how an art center could authentically represent their creative practices. Discussions covered everything from exhibition space requirements to the emotional and spiritual qualities that would make the space feel genuinely connected to Inuit artistic traditions. They were critical of the idea of their art being shown in a space that was a box of any kind. Partially because it was antithetical to the more fluid forms of the north, but even more pointedly because that kind of rectangular building was too reminiscent of the modular boxes the government forced on a traditionally nomadic culture when they were confined in villages in the mid-century. It was no surprise, then, to see many of the artists working outside of those modular houses, and making the outside and the expanse of the landscape their studio.

Several key design principles emerged directly from these consultations and conversations:

### 1. Light as a Cultural Metaphor

We were deeply influenced by Inuit descriptions of Arctic light — its transformative qualities, its spiritual significance, and its role in daily life. This led to the



Hammer Museum lobby with installation by Eamon Ore-Giron  
Photo Credit: Brian Forest courtesy Hammer Museum

development of a number of the center's most distinctive architectural features: the massive glass façade that acts as a lantern and allows natural light to interact dynamically with the interior spaces, creating a living, breathing environment connected visually to the city around it; multiple side lights that bring unexpected diffuse light in throughout the building; and a gallery ceiling perforated with round skylights, all working to create a spatial experience that seems to breath with the range of light as it changes throughout the day and seasons.

### 2. Spatial Transparency and Connection

Inuit artists and elders emphasized the importance of community visibility and interconnectedness. This translated into an architectural approach that prioritized open, transparent spaces where artistic practices could be observed, celebrated, and where greater understanding could potentially grow. The design includes a range of formal and informal interconnected spaces that break down traditional barriers between art, creation, exhibition, art storage, education, and curatorial and conservation practices.

### 3. Material Authenticity

Our conversations together revealed a strong desire for materials and design elements that reflected Inuit material culture. This influenced choices in textures, colors, and structural elements, and was the primary catalyst for the white granite stone that was chosen for the facade.

Inevitably there was the question of what building form would both be a strong and distinct presence on its own, and also be in a genuine dialog with the existing Winnipeg Art Gallery designed by Gustavo da Roza in 1971.





Hammer Museum gallery with work by Marisa Merz. Photo Credit: Joshua White courtesy Hammer Museum



Hammer Museum lobby with installation by Chiharu Shiota. Photo Credit: İwan Baan



We studied many shapes and forms in the design process searching for the right one that would create two unique buildings that would strengthen each other by not shying away from their difference. The final design creates a dynamic presence for the IAC through its scalloped and fluid forms contrasting the strict triangular geometries of the de Roza building, each distinct building being in a lively dialog with the other.

I was fascinated by the quality of light in Winnipeg. It has such a presence and beauty just like the light in the North. It seems to have a thickness to it, and almost feels like a material on its own. The scallops of the IAC façade catch light and shadows from many angles, while the white granite was chosen because it seemed to be able to be infused with the colors and intensities of that light.

The design creates a continuous glass façade at street level, making the stone gallery above seem to float. It is meant to create transparency for anyone passing by into the collection housed in the visible vault, and the public programs going on at the learning steps and in the foyer, meaning that the experience of the art, practice, and architecture within the IAC are more a part of city life and are visible whether you enter the museum or not.

The visible vault is really the centerpiece of that space, and fluid in its undulating glass form. There is a ribbon of glass floor at its base that gives you the impression that the art comes all the way from the very foundations of the building and rises up to support the gallery above. The concave and convex shapes of the vault create opportunities to experience the art up close, like you are being enveloped in the collection.

Visitors have a number of ways to continue their journey up to the gallery: by stairs and elevator, but just as often via the learning steps, which programmatically can be used for a wide range of public programs but also provides a critical education space before arriving at the main gallery. The activities in this space are visible when open, but can be closed quite dramatically with a curtain created in collaboration with celebrated Inuit artist Elisapee Ishulutaq, based on a painting by her in the collection.

Finally, you arrive at the main gallery, where visitors are greeted by a space of significant scale. I kept reflecting on the scale of the North. There has been the argument over time that art looks the best, feels the most alive, in a space that's similar to the studio space in which the artist created it.

For Inuit art, the studio has been the North itself, in its vastness, its scale, and its unique light. It's a fascinating juxtaposition, the scale of the North and

the fact that the pieces, especially the carvings, while often physically small, have the power to command their presence against that immensity. The typical exhibition response has often been to make intimate vitrines and cases, with a pin spot of light to bring the scale down to the physical size of these pieces, but that often seems to miniaturize and diminish them. Instead, with the Inuit artists and elders we chose to make an exhibition space that, while not at the full scale of the North, perhaps begins to insinuate it as a way to use scale and size not as a tool for flexibility, but rather to make a space that tries to collapse distance and separation, and replace those metrics with the qualities of dialog and connection.

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# Another Kind of Monument

Andrea Lissoni, Artistic Director,  
Haus der Kunst, Munich, Germany

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## Biography

Andrea Lissoni has been the Artistic Director of Haus der Kunst München since 2020. His program is based on a transdisciplinary approach, in which all strands are deeply connected, and which started in April 2022 with the sound-and-music residency series TUNE and a series of intertwined exhibitions by Fujiko Nakaya, Dumb Type, Carsten Nicolai, Christine Sun Kim, Tony Cokes, and Karrabing Film Collective (2022). This was followed by *Inside Other Spaces. Environments by Women Artists 1956–1976*, alongside shows by Wang Shui, Martino Gamper, and Meredith Monk. This spring, the series developed further with solo exhibitions by Pan Daijing, Liliane Lijn, and Rebecca Horn.

Formerly he was Senior Curator, International Art (Film) at Tate Modern, London, and previously curator at HangarBicocca, Milan where his exhibitions included Micol Assael, Celine Condorelli, Gianikian-Ricci Lucchi, Joan Jonas, Mike Kelley, Ragnar Kjartansson, Philippe Parreno, Wilfredo Prieto, and Tomas Saraceno. At Tate, he curated Philippe Parreno's Turbine Hall Commission in 2016, as well as survey exhibitions of Joan Jonas and Bruce Nauman. In 2019, he co-curated the Biennale de l'Image en Mouvement *The Sound of Screens Imploding*,



Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève and OGR, Turin, and participated in the international launching of CCA Tashkent, the first public contemporary art center in Uzbekistan, where he curated Qo'rg'on Chiroq, the first solo exhibition by artist Saodat Ismailova.

### *Another Kind of Monument*

Could Haus der Kunst be seen as a monument? Indeed, this is almost a provocation. Haus der Kunst is a contemporary art institution without collection inhabiting a monumental building whose identity swings between many layers of memory, a past and a recent history, and the daily unfolding of a program projected towards the future. In the historical moment when public monuments have been dramatically challenged, and bridging the recent past with the present-future of Haus der Kunst, the brief talk shares the question: can a public art institution represent the ideal transforming and transformative monument? Since 2022, Haus der Kunst has been in a fast process of motion and transformation. We decided to dedicate our work to living artists, proposing new lines in art history, questioning the previous canon, stereotypes, and rhetorics with an outlook into the future. Grounded on a transdisciplinary, transnational, and transgenerational perspective, the program is based on the assumption that "Everything is Program," without hierarchies between departments. As the main operation tool, the program explicitly interlinks all projects to form a common learning and engagement thread evolving throughout the years, and fostering a new context that develops with a strong understanding of the increasingly digitalized world in which we live.

### *Can we speak about Recollection of Memories and Perception as new Forms of Learning?*

(The following text is the lightly revised transcription of the presentation of the intervention, adjusted to the needs of the panel and the previous presentations of the day)

Good afternoon and thank you for inviting me. In our panel we were asked to answer some very precise questions. In order to answer those questions, I took the freedom to tweak them. The questions were about how do we see our buildings, what are the boundaries between past and present and between museum and community, and how do we work beyond the museum walls?

The outcome of my tweaking exercise was: Can we speak about recollection of memories and perception as forms of learning? That was only the beginning and the following step would be: could Haus der Kunst's building, commissioned by the national-socialist regime in 1933 as main art propaganda tool and opened by Adolf Hitler in 1937, be seen as a monument? Obviously, this is a provocation. Indeed it is a monumental building whose identity swings between many memories. In the historic moment when monuments are challenged and become horizontal, participative, lively, communal... what does it mean for a public institution that is monumental in its architecture to become a monument? The answer is "of course, it could represent the ideal idea of a monument, as long as it transforms into what nowadays a monument is and represents." At Haus der Kunst, over the last few years, we worked on perception; perception of an institution that, despite its astonishing international credibility, locally was not loved anymore.

There was a refurbishment pending. There was a financial crisis. There were voices of any kind, layoffs, the trauma and the tragedy of a visionary director who passed away just little more than a year before and the following one of a financial director who cut exhibitions planned since a long time. In a nutshell, when I arrived at Haus der Kunst there were many issues. I began working on six pillars. I eventually shared a vision with both the team and the supervisory board based on those pillars, to nurture the mission that will have to come afterward. I've been striving to change the way Haus der Kunst was depicted. I began using this image where we see the building as if we were a flock of birds or a swarm of bees, from the sky. The font of the new identity is somehow familiar. We almost recognize what is written, yet it is also a new language, another language. Letters clash, overlap, connect.

This is not the image of Haus der Kunst as it was known. I will now go quickly through a history that begins in 1933, when Adolf Hitler commissioned the building. Between 1935 and 1945, it hosted yearly *Große Deutsche Ausstellung*, a propaganda exhibition where paintings and sculptures were sold and distributed all over Bavaria and beyond. I don't need to say more, this is one of the darkest periods of history of humankind for Germany in particular.

The whole story is perhaps better known for the smaller exhibition that was presented in 1937 not too far away from Haus der Kunst: the *Degenerate Art* exhibition. The second little chapter of the history of Haus der Kunst is between '45 and '55. After the





Haus der Kunst München, 2018 Photo: Stephan Kelle

Second World War, the word “German” (*Haus der German...*) disappears. The building is denazified and becomes “Haus der Kunst,” and hosts a series of exhibitions, particularly from the Pinakothek, that was bombed and destroyed — luckily, the artworks were saved. Ironically, Haus der Kunst instead wasn’t bombed.

Perhaps the most relevant moment was in 1955 when the survey of Pablo Picasso arrived and *Guernica* was shown for the first time in Germany.

After many years of exhibitions, featuring western and in particular American artists, in 1993, the institution became a foundation. And that’s the moment when many questions around its demolition were in the air. Christoph Vitali, the first director, started combining modern and contemporary art in extravagant yet intriguing exhibitions. Between 2003 and 2011, Chris Dercon first, and then from 2011 to 2018, Okwui Enwezor, set a new agenda for the institution

to become groundbreaking — particularly Enwezor with his extraordinary work on post-coloniality and de-colonization — and transforming it into a discursive institution. However, the story did not end well, and in 2020, during COVID, the institution was in deep trouble.

So, we started with pillar number 1, basically the public space. We began “tagging” the building as if it was an extended throughout time street art action. We inaugurated working on memory and perception, and “attaching” forms of writing all over the building.

There was an intervention by Franz Erhard Walther, who had a show at the time I arrived. Obviously, it was impossible to visit the exhibition during the pandemic, and he produced a poem that was projected on the building and took over for 5 days the website. I eventually found by chance a beautiful artwork produced by Mel Bochner that was shown on the front façade in 2016. I called Mel asking whether he was open to the idea of installing it on the back, towards the park where the citizens were walking by during COVID. Mel was more than happy, donated the artwork, and now *The Joys of Yiddish* is part of a sort of ideal permanent collection of an institution without a collection.

We continued this journey in 2022 by inviting Tony Cokes to a survey show and asked Tony to produce some new works, and particularly some text work that we attached in the underpass, between two institutions (Haus der Kunst and Kunstverein Munich, by coincidence hosted in the same building where the *Degenerate* show happened). All these gestures were tools to begin to engage with the monumental building of Haus der Kunst differently. In 2023 we asked Joan Jonas if she was up to display *Wolf Lights* (2004—05) on a screen on the façade and in 2024 as part of her survey and commissioned Rirkrit Tiravanija a text work on a banner hanging between the columns. They somehow made the building speak and taking explicit discursive positions.





Tony Cokes. *Fragments, or just Moments*. Exhibition view. Haus der Kunst München, 2022. Photo: Maximilian Geuter



Fujiko Nakaya. *Nebel Leben*. Exhibition view. Haus der Kunst München, 2022. Photo: Andrea Rossetti



Martino Gamper. *Sitzung*. Exhibition view. Haus der Kunst München, 2023. Photo: Judith Buss





Rikrit Tiravanija. Exhibition view. Haus der Kunst München, 2023. Photo: Judith Buss

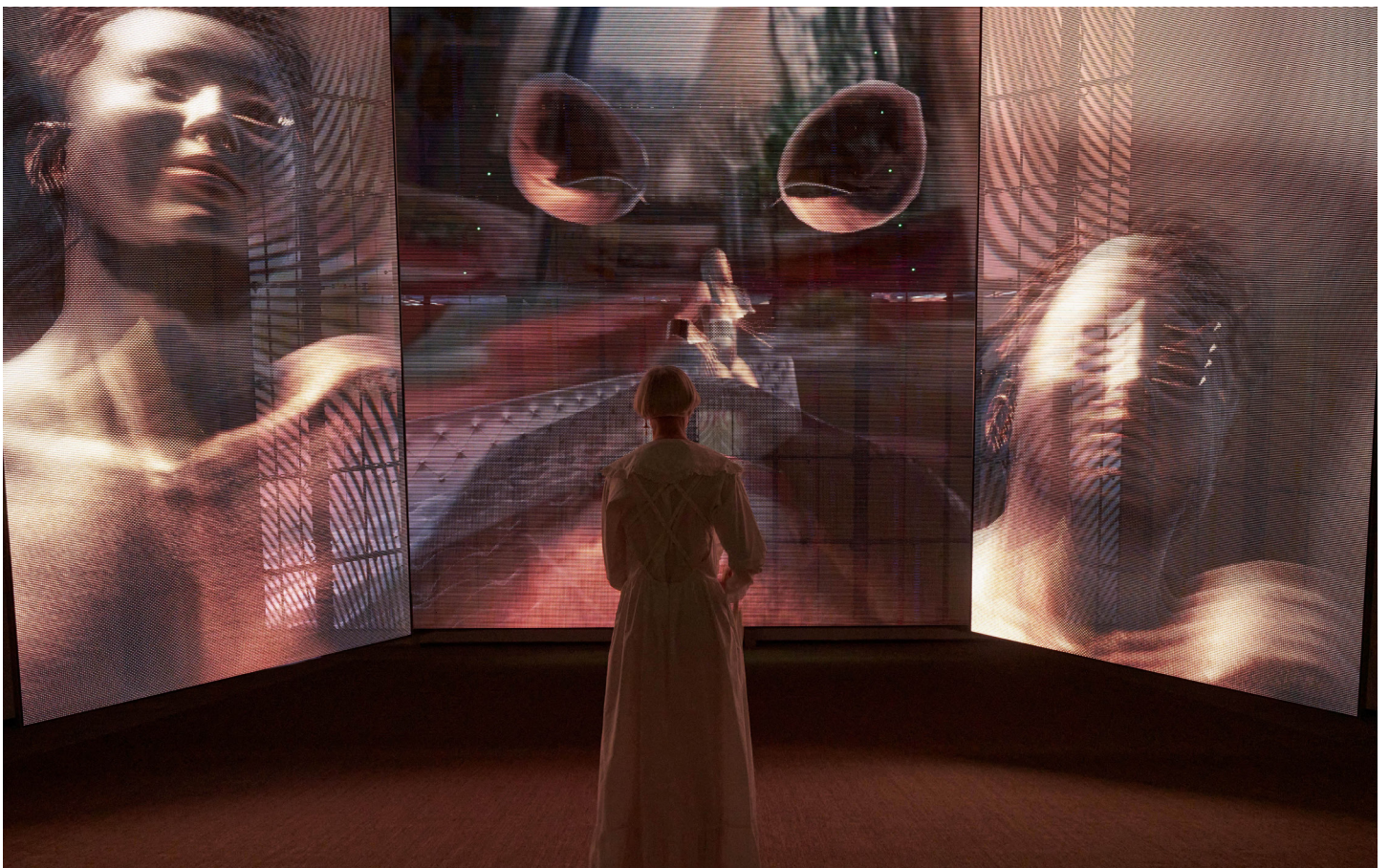


Haus der Kunst München, 2023 . Photo: Maximilian Geuter





*Inside Other Spaces. Environments by Women Artists 1956–1976.* Exhibition view. Haus der Kunst München, 2023. Photo: Agostino Osio — Alto Piano Studio



WangShui. *Window of Tolerance.* Opening. Haus der Kunst München, 2023. Photo: Milena Wojhan





Nico Vascellari, "Alessio". Performance. Haus der Kunst München, 2024. Photo: Franz Kimmel



Velvet Terrorism: Pussy Riot's Russia. Exhibition view. Haus der Kunst München, 2024. Photo: Maximilian Geuter



Pillar number 2 is what could be defined our discursive program, but in fact is differently intended. Let's start from the need Haus der Kunst had to engage with a new public. Pillar number 2 is not discursive in the conventional sense it is a music and sound program called TUNE. It is a tool specifically intended to build community. Instead of talks and panels we give artists working with sound and musicians space, time and resources, far more space than traditionally in arts institutions: They are invited for a week, and are part of a public residency announced one year ahead, as part of an entire series of 10 invitations — as if it was a sort of group show stretching throughout a year. In fact, they are invited to present what could be described as a survey of their work: perhaps their first concert, the most recent live, a collaboration, a dialog, sometimes a screening, or a series of listening sessions. Some of them leave an installation behind for some weeks in one of our galleries. Twice a year, two Tune artists inhabit a transitional space from the galleries towards the bar with an unfolding composition. This specific commission, loosely inspired by the idea of “Music for Airports” by Brian Eno, plays with the idea of transitional spaces and their soundscapes. Until now we commissioned Lamin Fofana, the very first one, then Ihor Okunieiev, a Ukrainian artist and activist, followed by Tadlee, Jim C. Nedd, Hanne Lippard & Laurel Halo, and Beni Brachtel. As you can see, we engage with reality as well as with the program, the aim is to host as a sort of voice of the institution whispered, sang and composed by artists throughout the year.

Pillar number 3 is the exhibition program. How do we do exhibitions? We focus on transgenerational, transnational and transdisciplinary artists mostly working with media and technologies. We try to commit to bodily perception as much as we can. We suggest, we train our audiences, not so much to read on walls, but rather to feel, again, to co-generate new forms of perception and memory that pile up throughout time.

Continuing this thread, this is Fujiko Nakaya, the exhibition that launched the new program three years ago. With it, we inaugurated a thread of new forms of engagement with our public, particularly with the younger public. This is also when we began openly to stress that *everything in the program is connected*. Across galleries, across individuals, across subject matters.

So, alongside Fujiko Nakaya, we presented a survey show of Dumb Type, who share a deep relationship with Fujiko Nakaya. We also commissioned an environment to Carsten Nicolai, who in the late nineties went to Japan to work on Japanese gardens

as a landscape architect, and encountered the work of Fujiko Nakaya. That encounter completely changed his life. He eventually met Dumb Type, and would since be both a renewed musician and a visual artist. This is just a first example to give an idea of what I mean by programming with the aim of connecting, drawing lineages and dialogs across galleries and throughout time. In that specific moment, between spring and autumn 2022 we triggered an art historical and transnational conversation across experimental practices, generations, and a specific idea of multisensory environments.

Pillar number 4 is the public space. By this I mean the immediate surroundings of the museum but primarily the heart of Haus der Kunst, the Middle Hall. Here is where we commission exclusively works that require to be experienced, that need to work as interfaces for a form of engagement. The first one we commissioned during the pandemic. We made a survey of all the videos made until then by Jäcolby Satterwhite within a sort of huge environment designed by Jäcolby as a club, a gathering space that was really missed by the younger generation in that challenging period. It worked very well, offering a soft and welcoming environment in which the public could experience the body of work of Jäcolby changing every third month. That was then followed by a commission to Christine Sun Kim, opening to a specific idea of diversity and bodily perception, we are proud given this was her first video work ever, took over the whole floor and ended up generating a unexpected form of engagement for children.

We continued in 2023 with Hamid Zénati, an artist of Algerian background who lived 60 years in Munich, who never had a show before. With this specific commission, the aim was indeed addressing underrepresented communities as well as presenting a groundbreaking practice based on textile and inventive printmaking.

The most successful project until now in terms of engagement was a commission to Martino Gamper, a designer and artist, who after many visits conceived specific chairs, all different from each other and produced on site. To connect with the closest local subculture, we decided to involve the community of surfers. You may be aware that next to Haus der Kunst there is a surfing wave, one of the hotspots in Europe for surfing, for sure the only urban one. We involved the surfing community as part of our marketing campaign of “Sitzung,” which in German means both *assembly* and *sitting*. Needless to say, the visitors would constantly move the chairs throughout the day as they wanted. The Middle Hall became the host



of neighborhood meetings, council assemblies, hang out space, and contributed to our push towards bodily perception.

To continue, we organized a “delocalized” exhibition with Rirkrit Tiravanija. Knowing about the exhibition he’d have had at PS1, and eventually at Martin-Gropius-Bau, we asked Rirkrit to conceive the stage design for Hanjo/Hagoromo staged by the Munich opera, as well as to present a specific selection of his works all over the building in non exhibition-dedicated spaces. This allowed to bridge the public of the Opera and Haus der Kunst (the Opera was in fact staged at Haus der Kunst), as well as offering to Rirkrit a different model of exhibition.

Pillar number 5: There is a bunker in our building. There is no art institution I’m aware of that hosts an actual war bunker in its premises. That’s where we decided to present artists who are striving to make their voice present in the current times, to change the narratives of the major history: Why is this? Inevitably, because this is where one can directly experience the specific history of the building. In 2022 We invited Tony Cokes for his first European survey ever, and he took the opportunity to transform the bunker into a sort of club, tributing his love and passion for electronic music, but also as the perfect site to host all his works. This exhibition was followed by a survey of the Karrabing Film Collective, a fundamental collective that is challenging not only contemporary history from an indigenous perspective, but, above all, has conceived a an inventive filmic language that is extraordinarily innovative.

The 6<sup>th</sup> pillar is our visual identity: The letters are somehow familiar, although interconnected, almost elegantly crashing into each others. It looks like familiar language but in fact it isn’t really readable. We do not work on name recognition, therefore we can be free to suggest that we’re preoccupied with connecting artists, media, audiences. Our icon looks like a little rainbow. It’s in fact a forum, a bridge, a ripple effect, a broadcasting station: in short, it is what you would like it to be and is made of the exact amount of all the pillars of the façade of Haus der Kunst.

This is a show that we presented last year, curated by Marina Pugliese and myself, about to travel to M+ in Hong Kong. Why do I mention *Inside Other Spaces. Environments by Women artists 1956 – 1976* (2023 – 24)? This is how we look at history: we suggest and draw new lines in art history by reappraising canons and stereotypes. We present perspectives that are not conventional and base our researches on a transdisciplinary, transnational and transgenerational approach. We rarely work on group

shows — they do require so much research that we can allow one only every second or third year. In the case of *Inside Other Spaces*, the idea was to look at the history of environments conceived by women artists. For this show, we did not ship anything, and decided to produce everything on site, after extremely accurate research and the involvement of an array of researchers, specialists and conservators from all continents. We worked on replicas, reproductions, or exhibition copies, and generated a project that I hope looked at art history from a different perspective, bridging it into the present, and presenting it alongside a survey of Meredith Monk, who worked all her career on the idea of *Shrines* — an in-between environment and installation concept, often produced for the stage — and WangShui, who conceived an exhibition as a journey into a window of what could be an environment nowadays, if the art historical category was still in place.

Through this show, we finally pulled together all six pillars, arriving to the point of generating a proper vision, based on the mission of striving to transform Haus der Kunst into a site where everyone can feel welcomed and immediately being part of a lively community. In doing this, we focus as much as possible on children, what we call the community of the future, on those in transformation, those that will be carrying these memories alongside many others, those who will become the messenger of how fundamental the arts are in shaping society. As far as possible, we do it by embracing the public space and engaging with the underlining vision based on the six pillars.

The current show in the bunker is a survey show of Pussy Riot that also answers the main question for an institution so preoccupied with performativity, bodily experience and liveness: How do we present performances avoiding the canonical museums tools, as vitrines containing arranged displays of documental sources alongside explanatory labels? In this case, everything in fact is a reproduction, there is no hierarchy between the “artwork” — an action by Pussy Riot — its preparation, the high amount of heterogenic documentary sources — photographs, videos, TV news — the narration of the action, and of its consequences, handwritten by the artists on the walls: All sources share the same value and everything is presented as a balanced overwhelming array of an artistic universe. In this specific display, there is no distinction between the actual artwork, its documentation, and the signage.

To conclude, in the hope to give a sense to the questions I presented in my introduction and the proposal of Haus der Kunst as a permanently

unfolding monument conceived as welcoming and different form of learning institution, I would like to share with you a project that lies at the bottom of our heart. Opening next summer and being the outcome of three years research, *For Children. Art Stories from 1968* is conceived as the next step after *Inside Other Spaces*. Engaging with a broader period of time, the aim this time is to look at art history beginning from a very basic question, a question we have extensively asked artists over continents and involved a large amount of colleagues across institutions: “Have you ever made an artwork for a child?” The seed was a series of films made by Harun Farocki, *Bedtime Stories 1–5* (1976–77) which were made for his own children and had never been shown in a museum context before. It’s Harun Farocki, so the *Bedtime Stories* are in fact night tales, to make the children fall asleep, but are obviously about structures and infrastructures: bridges, railways, ships, and so on. They are indeed extremely beautiful, and very touching. While avoiding playgrounds, we set about researching the history of artworks made explicitly for children since 1968. On the one hand 1968 is the year of *The Model*, the groundbreaking project produced by Palle Nielsen and others at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, on the other, it is when the history of the KEKS begins. KEKS was fundamental collective, active in Munich, that gave shape to extraordinary produced forms of learning for children and were invited to the Venice Biennale. Such specific artistic and pedagogic experiences grounded on innovative forms of learning appeared in different contexts, remarkable are Domingos da Criação (1971), initiated by Ferdinando Freire at Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro.

Presented in the main east galleries, *For Children. Art Stories since 1968* will be opening next summer and will be physically “sandwiched” between two major commissions. One is by Ei Arakawa, was presented during the pandemic in the Turbine Hall at Tate Modern with the title *Mega Please Draw Freely*, and is to be expanded for Haus der Kunst. Conceived as an homage to Gutai’s leader Yoshihara Jirō’s *Please Draw Freely* (1956) it invites children to freely draw on the floor of the Middle Hall, opening up towards the Park, the Englischer Garten. The other commission is to Koo Jeong A, a sculpture as skate park installed on the opposite side, on the terrace, partially plugging in to the east wing galleries and therefore becoming part of the show. It basically opens up the building towards the east, right next to the surfing spot hence in dialog with the community of surfers.

So, inhabiting the main galleries in between the two commissions the group show looks back to recent art history and proposes the question whether play through art can be intended as form of learning.

In October, during the Oktoberfest, the biggest world folk event, we will be presenting a solo show by Cyprien Gaillard, featuring at its center *Retinal Rivalry* (2024), a visionary stereoscopic film we co-commissioned. It could be defined as a sort of 4D film — it employs a cutting edge 120 frames/second technology — and is a journey within public sculptures in Germany, and last but not least was largely shot in Munich during Oktoberfest. Inevitably the exhibition’s baseline is the redefinition of the idea of monument, how monuments are “seen,” and can be otherwise perceived as both in transformation and transformative.

The aim of this scattered journey, was to tackle the provocative question: can Haus der Kunst be experienced as a monument? And can we do it by saying “everything is a program,” without hierarchies, across departments and across art practices and disciplines?

As I’m going back to the image I showed at the beginning, I will say that as a main operational tool, the program explicitly interlinks all projects to form a common learning and engagement thread. A thread based on encounter with art, passion, and love; a commitment to growing and transforming through the years, with an eye on future generations. I believe that like any arts center, Haus der Kunst can indeed be a monument, on the basis of the acknowledged shifted meaning of “monument” as it has finally changed over these last few years, opening up, hosting experiences, and its transitional status from “fleeting” to unfolding impermanently over time, always embodying forms of transformative learning. So, as a flock of birds would see it, Haus der Kunst, from the sky, looks more like a mouth organ or a big smile. And that’s the image I would like to leave you with, instead of the dark images with which I opened.

Thank you so much.



# *What Are Museum Landscapes?*

Sara Zewde, Principal and Assistant Professor, Studio Zewde and Harvard University, New York City, USA

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## *Biography*

Sara Zewde is founding principal of Studio Zewde, a design firm in New York City practicing landscape, urbanism, and public art. Named to Architectural Digest's AD100, an Emerging Voice by the Architectural League of New York, and a Best New Practice by ArchDaily, the firm is celebrated for its design methods that sync culture, ecology, and craft. In parallel with practice, Sara serves as Assistant Professor of Practice at Harvard University Graduate School of Design and is currently writing a book on her research retracing Frederick Law Olmsted's journeys through the Slave South. Sara holds a master's of landscape architecture from the Harvard University Graduate School of Design, a master's of city planning from MIT, and a BA in sociology and statistics from Boston University.

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## *What Are Museum Landscapes?*

My name is Sara Zewde. I want to thank you for the invitation here today. I am Principal of Studio Zewde, is a landscape design firm based in New York City. We work on projects across geographies on a wide



range of scales and project types. But really at the core of our work are questions about culture and ecology.

I've titled the presentation with a question, and that's not a rhetorical question. It's a real question that I'm asking you all today. What *are* museum landscapes? I think we commonly use the terminology *museum campus* or *museum grounds*. Maybe you have a favorite museum garden or a sculpture garden. Maybe a sculpture park. I would add to this list: museum plaza. But what about a museum landscape? I think that terminology is less commonly used, and that inspires a question in my mind. The other terms suggest a more discreet boundary, but a museum landscape suggests something indiscreet about its edges, and there isn't as much of a discourse around museum landscapes as you might imagine. One place to start might be with the question, what is a landscape?

The word landscape as we commonly use it is more than 300 years old. The late J.B. Jackson calls our attention to the origin of the term "landscape" as having essentially been drawn up for artists. It is meant to define the picture of a view, emerging together with the tradition of landscape painting. And this reliance on the picture of a view persists throughout the nineteenth century, and it birthed an entire profession known at the time as *landscape gardening*, offering services to shape the private and enclosed estates of the land-owning classes and turning it into something like that image of the painting. An entire landscape could be constructed around a singular view, and that view often an image from or looking toward the building in an expression of power and dominion over the land.

In the twentieth century, with the rise of the environmental and ecological movements, shifts have happened in the practice of landscape architecture, changing the meaning of landscape and the way that we use the term. Fundamentally, we're not designing images anymore; or we at least we have introduced the critique that we shouldn't be. We should be growing in our understanding that what we are doing is forming a dialog with cultural and ecological systems. Systems that are not static, like an image, but dynamic and ever changing.

We are engaging the processes of time that are inherent to this medium of landscape. J.B. Jackson wrote about the notion that a landscape is not a discreet, natural feature of the environment. It's not a mountain, it's not a river, it's not the soil, it's not the earth. Rather, it is a cultural lens onto the earth, a framing of it. It is a product of human culture, its contours created by the shared reality among a community of people. It is an expression of a way

of life entangled with ecology and it reveals the history, values, and practices of a community through its built environment.

The clarified pressures of climatic, social, and political changes in the twenty-first century have continued to trouble landscape architecture, troubling its roots in coloniality, provoking it to engage deeply with the specificity of place, of ecology, of indigeneity, and cultivate stewardship of the land as opposed to dominion over it. We might also ask ourselves what is a museum, which I am learning more and more about today in the course of the conference.

At about the same time that the use of the word *landscape* emerges, so too does the modern museum — in many ways a product of similar factors that produce the landscape-as-image. Europe's entrée into trans-oceanic travels, colonization of faraway lands, the associated accumulation of wealth and things... The grounds of these museums were flattened expressions of the land, aprons to the museum as a monument of power, flat to support the presence of the building in the overwhelm of the human body, the ground of the museum fashioned much like the white walls of the galleries inside.

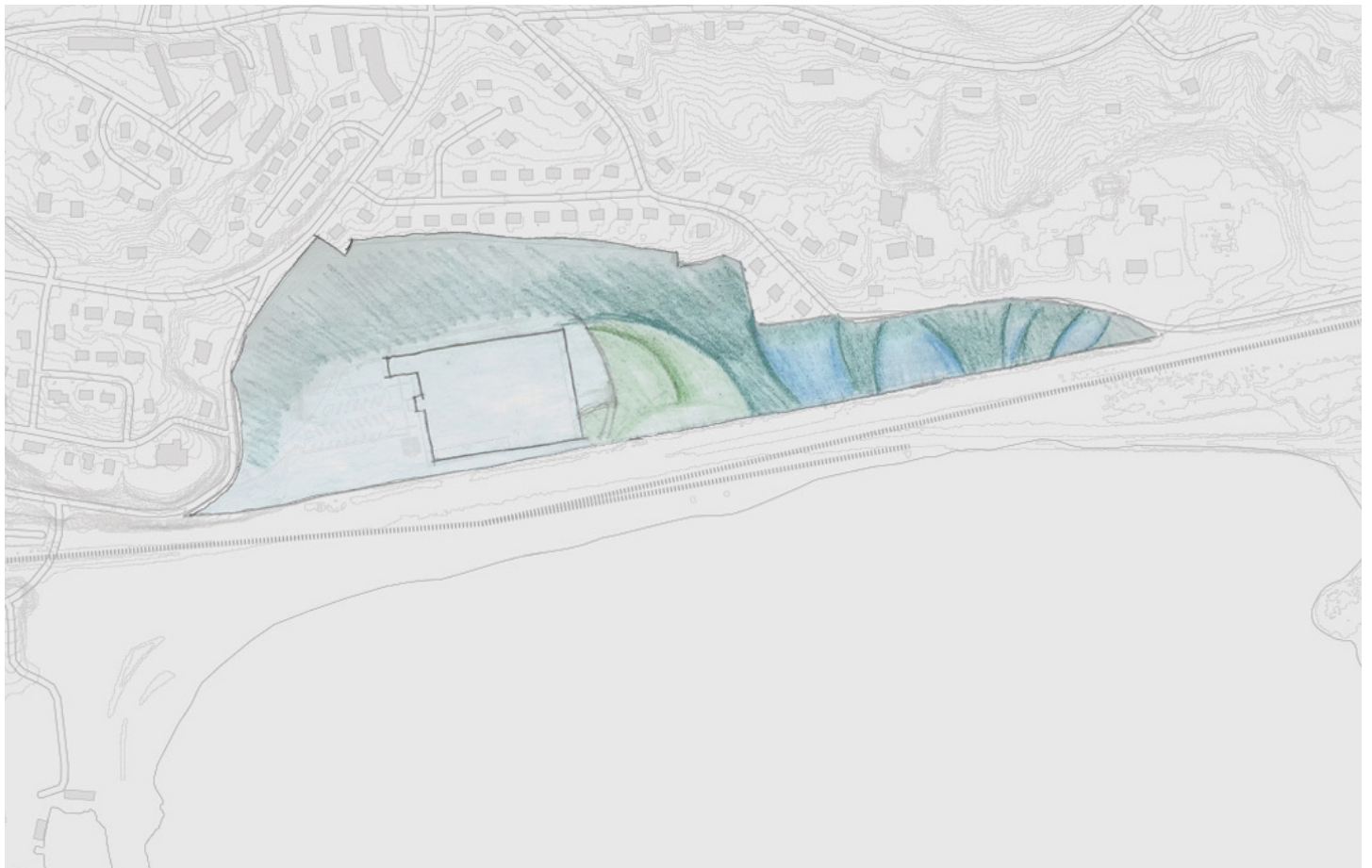
Much of our tradition of museum grounds today are remnant of this tradition. The land's axis of orientation is the building. The museum is the center of gravity of the very earth around it. The land is often treated like an object in the collection itself. But museums are shifting, too. They are increasingly rethinking everything. They face pressures to meaningfully reflect the plurality of the publics they serve, to become responsible models in a world searching for sustainable practices. And they are under threat in a very material way from rapid changes in climate. Beyond diversifying programming and exhibits, museums are questioning their relationships to the very practice of collecting, exploring what shifts in a position of ownership versus stewardship of collections might represent. The museum would seem to be headed towards becoming an institution that is not discreetly defined by walls or its campus, but an expanded model, an institution whose existence is interlaced meaningfully with the community of which it is a part. That a museum might be of the ground it sits on, or dare I say, its landscape.

The shifting models of both landscape architecture and museums might occasion new typologies that reflect the changing models of both. The design of museum landscapes can support the resilience of our institutions in a changing climate, but also serve as processes of critical inquiry into indigeneity, place, community, relationships, community relationships and



museum campus  
museum grounds  
museum courtyard  
museum garden  
sculpture garden  
sculpture park  
*museum landscape?*

What Are Museum Landscapes?



Conceptual Sketch for Dia Beacon's Southern Landscape





Working with the land at Dia Beacon



Working with the land at Dia Beacon



Working with the land at Dia Beacon



Working with the land at Dia Beacon

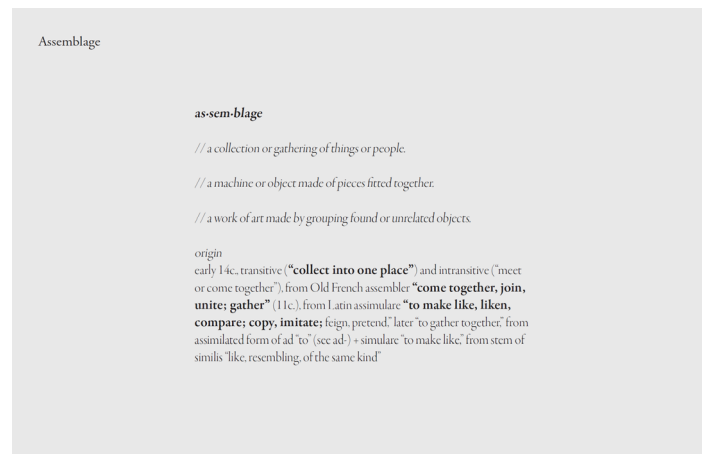


responsibilities, and institutional legacies. As designers, we are asking ourselves these questions in a series of commissions that we currently have: the Toledo Museum of Art, the Studio Museum in Harlem, the Watts Towers Arts Center, here in Los Angeles, and, under construction, the landscape of Dia Beacon.

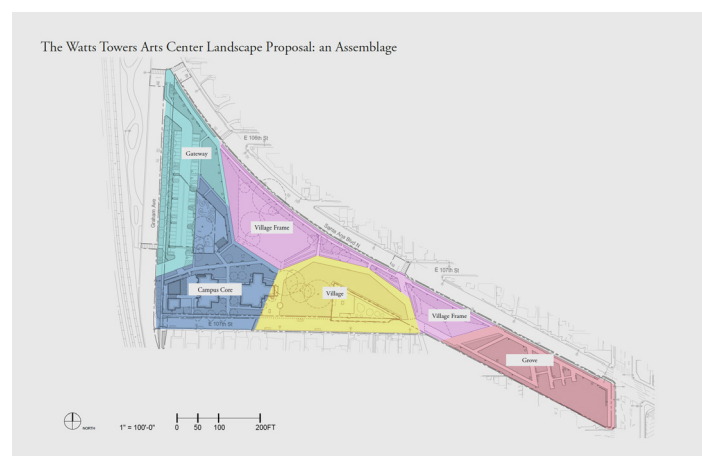
I'll share two of these projects quickly with you, the first being Dia Beacon. We started this work as we do with all of our projects, really situating the history of the ground, not necessarily starting from the creation of the institution, but the long history of the land. And we learned that the Hudson River is known as the great water constantly in motion. And in our conversations with native people, we learned about an important proverb: "we are all just passing through." The saying affirms an understanding that natural features in the landscape are not named after people, but rather people are named after landscapes, because it is the landscape that persists. We, humans, are all just passing through. Moreover, Ununraveling the history of slavery and dispossession that set the groundwork for the institution was critical to setting foot into the project.

In this way, we also learned that Dia Beacon sits in the historical floodplain of the Hudson River. And that the chapters of industrialization and resource extraction led to the topographic condition of the museum sitting in a bathtub created by the railroad tracks and the banks of the river. In 1929, the Nabisco box printing plant was constructed here, which would eventually become the museum itself. And in the mid-twentieth century, the city of Beacon underwent economic changes that left the Nabisco facility vacant, again setting the groundwork for this institution. The institution itself really is entangled with the historical emergence of the environmental movement in the United States. Several of the works of the artists that it has supported over time are engaging with processes of change in the land. And the word "Dia" itself actually means "through." And so, we found this interesting cross-section in the indigenous legacy of land here, in the notion that we're all just passing through, and that is the spirit of Dia as an art foundation.

The building was acquired in 1998 and Robert Irwin was commissioned to design a series of iconic gardens on the northern portion of the site. 2012 brought a kind of clarification about the vulnerability of the building. The basement saw flooding during Hurricane Sandy, and it triggered the idea of a potential project happening in the southern eight acres of the property and ways in which a landscape design could grapple with this ecological vulnerability. Dia was also already in the midst of grappling with narratives of



Assemblage in Watts, Los Angeles



Assemblage in Watts, Los Angeles



Assemblage in Watts, Los Angeles

indigeneity. And in the post-2020 racial reckoning, there were big questions about what landscape design could do to engage with all these challenges.

We were commissioned in 2021 to design these southern eight acres. Much of it, as you can see here, was lawn. Robert Irwin organized the gardens as an extension of the building itself in a kind of north-south orientation around this idea of conditional architecture, but the gardens and the gallery spaces are really serving to reinforce the north-south axis of

industrialization of the railroad tracks themselves. We were interested to learn from indigenous people about the history of the site as a portage from east to west across the Hudson River, and that this seasonal ritual of crossing the Hudson was an important part of sharing technologies with various people, and of movement. Also, that the site of Dia Beacon was the place where this actually took place across the river, not along it.

This was the original kind of conceptual sketch that started to look at a formal language that brought rise to this tradition, this different orientation towards the river. And the ways in which a kind of sculptural land-forming could express the movement of water that was once there, and also protect the building by bringing water in, not holding it out or hiding it away. Making water a part of the experience of the site, bringing an understanding of the presence of water here over time. We kept coming back to this quote by Toni Morrison. She says: "Floods is the word they use, but in fact it is not flooding; it is remembering. Remembering where it used to be. All water has a perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was."

So, there were many iterations, lots of studies. We worked with clay to explore its sculptural qualities and with Sherwood Design Engineers to calibrate the volumes of these forms to be positioned to protect the building across a wide range of scenarios. We worked with Larry Weaner Associates, who are specialists in meadow planting, to think about ways to convert this lawn into a more sustainable plant palette. And we came up with this collection of different kind of palettes to express the various conditions of the land, supported by a wide range of tree canopy. The landscape by the numbers: 380 trees converting about 4 acres of lawn into over 90 species of meadow plants.

At one point in the project, we shared some of these ideas with the native people, and they stopped us in the middle of the site analysis. And they told us they didn't want to see any more historical maps. They told us to go back and look at the ground, the history of the land is there. And so, we went back and looked at the ground and all those chapters of history that I just walked you through can be seen in there. This was kind of a notation exercise that we went through and that really birthed our material palette. So all of the materials to construct the paths and the seeding are really about expressing the materials that are already on the site.

And so, this is what ultimately is going into the first

phase of construction. We took all of those studies and translated them into our construction documents. This is the before condition, and this is after, you can get a sense of the ways in which the different material palettes express the microfolds of the landscape, the ways in which the forms actually pull you in and invite you in to explore the landscape itself. It is no longer an image to look at—it's really something to immerse yourself in an understanding of.

The seasonality of the meadow plants invites you to come back across seasons and understand the ways in which stewardship and the changing land is something to embrace and to come back to experience in different ways over time.

There's a small amount of lawn left to allow for some further programming to take place. The tops of the different forms offer prospects out into the lower basins. Although it takes a sculptural form, the landscape is a layered approach to stormwater management. Protecting the building is a 10-year stormwater retention capacity underneath the lawn, optimizing use of this minimal portion of lawn that's adjacent to the building. The berms are also protecting against major storm events. And you get this kind of exuberance of the meadow plants when you're in the lower basin. So, actually, the perception of moisture and water and how that changes over time is really important to this landscape expression. And this is an offering of Dia's to its community. This is not a ticketed entrance. This is Dia becoming a steward of this land.

The lower basins, as you can see here, again, are designed to flood. This is a fun fact: this path that you see here is designed to be at the level of Hurricane Sandy's flooding. So every time the water crosses there, it serves as a datum for that moment in time. The project is currently under construction, so these photos are from about two weeks ago. This is Rae Ishee, who serves as our project manager extraordinaire, reviewing mockups on the site. You can see a little bit of how those forms are starting to come in and how the folds in the land are legible. So we invite you to come and see this when it opens in spring 2025.

Next, to give you a quick sneak peek of a project that is a little bit less further along. The Watts Towers Arts Center is local to where we are in the Watts Community of Los Angeles. We're entering into this project and this is going back to some of the original questions, where we are looking for a formal language that isn't the expression of the land as an outgrowth of the building and the museum, but searching for a language that is endemic to this place and this community. And Watts played an important role in the



history of assemblage art and its production. And so, we started to explore the history of assemblage as a tradition of bringing objects together.

The assemblage movement arises out of industrialization, and Watts suffers from some of the worst effects of industrialization. It is one of the most polluted communities in the State of California, with high rates of soil contamination, respiratory ailments, cancer, and many other issues. It's very much an environmental justice community. Average life expectancy is ten years less than other neighborhoods in the city of Los Angeles. And so, there's a role that landscape can play here.

Simon Rodia, an immigrant from Italy who lived in Watts, constructed the Watts Towers. It is considered the world's largest single construction completed by a single person. And he constructed this using everyday objects, largely collected from people in this neighborhood: a neighborhood historically black, which today is predominantly Hispanic. Several artists at the forefront of assemblage come from Watts. Noah Purifoy would become the founding director of the Watts Towers Arts Center, located at the base of these towers. And many of these artists cite Simon Rodia and the towers themselves as inspiring their practice. In 1966, the Watts Rebellion produced an excess amount of rubble that would go on to become a part of the practices of these artists.

Noah Purifoy talking about the practice of assemblage and how critical it was to his practice, together with some images from the 1966 exhibition, set the creative departure for us, thinking about the art of making do and what it lends, how we might interpret that in a practice of landscape architecture.

The site itself is an assemblage. The community has fought over many decades to create what it has as an arts campus around the towers, so the site itself is a collection of parcels. It doesn't look like a singular, cohesive campus, and that is because the community has really fought off development, but has yet to have the opportunity to build in its own image. It has just been a practice of protection to this point.

This is the framework, the site diagram of how we are approaching the site. We don't want to make a landscape with a singular expression that erases that history of activism as if it never happened. We want to make an assemblage. We want to make this place functional and legible, but in the spirit of everything this community has done to steward this land. We want it to express its pieces, but also to come together as a place that is functional and supportive of this arts center as an institution.

This is where we're currently at in the landscape

design process. You can see all of these pieces. And the idea is that each one tells a story. It's a separate space, but again, you read it as a place with a heart and an intellectual core. A lot of the expression of those pieces is achieved through different plant palettes, again really focusing on the plants that work best in this climate that are low-to-no water. The conservators have really expressed to us the issue with the massive amounts of concrete and asphalt around the towers. And so, the greening of the landscape and offering a place for people in this community to engage with nature, with vegetation, is a major offering of the arts center to this community, in addition to being an act supportive of the conservation of the towers. The landscape is designed to be a place where the life of this community happens, and in the shadow of the towers that have inspired so much life around it. And with that, I'll end with my question to you: what are museum landscapes?

Thank you.

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**Day 2**

**Saturday, December 7**

**Hammer Museum at UCLA**

***Economies of Sustainability:  
Ethics, Values and Resilience***



# *Fogo Island: The Possibility of a Place*

Zita Cobb, CEO Shorefast,  
Co-Founder, Shorefast,  
Ottawa / Joe Batt's Arm, Canada

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## *Biography*

Zita Cobb is an eighth-generation Fogo Islander, Cofounder and CEO of Shorefast, and innkeeper of the Fogo Island Inn. A registered Canadian charity, Shorefast uses business-minded means to help secure economic and cultural resilience for Fogo Island, a centuries-old settler fishing community off Newfoundland's northeast coast. Cobb graduated high school on Fogo Island before leaving home to study business in Ottawa. Following a subsequent successful career in high-tech, she returned to Fogo Island to help grow another leg on the island's struggling economy to complement its ever-important fishery.

Shorefast's notable achievements to date comprise a holistic set of charitable initiatives, including the world-class artist-in-residence program Fogo Island Arts ([fgoislandarts.ca](https://fgoislandarts.ca)), and three innovative social businesses whose operating surpluses are returned to Shorefast for reinvestment in further community development work. Specifically, Shorefast is behind the award-winning, 29-suite Fogo Island Inn ([fgoislandinn.ca](https://fgoislandinn.ca)), Fogo Island Workshops ([fgoislandworkshops.ca](https://fgoislandworkshops.ca)), and Fogo Island Fish. Shorefast has pioneered the innovative practice economic nutrition labeling for its



social businesses, transparently demonstrating “where the money goes.” Shorefast’s model is both unwaveringly specific and universally applicable, holding relevance for communities worldwide.

Cobb has been a Member of the Order of Canada since 2016 and was a 2020 inductee to Canada’s Business Hall of Fame. She holds honorary doctorates from McGill University, Memorial University of Newfoundland, the University of Ottawa, and Carleton University. She is an active CEO and volunteers her full time and energy for Shorefast’s work on Fogo Island.

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### *Fogo Island: The Possibility of a Place*

I was born in 1958, and I have already lived in three centuries. Until I was 10, I lived on Fogo Island, where I grew up in what felt like the nineteenth century. We didn’t have running water or electricity, my parents couldn’t read, and we had very little money. Despite this, it was a pretty perfect life. We were part of a fishing community. However, when I turned ten, the harsh realities of the twentieth century began to impact us, particularly with the industrialization of the fishery, which abruptly ended our livelihood and seemingly rendered us irrelevant in the world.

I studied business and built my career in wave division multiplexing, which involves the optical components that have made the digital age possible. So, that’s an overview of three centuries of development. Eighteen years ago, I returned home to start the projects that I will be discussing.

Fogo Island is connected to the mainland of Newfoundland by a ferry. Some of you may have visited Fogo Island, though probably not as many have been there. I started a charitable foundation called Shorefast with my brothers 18 years ago. It’s important you understand the meaning of the name. A Shorefast is a line or tether that connects a traditional cod trap to the shore. We are cod-fishing people, and this concept serves as a metaphor for our desire to remain connected to our place or places; being shorefast in our place(s).

The specificity of Fogo Island is significant. It is shaped by the Labrador Current, which is one of the coldest and fastest ocean currents, originating from the west coast of Greenland.

There was an economist named E.F. Schumacher, who came from Germany, via traveling through the UK, and eventually moved to the United States. He wrote a book called *Small is Beautiful*.

He has been a great inspiration to me. I read his work while I was in business school, and it made me consider dropping out because I felt that all the answers I needed were there. We’re discussing sustainability, and the term “sacred capital” originates from the work of Charles Eisenstein. It raises important questions about what has value and whether inherent value exists at all — some people argue that it doesn’t.

Eisenstein’s perspective on sacred capital refers to something that emerges from specific circumstances and, if destroyed or harmed, cannot be easily replaced. Then, of course, we have money. What are we, us humans, trying to figure out when discussing sustainability is how to establish a better relationship between money and those things that possess inherent value, as our current relationship is certainly not the right one.

When we find ourselves tangled in difficult situations, how do we begin to untangle them? I believe we must start from where we are. Place automatically organizes everything, so we need to hold something constant in order to find a way forward. In our work, we hold the concept of place as a constant.

I discuss the economy and engage in economic work not because I believe it’s the most important aspect, but because it’s the most powerful lever we have to achieve our objectives.

I understand that you use the term “community” in a different way than I do. When I talk about community, I’m referring to a specific place where people live. Anyone who is in that location is part of the community, and they are inevitably intertwined with one another. While economics is meant to be a social science, it has unfortunately transformed into something of an anti-social science.

Development, in my view, is the richest word. What does it mean to develop? Every time someone mentions growth, I want to emphasize the importance of development. We can develop without necessarily growing. Development is akin to deepening, much like developing film; it’s about taking something with latent potential and bringing it to the forefront.

However, development is highly contextual. What I perceive as development may differ from your understanding of it. I believe it is a more meaningful term than growth. In our work, we put place at the center and explore how place organizes and holds everything — absolutely everything. Place holds nature. Culture is a human response to a place. I used the word community as a shortcut for the nature and culture of a place.



I view the world as being composed of communities. In Canada, there are 3,797 incorporated communities and 637 indigenous communities, along with countless unincorporated ones, the total of which is unknown. If you consider community to be the essential building block of society, it raises an interesting question: What can we accomplish in these places? What do they need?

During my conversations over the past day about the concept of scale, I've recognized that scale is one of the toughest challenges to address. Canada is a vast geography, containing numerous communities — many of which are quite small. For example, my home province of Newfoundland and Labrador has hundreds of communities and 600 of them have fewer than a thousand residents.

In today's world, there is significant emphasis on scale, especially in the business sector, where larger is often perceived as better. However, the pursuit of increased scale can lead us off course. Schumacher, who wrote *Small Is Beautiful*, did not mean that everything should remain small; rather, he argued that our goal should be to determine the appropriate size for something and then find ways to connect it to the larger world. This idea captures the essence of the work we are undertaking.

I believe that scale is crucial when considering sustainability. Many terms we use carry different meanings for different people. In the business world, we often talk about "resources" and "assets," for example, human resources and natural resources. However, these should actually be considered assets rather than resources. Money on the other hand, is a resource, that can be deployed to strengthen or properly develop assets.

We have often confused the concepts of investment and development; in reality, most investments do not amount to true development. This presents a significant opportunity. If we can establish the right requirements and enabling conditions, we could transform all investments into genuine development.

As Raghuram Rajan said in this book *The Third Pillar*, human societies relies on three pillars: markets, governments, and communities. If we fail to reactivate the community pillar, none of our aspirations will be realized; instead, we may face our worst fears.

At Shorefast, we are building an Institute and developing a network that connects effective and exemplary practices for community and economic development while considering all aspects of the local environment.

How can we strengthen community economies? The economy is the most significant lever we have.

Very few communities have a way to come together to take collective action.

Fogo Island is over three times the size of Manhattan, home to 2,500 people spread across ten different communities. Our work starts with the assumption that human beings are embodied, social and meaning seeking. As such, what do we need? The answers lie in place and the collaborative efforts we engage in within that place.

My ancestors crossed the ocean from England and Ireland in the mid-seventeenth century. Upon their arrival, the Beothuk people used Fogo Island for summer fishing. The arrival of the Europeans put unbearable pressure on the Beothuk. The last known Beothuk died in 1832. Europeans initially came for the cod, which provided livelihoods for over 350 years.

When I was ten years old, industrial finishing methods arrived on the island, leading to a complete economic collapse for us, followed by a cultural decline. At that time, my father wondered, "Who in their right mind set out to catch all the fish?" This behaviour defied his social and ecological logic systems. He ultimately concluded, "They must be turning the fish into money." He told me, "When you grow up, you need to go away and understand how this money thing works, because otherwise, it's going to eat everything we love."

The ten different communities living on Fogo Island did not want to leave the island, so they came together to create the Fogo Island Co-Operative Society for the fishery.

On Fogo Island, we are currently practicing Asset-Based Community Development to address specific needs. We ask ourselves: What do we know? What do we have? What do we love? What do we miss? And what can we do about it?

Every object in our lives is intertwined with a network of relationships. When these relationships are positive, the objects enhance our lives. Each object also represents a business model; someone created it, money was exchanged, and it arrived here in a particular way. Therefore, we have a relationship with these objects. When we allow anonymous objects into our lives, we miss the opportunity to form meaningful connections.

Shorefast pioneered the practice of Economic Nutrition, aiming for transparency in how our funds are allocated. Each product we sell is labeled to indicate where the money goes. Shorefast established a small company that sells hand-caught fish, which is distributed off the island, with 70% of the proceeds returned to Fogo Island.

If my father were still alive, he would have said, "You've found a way to turn money into fish." That is

precisely what we need to focus on. Shorefast also built an Inn and started a furniture making business. We practice Economic Nutrition labeling in all of our businesses.

Sustainability revolves around care, which is the central theme of my talk. We must cultivate a global network of intensely local communities. Culture is a human response to place; therefore, if we prioritize place and build an economy that includes places, that serves places, we can truly make a difference.

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# *Tentacular Models of Interdependency*

Manuel Segade, Director, Museo Nacional de Arte Reina Sofía (MNCARS), Madrid, Spain

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## *Biography*

Manuel Segade, (born A Coruña, Spain, 1977) is the Director of Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in Madrid. He trained as an art historian and led CA2M (Museo Centro de Arte Dos de Mayo) in the Madrid municipality of Móstoles for ten years, where he was awarded the CÍMAM Outstanding Museum Practice Award (2021). Segade has taught on post-graduate curatorial programs and is the author and editor of numerous books, including *Elements of Vogue*, *Kiss My Genders* and *Endgame: Duchamp, Chess and the Avant-gardes*. He is a founding member of both the European Art Assembly and the European Forum for Advanced Practices. He curated the Spanish Pavilion at the 57<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale in 2017. *What do you do when your world starts to fall apart? I go for a walk, and if I'm really lucky, I find mushrooms.*

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## *Tentacular Models of Interdependency*

There is a naturalization effect that takes for granted the relationships between public and private in cultural institutions, a consensus about the need of both types of funding and relations for a contemporary art space to survive. I can agree, but I don't understand the



public/private cohabitation as a given context, but as one that needs to be carefully produced as a political construct. To institutionalize is precisely to establish a political construction as the structural body of the institution itself. After all, there have been decades of situated institutional practices that have shown us that the contexts are not just something given but that they can be produced. Contexts should be produced and that is a task of ours. Sorry to jump to a conclusion already at the beginning of my presentation, but what I'll say today is that to preserve the complexity of the world is the main task of the spaces that show contemporary art. In a time when conservative forces are resisting to leave an epistemology based on binarisms, a perspectivist and trans scalar model needs to be designed, one that can acknowledge desirable futures that are already here now. I insist: not a hereafter or a yet-to-come, but to acknowledge desirable futures belonging to the here and now, and for which we don't need to wait. What these today's futures need is to be redistributed — a redistribution of futures in equality of gender, ethnicity, and social class.

Reina Sofía Museum in Madrid is a state-funded public institution from the national government of Spain. We are a southern European museum with funds granted by the nation, but we are also subject to the tax authorities of a neoliberal European Government that forces each of our managerial operations to fundraise, to be economically "effective." Accountability has become the norm in a time of audit policies, of media control by global corporations, and of the informal pressure exerted by the fascist sphere of the social networks.

But this is also a time of Cultural Wars and the Minister of Culture of our country is fighting a big public debate on cultural rights. The Spanish Democratic Constitution — born in 1978, three years after the death of the dictator Franco — says this in its 44<sup>th</sup> Article: "Public powers will promote and guarantee the access to culture, to which everybody has the right." To have the right to culture means that it needs to be within everyone's reach, but also that culture is a natural phenomenon of a community that plays a meaningful part in its development. It is very good news to be having a public debate to claim for cultural rights, however it also proves by definition that we should not think of our state as a philanthropic and generous stakeholder, but that the main and foundational law of our country is that it recognizes cultural materials need to be supported with the budget of the public administration. Given that culture is 0.35 % of the state's annual budget for 2024, it does not seem too much to ask.

In this frame, we're constructing a new support culture surrounding the museum, but also unprecedented modes of redistribution that challenge our colonial institutional body. We need a choral museum embracing as many differences as there are art practices. Spanish eco-thinker Yayo Herrero says that diversity is essential for life and so the condition for survival is inter-dependency. We came to think that the condition for the survival of an institution is inter-dependency also. Sustainability should be understood as an ability to sustain: that is the meaning of our institutional powers.

My task in this presentation is to show you the way we are producing a relational ecosystem of public and private forces in Museo Reina Sofía. And the most interesting way to tell it is through three case studies of art practices: it is in their radical imagination that all the complexity is preserved and our expectations exceeded.

The first case study is the most evident one: *Guernica*. Our twentieth-century chronology, our Spanish contemporary history, has nothing to do with our European neighbors. In fact, it's more related to the Eastern block and Latin America than to France or the UK, because we all lived through a break with modern cultural development due to our dictatorships. The emergence of the contemporary has been brought about by the exiled cultural figures of our modernity who returned in the late seventies, but also from a great gap, a big distance, between their experiences on their return and that of the younger generations. This lack is very well exemplified by Picasso's *Guernica*: it was in the custody in MoMA in New York and only returned to Spain in 1980, after our democracy had been constituted, as stipulated by the artist.

This image belongs to the group of 28 photographs taken by Dora Maar from May to June 1937. They were commissioned by Christian Zervos, editor of *Cahiers d'art*, to document the production of the painting. They belong to our collections and are shown in front of the monumental painting: I love that narrative not of a making of, but as if the huge Picasso was always in the making.

Another work from our collections is a monumental sculpture by Alberto Sánchez that stands in front of the façade of our main building. It is called *The Spanish People Have a Path that Leads to a Star* — no doubt a red communist one. It is a reconstruction of the one erected in front of the Pavillion of the Spanish Republican government in the Paris International Expo of 1937, where *Guernica* was exhibited for the first time. It is a clear sign of the public vocation of our institution, a political commitment to bringing historical facts into the present:



a forever museum, forever against war. The French philosopher Ray Brassier has a very thoughtful sentence: “The past is unpredictable,” and looking at the uses of Picasso’s painting in the public space throughout the different wars of the twentieth century makes this clear. Vietnam, Iraq, Ukraine, and Gaza with this Palestinian flag made by the people of the village of Guernica. As it has been said: “History does not repeat itself, but it rhymes.” This street archive dates from January 24 this year, when Greenpeace activists climbed twenty meters up our main façade to hang this denouncement of the killing of children by urban artist Obey.

These images of the façade of our main building are from the time of the Spanish Civil War, from 1937 or 1938. A celebration of May 1, of the workers dignity, and against Franco’s uprising; an uprising that started a war, an occupation, mass killings of the members of the Republican government, the murder of people... I’m trying, very briefly, to explain how the political frame of our institution is created by our own collection, and how the private and the public realms do not need to be opened up, but are interlaced and overlapped in the chrono-political pattern that is history itself. History is the rhythm to which our institutional asses are dancing.

It is as if to say that the most powerful example of a representational tool made to honor respect for human life is in the DNA of our museum. Contemporary art is a place of fundamental resistance and our museums should not just be defending life, defending freedom, or defending equality, as Chus well said yesterday, but they should arise as part of the conditions of equality, part of the conditions of freedom, and part of the conditions of life in our societies.

In fact, contemporary art museums have not become feminist or worried about gender issues, nor suddenly fixed in ethnical or economic diversity. Neither are they unexpectedly interested in specific social demands. Quite the opposite, these subjects are at the core of the artistic practices that define its institutional nature. A museum of contemporary art needs to set itself up as part of the material conditions for equality because they constitute the frame that made contemporary art practices emerge in the sixties, at the time of the second wave of feminism, the Stonewall Riots, May ’68, class revolution, and the final independence of the countries from the global south from the long-lasting European empires.

An intersectional point of view needs to cross the museum from its foundations to every minor action: central to our project is how to give visibility and representation to all possible differences of

identities and subjectivities. After all, democracy is a constituency of legions of minorities — or, put better, minorized communities — and our museum needs to reflect that. Put another way, if there is an institution prepared for the worlds to come, prepared to blend and to be transformed by any crisis, it is that of contemporary art. Our institutional condition has the advantage of being speculative.

The institutional body of Museo Reina Sofía is literally a hospital dating from the seventeenth century. It was a royal foundation in the center of the Spanish imperial economy caring for the bodies of the common people. To care, yes, but it was also the place where exclusionary practices were defined: here, over the last four centuries, decisions were taken as to which bodies deserved to be saved and cured, and which were left to die.

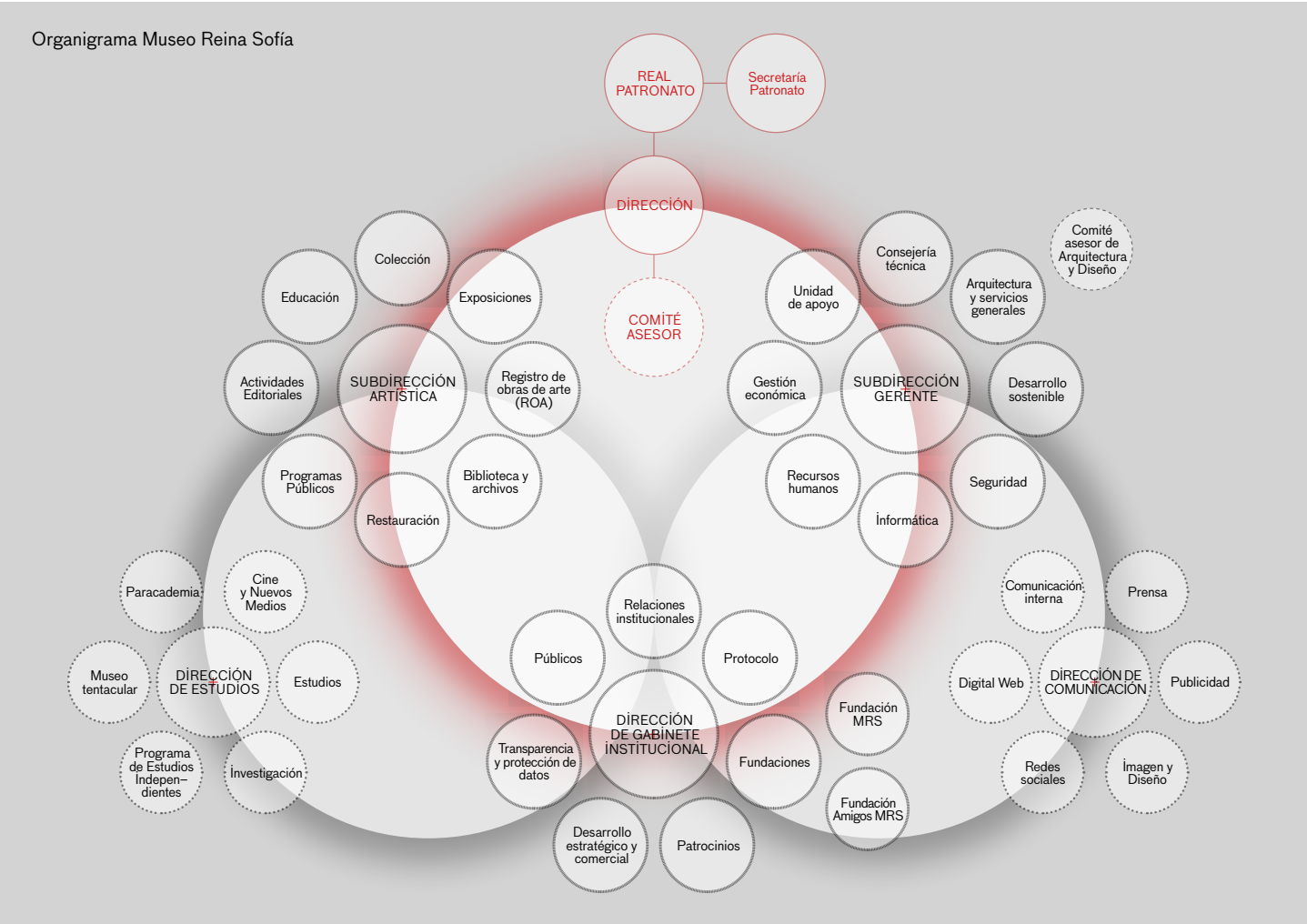
The garden was conceived by the architect Fernández-Alba in 1986, when the hospital was reformed to become a museum. It was here, when invited to make a monographic exhibition four years ago, the artist Alejandra Riera decided to install the *Garden of Mixtures* in two of its flowerbeds: a space of collective work, an inversion of the cosmetic imaginary of a historical garden the architect had designed as a museum landscape. It was built and is now maintained by a collective group of volunteers formed by museum workers, some neighbors, and some professionals committed to it.

Its function is not one of concealing and protecting nature from humans, but of removing the distance between nature and culture. The benches are situated inside the greenery and not in the walkways. The new design respects paths of desire, centralizing the coexistence between humans and animals... It is an almost utopian archive, a disorder in the museum that allows communities to permeate it.

Mame Mbaye was an African migrant and street seller who suffered a fatal heart attack while being persecuted by the police. By which I mean he was killed by the police. The riots that followed his murder in the neighborhood adjacent to the museum provoked a reaction from its team: the museum felt the need to belong to its area and to serve as a means of speaking out for its communities. This was the birthplace of the Situated Museum — an assembly of collectives of neighbors and activist groups where the institution is only one more member, as conceived by Manuel Borja-Villel, Ana Longhoni, and Mabel Tapia. Its most visible manifestation is an annual picnic organized in the free public space of our garden beside this Situated Museum. It is a perfect example of the interdependency for which we are looking, because



Sunshine parterre on April 9, 2019. Íñigo Gómez Egiluz, Tamara Días Bringas, Alejandro Simón, Alejandra Riera, Carmen Lobo Bedmar, Diana Vázquez, before confinement in the Garden of Mixtures. Photography by Román Lores Riesgo, image part of the documentation of the transformation of two plots of eight in the Sabatini Garden, initiated by Alejandra Riera with the Jardín de las Mixturas collective in 2017 and present in the exhibition *Jardín de las mixturas. Attempts to make a place, 1995-...*, Alejandra Riera, May 4 – September 5, 2022. Reina Sofía National Art Center Museum.



Work organization chart, 2025. Reina Sofía Museum.





Pablo Picasso. *Guernica*, 1937. View of Room 205.10. Sabatini Building, 2nd floor. Reina Sofía National Art Center Museum. Photographic archive of the Reina Sofía Museum.



Francis Alÿs. *Intervention Staircase Tower 2*. Sabatini Building. 2001. Reina Sofía National Art Center Museum. Photographic archive of the Reina Sofía Museum.

next to the sculptures of Calder, Chillida, Graham, and Miró, migrant families share their different cultures in a party that is also disrupted by different activities throughout the day, providing highly affective moments of political joy.

The communal garden in our institution, the garden by artist Alejandra Riera, and the Situated Museum are forms of assembly: they constitute soft institutional tentacles in our institutional octopus. As with the animal, they are collective brains that work independently, without the need of the main institutional brain... unless an instant of menace or danger urges the need to mobilize all the assemblies and the institution together.

This is the most relevant and most banal image that I can share: a piece of corrugated cardboard, the central material of global logistics, of the neoliberal bureaucratization of circulatory logic, the total tool of the Amazonization of the world. It is made up of three layers of the same material. Each one, on its own, could hardly support any weight. It is only thanks to the intermediate sheet, the zigzag corrugated one, that it acquires the capacity to support weight. It is because of these structural gaps that it acquires its strength. These spaces in biology are called interstices. My body is alive because there are interstitial spaces between my organs: it is that separation of functions that allows my heart to beat, my lungs to

breathe, etc. Social theorist Brian Massumi describes affect as “the gaps that occur between positions in a network.” For him, without affect, no ideological or interpretative system could exist. Affect is the connective tissue, the functional gap between the organs of the institutional body.

This is the structure that defines the museum that I inherited: a labor structure of more than 500 people working in the national museum under two major sub-directorates, the artistic and the managerial, as you can see, totally separated. As of September, a new organizational chart was approved by our board and it announces a new labor culture for our museum: a tentacular and interdependent system, which not only respects but also cultivates the structural gaps. As you can see, we have gone from two sub-directorates to five, and with them, the ways of working are redistributed with a flow of internal communication and circulation of processes that, I believe, better responds to what we expect from a public institution today. Maybe those gaps, voids or empty interstitial spaces need to be more like a rhythm: our cultural institutions need to aspire to be a choreographical form by itself, to be able to engage all possible cultural, social, and political bodies.

The last case study I want to reveal is an institutional secret. In tower number two of the old hospital building, on the floor along the entire length of the building, can be seen two lines of sky-blue paint. This is the permanent consequence of an artistic intervention for which you will find no caption.

In the year 2000, a complex three-part project entitled: *Versiones del Sur: Cinco propuestas en torno al arte en América* [Versions of the South: Five Proposals about Art in America] was carried out. One of its chapters was entitled *F(r)icciones* [F(r)ictions], curated by Adriano Pedrosa and Ivo Mesquita. As part of that exhibition, in December of the year zero of the new century, the artist Francis Alÿs performed a walking action with two buckets of paint, each with a small hole, producing two continuous lines that ran down the stairs and around the building.

Those traces could be removed, but somehow several teams of workers decided to preserve them: it was not the curators but the cleaners and the maintenance staff that decided not use abrasive products to erase it; doing so without formal instructions. However, it is not capitalized upon by the institution or the market: it barely exists because it is not publicized and it will never be. It is a rumor with the stubbornness of a memory: a fragment of material culture that became something to be spoken of in an undertone. I find this work is a perfect thinking machine, incredibly

relevant to reconsidering the relationality of the private and the public spheres in our museums. What I want is to acknowledge Francis Alÿs's piece as a tactical form that comes from the past into the future; a sign of vulnerability, like a scar, that has for me the potentiality of hope: we can call this kind of device *an institutional whisper*.

What I have tried to do is to show three more or less visible pieces in our museum that have structural effects on the institution, linking and organizing potential external forces, not avoiding the tension but embracing all its complexity. They deploy a speculative system, as an elastic, archival device, at once fragile and strong, that folds and unfolds in exercises of radical imagination: that of the artists, who are the ones that set the tone for the forms that our public institutions should adopt in those futures that are already here.

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# *Playing With a Different Set of Cards*

Mai Abu ElDahab, Director,  
Mophradat, Brussels, Belgium

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## *Biography*

Working in Belgium since 2007, Mai Abu ElDahab is a contemporary art curator from Cairo. Since 2015, she has been Director of Mophradat, an organization creating opportunities for artists from the Arab world while experimenting with what an art institution is and how it can be eccentric and relevant. She is engaged with contemporary dance, music, visual arts, and writing, and the conditions of work in the arts. In previous roles as curator, she focused on working and developing solo projects with artists, and is particularly interested in long evenings that take the audience from listening to words, to being consumed by performance, to taking over the dance floor themselves. She enjoys publishing and has produced several publications with Sternberg Press and proudly commissioned two LPs. Her interest in publishing continues with Mophradat's ongoing booklet series *Read the Room*, and recent books including *Can We Rule It Out? Collective ideas for keeping sexual abuse out of art space* (Mophradat, 2022), *Why Call It Labour? On Motherhood and Arts Work* (Archive Books & Mophradat, 2020), and *Lentil Space, a book of recipes from artist's homes* (forthcoming, 2024).



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## *Playing With a Different Set of Cards*

Due to its content which partially relies on audio, Mai prefers her text not to be published in the written form, but invites everyone to watch her video-recorded presentation available at [CİMAM's TV channel here ↗](#)

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# *A Short Century and Archeology of the Future*

İbrahim Mahama & Yesomi Umolu

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## *Biography İbrahim Mahama*

İbrahim Mahama (born 1987) is a Ghanaian artist of monumental installations. He lives and works in Accra, Kumasi, and Tamale, Ghana. He is the founder of Red Clay Studio, Savannah Centre for Contemporary Arts and Nkrumah Volini. He obtained an MA in Painting and Sculpture in 2013 and a BA in Painting in 2010 at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana.



## *Biography Yesomi Umolu*

Yesomi Umolu is an arts leader and independent curator. From 2021 to 2024, she was Director of Curatorial Affairs and Public Practice at Serpentine Galleries, London where she oversaw the artistic program alongside co-organizing the Serpentine Pavilion 2022; *Black Chapel* by Theaster Gates; and *Barbara Chase-Riboud: Infinite Folds* (2022), the first survey of the artist in Europe, among other





projects. As Artistic Director of the 2019 Chicago Architecture Biennial (2018–20) ...and other such stories, she oversaw a critically acclaimed curatorial program featuring new commissions and off-site installations with over 80 international contributors. Umolu has developed key solo exhibitions and publications with Assemble, Ursula Biemann and Paulo Tavares, John Akomfrah, Mike Cloud, Mariana Castillo Deball, Kapwani Kiwanga, Candice Lin, Harold Mendez, Camille Norment, Karthik Pandian, and Andros Zins-Browne, among others.

She was previously Director and Curator, Logan Center Exhibitions at the University of Chicago, where she also taught courses in visual art and spatial practices as a lecturer in the humanities division. Prior to joining the University of Chicago, she held curatorial positions at the MSU Broad Museum, Michigan; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; and Manifesta 8.

Umolu is a trustee of the Horniman Museum and Gardens in London. She was previously a trustee of the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts in Chicago, and she served on the curatorial advisory board for the United States Pavilion at the 16<sup>th</sup> Venice Architecture Biennale. Umolu is a 2016 recipient of the prestigious Andy Warhol Foundation for Visual Arts Curatorial Fellowship. She holds an MA, with distinction, from the Royal College of Art in London and a MA (Hons.) from the University of Edinburgh.

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### *A Short Century and Archeology of the Future*

*Yesomi Umolu:* Hi everyone, thank you for having us this morning and I just wanted to say thank you to Mai and Zita for your words. And before we have this conversation about Ibrahim's practice, what you just mentioned today, and what has been brought up, has been thinking a lot about practices of care in place and how to do that with integrity. So, these are words that have already come up, but I'm just repeating them here so they might frame how we look upon the work of Ibrahim in a very specific place. Also, we talked a little bit earlier about wanting to, I guess, try to articulate a slight, maybe, discomfort that we might sense in relation to what we have seen yesterday, positions that feel very centered within a Western institutional rubric and what is going to be offered here today, which is coming from the Global South. And I think we just want to remind you all to displace any preconceptions one might have about the place that we're going to talk

about, and how Ibrahim as an artist is working with the specific conditions of his place, and how it's not necessarily a solution to what you might be experiencing. So, this is not the antidote to the Western context — it is but a different model and a different way of working that is sensitive to the realities of locale. And so, when we started to put together this conversation, I think there are a few things that Ibrahim wanted to make sure that we touched upon, and certainly the question of how you work when you're coming from a place of surplus — but a surplus that might be less related to profits and excess, but more related to failures, losses, and deficits. How do you work in that context and how do you work from a position of the gift and not the commodity? So, with all this in mind, I'm just going to jump in to have Ibrahim give us a little bit of a context as to what motivated him as an artist to establish the Savannah Contemporary Art Centre in Tamale as well as the Red Clay Studio in Tamale.

*Ibrahim Mahama:* Thank you very much, Yesomi, and thank you very much to Kim and all the organizers, and CİMAM and also the Hammer for hosting us. I went to the Kwame Nkrumah University in Kumasi, and the Arts program, which was originally like the old British curriculum, was very conservative, and we had a group of professors who lead the Black Star Alliance collective. One of the chief proponents that was Dr. Kari'kachä. He was teaching us about looking at economic means and other models, aside from just looking at artistic production, because the point is not about just being in an art school and learning how to make paintings and sculpture — it was to really think about the entire constitution of art in itself, because in the older model artists were making sculptures and paintings, and those paintings and sculptures were commissions that would hang in people's homes or they'll be shown in hotel lobbies and others places, but Kari'kachä felt that we needed to think beyond the idea of the commodity, but look into art as a gift to start with. So, looking at all the precarities of the histories that we've inherited, and then use that as material in itself, because failure and collapse in itself is not an end point, but sometimes you can use it as a material in itself both on a tangible material level, but also on an ideological level in order to be able to excavate things that we possibly didn't imagine.

*Y.U.* So, when you talk about failure, could you give for those in the room who do not know the current conditions in Ghana as well as in Tamale, where does that failure come from? If you could maybe speak

about that, and if you might want to do a little bit of historical contextualization and talk us through, apart from the interest in your studies, why this project has been given its urgency.

*I.M.* Well, Ghana is quite interesting because in the pre-slavery era to the period of slavery colonization — if we even want to start from the late nineteenth century — there was a lot of investment in the building of infrastructure, like the railways. In the early twentieth century, you have people like Nkrumah, who decide to come back to Ghana in order to lead the independence struggle, the market women, the railway workers, the unions, everyone puts in their labor. And in 1957, Ghana gets independence. But in that period Nkrumah was also a bit of a Marxist and socialist, so he was leaning towards the Eastern Bloc; he worked a lot with architects from the Eastern Bloc, so we had quite a lot of infrastructure being built. In 1966, Nkrumah is overthrown, and by the eighties Ghana enters the structural adjustment program that sees a lot of privatization, State institutions. Nkrumah was the only active president who built a museum in Ghana. The museum was abandoned when he was overthrown, because following the Cuban Missile Crisis there was propaganda from the CIA that he was building nuclear silos, so it really led to a steep decline. And of course, in the eighties a lot of things were sold, film archives, everything, and a lot were destroyed. So, that's where our generation arrives at the idea that we see ourselves almost as archaeologists. For instance, on the screen you can see a train that we are transporting to the studio over a distance of 700 kilometers. In the previous images, you saw that we were transporting airplanes or even building railway lines, but then the idea is not just to build something or to preserve a history thinking about it as an artistic practice, but how do we share what we produce? So, for instance, there is an entire generation of young people who are completely annihilated from these historical forms that we're talking about right now. So, through these material forms, it allows a series of generations to enter into these histories and these materials from very different points of view.

*Y.U.* Could you tell us a little bit more specifically about the north and Tamale? You said that it was obviously a context that's been separated from development and growth, while others would have experienced in the country in the Nkrumah period. Maybe you could talk a little bit more specifically about that locale and what it means to work in that space.

*I.M.* Well, when everyone comes to Ghana they come to Accra, you know? It's like this big cosmopolitan center. But I've always found it a bit quite empty, though I grew up there, I didn't grow up in the north at all. I was born there because I came from a very big, polygamous family, so we had to move to the south when I was young and I'm very grateful for that, because at the same time, when you live in Accra, you get to meet many different people. Because no one really comes from Accra, except the Ghana people. But the north is very poor — it's always been like that. It's also because historically that's where the labor came from. During the period of slavery, a lot of slaves that were taken by slave raiders were taken from the north, so you go to Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger... all these places. And they were mashed down through the south. When the infrastructure project was built during the colonial period, they didn't build it up north. And also, because the south is mostly rainforest, the British didn't go further north. They also had a war with the Ashantis during the Anglo-Ashanti war, so people in the north, in my opinion, historically have never been thought of as people who could contribute intellectually toward the growth of the country. And for me as an artist, once I started practicing and working with galleries like Apalazzo or White Cube, and thinking about ways in which the economic models come out from the work, I thought that those residues could actually go back into this context and somehow create something different, where we could build institutional studios that could allow for a revitalization of young people. I think imagination is the biggest problem that we have in the world. And sometimes just by the sheer lack of imagination, cultural policies and a lot of different things that happen actually erase a lot of things.

*Y.U.* So, your project has been to activate a series of spaces in Tamale, working with the vestiges of these colonial infrastructures. And this collection and movement and arrangement of objects and bodies are really essential to your studio practice, so you make what look like art objects that are derived from different found objects in the world and then that is also transposed into the practice of making these cultural spaces. Can I ask what your intention is when you start this process of collection movement and arrangement? And I'm particularly thinking about the projects that you've done where you have physically moved large objects through the terrain across Ghana and in Tamale. What is your intention with these actions, especially as it relates to the specific bodies that choreograph their movements, but also the bodies



that are witnessing this kind of transportation of objects?

*J.M.* This is also about this archaeology of memory. I think it's also as a response to the lack of investment in building cultural institutions or building the right communities. For me, it has always been very important that, when we're making art, the most important question is: Who are we making it for, and what does it do within this specific context? Certainly, there have been a lot of things that I've collected over the years — things that generally the State is supposed to preserve. I think sometimes when you live in a Western context you take quite a lot for granted, such as access to water. Even in the space in Tamale, where the studio is, we barely have access to drinking water. Or, when I started a studio, we had to build the electricity line, we had to install water, things like that. So, it's almost as if you have to build the basic conditions for life before art can even begin, and that's where I think it becomes important, because in this image you see that in the Savannah Centre we have a commission by a young Ghanaian artist, Sandra, with the paintings in the background, which is made with earth materials. And, on the other side, we have the same kids who were sitting on a train from 1930, which was brought to Ghana for colonial extraction. It was used for extraction of gold that contributed to the British Empire. So, now, someone might say, "Oh, but this object has no relationship to our generation." I'm like, what do you mean? The Government has sold it for scrap, but I have to intervene with the capital residue from the art world in order to save it, and then take away the economic value. Next, we excavate the cultural memory that comes along with it, because suddenly it allows us to be able to connect with time. And I think that is one of the most essential things: the idea of being able to build an institution. I mostly don't like to think of it as an institution: it's an artist studio, and the artist studio has the ability to allow us to go back to the subject of repair, because in your studio you're constantly producing and constantly rethinking. But when objects end up in institutions, they always feel there is a responsibility to safeguard and then to freeze the objects in time. So, there are different dynamics.

*Y.U.* I love these images that you're showing and how you're trying to make the connection between the contemporary and the past, and I guess it's a pedagogical process, right? And I know it's really important to you that young people are very much engaged in conversations around the studio, and the work that

you're doing. We had a conversation earlier about how you work with young people and how you partner with their teachers and their schools. So maybe you could just talk a little bit about how you make that initial welcome to the space and sustain their continued engagement, and what you have experienced in terms of how it has broadened their imaginations? And how the conversations that they're having might be far removed from conversations that they would have been having had this space not existed.

*J.M.* It's interesting because the idea of building an institution is one thing, but the redissemination is another. And for us, the idea of redistribution is very central to art making. So, for instance, in my work I engage a lot with institutions all around the world, but in the beginning of our practice, we realized that there are a lot of artists from the Global South who've made very interesting work across their lifetimes, but in the Global South it's very difficult to even get access to their work there. So, from our generation, we had to use that as a starting point of how to redistribute. For instance, we have a program where we work with bus companies and we send them to communities all around the region, mostly to deprived areas, and we bring these kids. Sometimes they also come by themselves, like in food trucks and others, so in this image you can see that the truck is broken down at the studio and all the kids with their parents are actively trying to push start it again. In this, you realize that there is a tricycle that brings the kids. In this case it's quite interesting because this man, he came with two tourists in the morning, and he was so excited by the idea of what this space was, he went home that morning and brought all the kids from his house. This truck is supposed to take three people, but he packs in 15 kids. It's like a new model for canned fish or something. In the beginning, people said to me: "But why would you build a studio in a place like this? The people don't understand art." But, as the keynote speaker was saying this morning, is about the sensibilities that go together with the idea of building community and the idea of the place and all that. So, you have to have faith that, as artists, as we try to build these models, it also goes further to somehow excavate new forms of courage within the community and within the local population in such a way that, if we are sharing for instance the building, it's not just a matter of building, then finishing, and then activating programs: we're hosting the kids in the program, in the architecture, we're sharing the residues, the stories of the collection. Even as we're building the space, we're actively using the space at

the same time we're building it, so what does it mean for these kids in the community to be sitting within the institution as the institution is being built? Because 20 years from now, a lot of them will be grown, some will have kids, what will be the relationship of that memory to their children in that timeline? Because they will inherit all of the work and the things that we're doing.

*Y.U.* You mentioned resources and redistribution, or distribution, and if we can please speak plainly about finances and resources. Can you talk about how you've utilized the economy surrounding your artistic practice, but also the broader economy of the art world, to support your work in Tamale?

*I.M.* Well, sometimes I think it's a bit of a privilege to be working within the art world and to be able to use, let's say, the residues that come from it, so all of the images that you're seeing are from sales from my work commissions. When you work with biennials and when you're paid a salary as an artist, all of that goes into it, because I'm really interested in the theory of the capital residue and what it can do. Because we are not coming from a place of surplus. We're coming from a place of negative, so, again, all of us are precarious within this situation and how we use that as a model and as a means. Sometimes there are people who are very generous so, for instance, we have someone like Mercedes, who's been championing our institution over the years, and recently she just bought us a bus, which is very interesting. Imagine that idea of the bus being an extension of the institution. It allows for tens of thousands of kids to be connected to the program and to the institution, and then taking exhibitions and programs to these places. You don't need a lot of money. Sometimes just a little here, a little there, the accumulation of those little things here and there goes a long way in order to be able to build what we do.

*Y.U.* That's that question of philanthropy that came up earlier and the importance of philanthropy in providing essential resources, where resources can't be found elsewhere. So, maybe we could give a bit of a wider lens, and talk about the African continent and the state of institutions on the continent, and right now, for those who know in the audience, there's a proliferation of artist-led institutions across the continent, specifically in West Africa, in Ghana. They're doing amazing work there, and also in East Africa. I know we have some colleagues here from Uganda and Kenya. And I'm just curious about what you can tell us about artist-led institutions and why they are critical today on

the continent, and what they offer in contrast to other types of institutions.

*I.M.* I think we're living in very interesting times. From Uganda down through Kenya we have Teesa Bahana, who is here, from Uganda, from 320, and then in Kenya we have NCAI, [*inaudible*] Studio, The Art Space, AAF in Nigeria, to the MOCA. All the things that are developing there to Victor Studio [*inaudible*], and then through Ghana we have Amoako Bofo Studio there, dot.ateliers, and Nubuke, FCA, we of course have the Black Star Lines, the collective, and then the Savannah Centre and the Red Clay with the work that we do. I think it's just an interesting time for opportunities, because someone has to take responsibility at the end of the day, because we haven't had the privilege of having the State as an agency supporting culture, and also promoting it, and also investing into it. So, certainly I think that is quite interesting because when artists do it, then there is a sense of criticality that it comes with. We're not doing it because we wanted to somehow generate a certain kind of economy, because when most State institutions try to do it, it's like, "Oh yeah, we're hoping that it would allow for tourists or people to visit," but we are just trying to solve the fundamental problem of what artistic work and culture is in itself, and I think that's what becomes important when artists and also cultural practitioners take responsibility for this kind of production.

*Y.U.* I have two more questions. You recently said, "I like decay quite a lot, when something is at this point in its life, I always think it is when it begins to live more," and I think this is particularly relevant as we discuss the viability of museums at this conference, and the question of sustainability, and to kind of sit that side by side: the idea of sustainability vs decay and decline. As you're talking about the kind of necessity for artist-led initiatives or alternative models within the African continent, and as we contend with the decay of preexisting institutional models that obviously derive from a colonial enterprise, what is your view on the museum as an institution? And do you see potential in the model to inspire new life, whether or not on the continent or elsewhere? My question is: Do you see a moment where your artist-led initiative could transpose itself into a more established institution?

*I.M.* Yeah, I guess. So this is just like an image, a drone image of a part of Red Clay, mind you, separate from SCCA and Nkrumah Volini. But the idea was just to use land, because in Ghana it's almost like a feudal



system, if you want to buy land it's not from the government. You have to buy it from the chiefs. So, the question was how to negotiate with the chiefs in order to be able to invest the money into buying land, and then to collecting all these objects and reconstituting them almost like you're developing a canvas with both the people and also with the space. But certainly, the idea is just to be able to build an institution that can allow for a generation to develop different artistic sensibilities. Although we have plans to develop, to build an independent art school and all these other models, when people ask me, "Do you want there to be more artists in the world?" I always say: "Maybe we need fewer artists, but we need more people with artistic sensibilities." If you have doctors, lawyers, and especially politicians, a lot of these people control all of our lives with policies and all that. And the idea is that, if we build a society that actually can go a long way to invest into a certain kind of cultural morality within a younger population, then it might alter the future. When you ask me too much about the future in terms of how I imagine what we'll do or become, I will say that I honestly don't know. It's that I appreciate every moment that I have within what I build, and I try to invest everything that I can into it, together with all my colleagues that I work with within this context, both home and abroad.

*Y.U.* As a last point, this idea of personal investment and one's personal labor in what feeds us. Obviously, it's something you're very passionate about, but as you say, it's a gift to others, it is a gift to the current generation and a future generation. And I'm curious about how you're going about embedding sustainable processes in the Centre and the Studio, so that it will one day outlive you. So, how are you thinking about separating the work that you're doing from your own individual labor, and your own individual capital, which, obviously, at this point is doing very well. Maybe you could just kind of leave us with that.

*I.M.* I don't think it's necessarily doing well. I think it's more a work of sacrifice and love at the same time, so sometimes when people see it they think that "oh, but he's doing well." No, it's rather the opposite, but just that it requires a lot of sacrifice. If you have \$10,000 and you decide to spend \$9,999 on a project, it doesn't mean you're doing well. It means that you're just sacrificing because you believe in something. But already there is this idea of the collective labor, which for me is very important to end on within the work that we're doing, because though it's like over the last almost one decade, I've spent most of my practice and

my resources to build this institution, but it's also because I understand that a lot of this work that we can do now is based on collective labor, because, as an artist, if you're going to produce an object at work you're collecting objects, which is based on a certain historical form, and then you use that to produce work that translates into capital, and then you bring that back. That's accumulated capital, which is inherent within the inspiration that allows us to produce what we produce, both on the international scene and the continent. We have to be able to open it up further in how the community or the world relates to it. In the context of, let's say, this work, which is *Capital Corpses*. When it was shown in London at White Cube, the work was in a typical museum setting, and it could be here or anywhere; it's an object, sacred, no one is allowed to touch it. There are moving parts within it, so there's a sense of responsibility. But in Tamale, we have this wonderful lady in our community who sells fruit, and every day she comes just to sell fruit at this space. But she follows the kids and people around. And then sometimes within the artwork says, "Oh I want to buy fruit." It's like, "How much do you want to buy?" and then she puts the fruit on the artwork installation, and she peels the fruit and then life goes on. So, for me, that was one of the things that was important if we look at it in relation to this, like the women, the mothers in the community, and all those who bring their kids to the space, or allow their kids to go to the space to play or to go see art. Some of them sell kerosene on their heads. For me the question has always been that in the previous generation, particularly in the twentieth century, thinking the objects, it was about the objects, whereas in our case now it's not so much about that, it's how do we use what we produce as artists in order to be able to assimilate life itself. It's almost as if sometime when art is made, suddenly it wants to distance itself from the conditions that allowed for the premises of itself to exist, and I think that that is what we have to do. Particularly, if we come in from the Global South, we don't have the luxury of having people who are going to sponsor and do things all the time. So, as we are excavating, trying to do things, we also have to remember that the reason why we're doing all of this is in order to be able to at least bridge a certain gap within the histories that we share, in the conditions.

# *Mission, Governance, and Sustainability*

Andrea Fraser, Artist and Professor,  
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## *Biography*

Andrea Fraser is an artist whose work investigates the social, financial, and affective economies of cultural institutions, fields, and groups. She is Professor of Art at the University of California, Los Angeles, and serves on the artist councils of the Hammer Museum and the Institute of Contemporary Art Los Angeles as well as on the ICA LA's board of directors. Retrospectives of her work have been presented by the Museum Ludwig Cologne (2013), the Museum der Moderne Salzburg (2015), MACBA, Barcelona, and MUAC UNAM Mexico City (both 2016). Her books include *Museum Highlights: The Writings of Andrea Fraser* (2005, The MIT Press), *Andrea Fraser* (2015, Hatje Canz and Museum der Moderne Salzburg), *2016 in Museums, Money, and Politics* (2018, co-published by the CCA Wattis Institute, Westreich/Wagner Publications, and MIT Press), and *Andrea Fraser Collected Interviews 1990–2018* (2019, A.R.T. Press and Koenig Books).

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*Mission, Governance, and Sustainability*

Good morning. I want to thank the organizers, Clara Kim and, especially, Kitty Scott who started a conversation with me last spring that led to my participation today. The last time I participated in a CIMAM conference was in 2008, so it's great to be back. I'm an admirer of CIMAM and I wish there were an organization like this for artists.

I am speaking here today not only from my experience and position as an artist, but also from my involvement in institutional governance as a member of the artist council here at the Hammer Museum and as a member of the artist council and board of directors of the Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.

And I am speaking here as a white, financially secure US citizen.

From these positions, I want to begin by saying that I am a climate hypocrite.

I am terrified and distressed by our climate disaster. I vote for politicians who pledge to take action to limit emissions. I sort my garbage. I drive an electric car. I feel good about all those things. But I eat meat — way too much red meat. I fly business class whenever I have the opportunity. And I am in the midst of making life choices that will significantly increase my air travel. I think I should make more sustainable life choices. But then I think, why should I? Or why should I, when so many other people I know, people around me, are overconsuming so much more than me? And what impact can my individual choices have anyway, really?

Short of those choices being made for me by legal or economic limits, I need a sense of social, or institutional, or field-based sanctions on my high-emission behavior. I need a kind of peer pressure. I need to feel that it's wrong, that everyone around me thinks it's wrong, and that I'm going to be seen as a bad person if I continue to do indulge in my high-emission lifestyle. I'll be an outlier. I'll be criticized. I'll be shamed.

Maybe that's overdoing it, but I do think that critique and even, yes, shame, have an important role to play in changing individual and also institutional behavior when it comes to promoting sustainable practices. I don't think inspirational case studies, which is what I was asked to present here today, are going to get the job done. No-one likes to be critiqued or shamed. I don't. That's why I always try to start by

shaming myself — although this isn't all that shaming, and that's part of the problem.

*Sustainability*

This conference proposes to address “sustainability from an integrated and holistic perspective” and the brief for this panel extends that to the “long-term health and financial sustainability of museums.”

There are different ways of interpreting what an integrated and holistic perspective on sustainability can be, as demonstrated at this conference so far. We can extend the concept beyond environmental sustainability and consider the sustainability of institutions and communities. My perspective is that an integrated and holistic perspective on sustainability must include environmental sustainability, and must include the economic and political context of climate disaster. Discussions of sustainability that do not take that economic and political context into account are futile if not counterproductive.

The economic context of climate disaster is, of course, complex. What is very clear, however, is that global warming is driven by excessive consumption in wealthy countries, mostly former colonial powers of the global north. And it is driven by massive overconsumption by the wealthiest 10% of the population globally who, according to a recent report by the World Inequality Database, are responsible for 48% of global emissions, while the top 1% alone is responsible for 17% of global emissions.<sup>1</sup> And we are not talking about the superrich: the threshold for top 1% status globally is \$220,000 per year gross, and for top 10% status only \$64,000 per year.<sup>2</sup>

So it is futile, if not counterproductive, to consider sustainability without considering global inequality and wealth concentration, and the culture of excessive consumption among global elites.

It also is futile to consider sustainability without considering the political context of the devastating failure to address climate disaster. This includes the political context of the development and implementation of policies and practices to fight climate change, which obviously is a matter of the politicians and political parties in power. It is also a matter of the political conditions under which those politicians make policy: of the influence of individuals and corporations who resist regulation, taxation, and other policies that

1 Chancel, L., Bothe, P., and Voituriez, T. (2023) *Climate Inequality Report 2023*, World Inequality Lab Study 2023. 24. <https://wid.world/document/climate-inequality-report-2023/>

2 World Inequality Database, [https://wid.world/world/#tptinc\\_p99p100\\_z/WO/last/us/k/p/yearly/t/false/29122.1025/300000/curve/false/country](https://wid.world/world/#tptinc_p99p100_z/WO/last/us/k/p/yearly/t/false/29122.1025/300000/curve/false/country)

might limit emissions and consumption, as well as reign in the wealth concentration that produces, not only a culture of entitlement to excessive consumption, but also of entitlement to political power and influence. And it is also, of course, a matter of the perspectives and priorities of the people who elect those politicians.

### *Museums*

What do these economic and political conditions have to do with art museums, and how can art museums engage those conditions as they develop sustainable policies and practices?

In terms of economic conditions, the art world and climate disaster have one major thing in common: they are both driven by income inequality and wealth concentration; by the massive overconsumption enabled by wealth concentration and encouraged by the consumer goods sector, and at our end, the luxury goods sector, of which the art market is a part. The link between the art market and wealth concentration has been tracked by economists who have found a direct correspondence between the income share of the .1% and auction prices.<sup>3</sup> Art market advisors track the ups and downs, usually ups, of the global billionaire population as an important indicator of the art market as well as luxury goods markets broadly.<sup>4</sup> This wealth concentration also can be linked to the museum building boom in the US and other parts of the world, especially those with booming art markets and especially where public arts funding is limited or declining.

I am presenting three works of mine as illustrations for this part of my talk: *Index*, 2011, which represents the correlation between wealth concentration and art market growth; *Index II*, 2014, which links the museum building boom to the prison building booms and mass incarcerations in the US in the context of wealth concentration and art market growth; and *Index III*, 2024, which situates art market, and especially contemporary art market growth, in the context of luxury investment and the growth of billionaires globally, in the context of the stagnation of stagnating income share of the bottom 50% globally. Now I really have to make on a new index about climate change. In the US, the direct link between museums and

wealth concentration is inescapable. As the income share of the top 1% in the US doubled from 11% in 1984 to over 22% in 2016, giving to the arts, culture, and humanities increased by a factor of almost five, from \$3.85 billion to over \$18 billion in 2016, with both wealth concentration and cultural philanthropy driven in part by the same tax policies, above all the erosion of progressive taxation.<sup>5</sup> This increasing in giving to the arts has driven exponential growth in the number and scale of arts organizations. Whether responding to competitive pressures, or to the ideologies of patrons and nonprofit consultants, or to the ambitions of their own directors, many art museums, especially the most prominent, seem to have uncritically embraced economic and organizational models that push for perpetual growth, leading to expansion that has increased the scale of museums and their exhibition spaces, and consequently of the art works and exhibitions demanded by those spaces.

I may be wrong about this, but it seems to me that regardless of the increased energy efficiency of newly constructed buildings, the carbon footprint of new construction itself almost always dwarfs those carbon savings, except in the very long term, especially compared to renovations. In seemingly ever-expansionist museums, this carbon footprint is then compounded by the carbon cost of the exhibitions demanded to fill that expanded exhibition space.

And if those exhibitions are promoting sustainable practices and environmental justice? Any climate benefit gained by programs promoting sustainable practices among museum audiences are likely to be outweighed by the carbon footprint of the exhibition itself, and in larger museums, probably even just the opening events. And they are vastly outweighed by the carbon footprint of the fundraising operations and patron activities promoted by most US museums: the galas in climate-controlled tents, the luxury tours of global survey exhibitions and art fairs, international councils whose meetings occasion multiple first-class transatlantic flights, each with a carbon footprint that is four to five times the average emissions of a car for an entire year.

3 William N. Goetzmann, Luc Renneboog, and Christophe Spaenjers, "Art and Money," Yale School of Management Working Paper No. 09-26, Yale School of Management, April 28, 2010. Their analysis suggests that "a one percentage point increase in the share of total income earned by the top 0.1% triggers an increase in art prices of about 14 percent." See also my essay "L'1% C'est Moi," *Texte Zur Kunst* 83, September 2011, pp. 114-27. Also available at [https://whitneymedia.org/assets/generic\\_file/805/\\_22L\\_1\\_\\_C\\_est\\_Moi\\_22.pdf](https://whitneymedia.org/assets/generic_file/805/_22L_1__C_est_Moi_22.pdf)

4 See, for example, the Art Basel & UBS *Art Market Report*, which has been tracking the number and wealth of millionaires, and more recently billionaires, globally as an art market indicator since its first issue in 2017.

5 *Giving USA 2015: The Annual Report on Philanthropy*, cited by Melissa Berliner, "Humanities Sector," June 25, 2015, <http://www.campbellcompany.com/news/author/melissa-berliner/>; World Wealth & Income Database, <http://wid.world/country/usa/>.



If I focus here on the carbon cost of fundraising operations and more broadly fundraising culture, it is because the contrast between promoting sustainable practices among everyday museum goers while promoting incredibly high-emission activities among museum patrons — and sometimes also honored artists like myself — is a direct example of the climate injustice that is a central feature of climate disaster.

Of course, I get it: it's just the cost of doing business as an art nonprofit in the US, and increasingly in other contexts where public arts funding is limited or non-existent. But in addition to how the emissions from museum programs and practices may directly contribute to climate change, they also may have an indirect negative political impact: yet another example of the yawning gap between the discourse of progressive political, economic, and cultural elites, and our actions, institutions, and lived values.

To put it bluntly, it may look like just another example of liberal hypocrisy: the hypocrisy of liberal elites who demand sacrifices of others that we don't make ourselves; hypocrisy that has contributed to the political alienation of low-income and low-education voters excluded from cosmopolitan economies, and that has fueled resentments that have been so effectively mobilized by right-wing populists who have come to power with promises to withdraw from climate agreements, deregulate polluting industries, increase fossil fuel production, and undo environmental regulations.

But alienated and aggrieved low-income and low-education voters are not the only people who support climate-change-denying politicians. There are many high-education and high-income people who do as well, for a range of reasons that apparently outweigh any interest in sustainability they might have. Some may be climate deniers themselves. Some may be among museum audiences. And some may serve on museum boards.

My project *2016 in Museums, Money, and Politics* examined the political contribution of the boards of 125 art museums in the 2016 election in the US, when Donald Trump first rose to power. The project revealed the extent of support for anti-democratic, plutocratic, authoritarian, and ethno-nationalist politics on museums boards — over 40%. More broadly, it revealed the extent of political engagement on art museum boards: 44% of these board members, versus less than 1% of US adults nationally, made political contributions in that election. And it revealed the degree to which governance in these highly visible civil society organizations is itself anti-democratic and patently plutocratic, due to self-perpetuating

nomination systems and personal financial contribution requirements that limits governance roles to people who are very wealthy and overwhelmingly white.

I am now starting to organize myself to do a sequel, *2024 in Museums, Money, and Politics*, which is just going to be dreadful. I am hoping that I will find less support for Trump and Trump's party on US art museum boards than I did in 2016. But I'm not optimistic. It's great if our work can change the way that people think, as we often tell ourselves, and help to "build a more just world," and influencing powerful patrons and trustees as well as our other audiences is part of our political impact. Unfortunately, however, I think the culture of fundraising and governance in US museums more often supports a permission structure in which political perspectives are framed as secondary to institutional support, and are rarely challenged, even when those perspectives are at odds with the museum's stated mission and values. And this also serves to normalize those politics within the powerful social networks that patron and trustee groups represent. And here in the US, we have just witnessed the devastating electoral consequences of the normalization of extreme-right-wing politics over the past eight years.

### *Mission and Governance*

So, if we acknowledge the structural entanglements of museums with the economics and politics of climate disaster, what can be done? One might argue that addressing those economic and political conditions are beyond the scope of what art museums are created to do. And even if one can consider them within that scope, as conditions entangled with the structures of funding and governance of museums, how can any positions that might be taken by museum directors and senior staff be put into practice, especially in the US, where directors serve at the pleasure of boards and have limited influence on the funding and governance structures of their organizations?

Here, once again, I think one answer is to pursue and integrated and holistic approach to sustainability, at this end, not only in terms of the economic and political context of climate disaster, but in terms of institutional mission.

Nonprofits in the US are defined as mission-driven organizations, as opposed to "profit-driven" organizations. Their mission defines their charitable purpose, which is the condition of their tax-exempt status. It is the mission-driven logic and legal framework of nonprofits, and the specific missions themselves, that should provide the basis for the

ethical and sustainable operation and governance of art museums. Mission should be the primary, if not the only logic of sustainability for nonprofits, down to the level of basic self-preservation.

Nonprofits are governed by boards who take up fiduciary responsibility to protect the organization's assets, and are bound by codes of ethics and conduct in their execution of this role. BoardSource, an organization that provides resources for nonprofit boards, breaks down codes of conduct and ethics for nonprofit boards into three key elements. The first two, the "duty of care" and "duty of loyalty," require that board members exercise competence and care as stewards and act in the best interests of their organization. The third element, the "duty of obedience" requires board members to be faithful to the organization's mission. They are not permitted to act in a way that is inconsistent with the central goals of the organization. A basis for this rule lies in the public's trust that the organization will manage donated funds to advance the organization's mission.

From my perspective — and I am speaking now as a member of a board of directors of a museum, the Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles — a rigorous interpretation of this framework implies that my primary obligation as a board member is to mission. While I have the duty and care and loyalty to the organization — to avoid mis-management, self-dealing, and conflicts of financial interest — my primary obligation is the duty of obedience to mission: those other obligations to the organization apply only in so far as that organization is serving its mission, and it is my obligation as a board member to make sure that the organization is serving its mission.

So, regarding governance, the organization is not an end in itself: not in terms of assets, operations, or staff. And the sustainability of the organization is not an end in itself: not in terms of sustaining assets, operations, and staff at current levels and not in terms of growing them endlessly, except as that organization, and its growth, furthers its mission. This is the logic of nonprofit governance in the US.

And so, with regard to the challenge of developing an integrated and holistic approach to sustainability, I have three recommendations:

- first, develop a rigorous interpretation of mission that can provide meaningful guidance for governance and, if necessary and possible, initiate a process of revising that mission so it can provide meaningful guidance for governance;

- second, develop codes of conduct and ethics for board, staff, and operations that frame their responsibilities and obligations in terms of an integrated and holistic vision of mission and its long-term sustainability, considering the economic, political, and environmental conditions of that sustainability;
- third, although this might have to come first, democratize, or at least de-plutocratize governance by eliminating, or at least loosening, financial contribution requirements for board membership and opening boards to a broader range of stakeholders, such as artists and other community members.

The first challenge for a museum board in taking up these recommendations is that, despite their centrality to operations and governance, the mission statements of most arts organizations are so broad and vague that they provide little real guidance. Lawyers and consultants often advise nonprofits to keep their mission statements broad, especially when these correspond to legally binding statements of purpose. This can be framed as a way maintaining flexibility and avoiding liability. But it also has the effect of diminishing accountability and, I think most importantly, robbing organizations of a fundamental resource for building organizational culture and board culture: culture that is more central to how boards and organizations function than any written code of conduct or ethics.

The first challenge for a museum's senior staff is that, practically speaking, the extent of their influence on board governance is usually the strength of their relationship with board leadership. If that influence is limited and it's not possible to start on the board level, directors can begin by bringing stakeholders into dialog with senior staff by creating artist advisory councils and, in larger institutions, staff councils and community councils. These councils can gradually be introduced to boards and eventually integrated into institutional governance, for example, with ex-officio board membership for council representatives in addition to board positions for other community members.

### *Inspirational Case Study*

These recommendations are informed by, and lead up to, an inspirational case study, which is what I was asked to present today: my experience with the Institute of Contemporary Art Los Angeles, or ICA LA, where I have served on the Artist Advisory Council since 2012 and the Board of Directors since 2018. The



ICA LA was founded in 1984 as the Santa Monica Museum of Art. I think it had artists serving on its board of directors from the very beginning. In 2012, one of those artists, Charles Gaines, initiated the creation of an Artist Advisory Council. I think Charles was partly inspired by the Artist Council here at the Hammer Museum, on which he also served (and on which I also currently serve).

In 2015, the Santa Monica Museum was forced out of its space in a dispute with its landlord. After unsuccessfully searching for a new space in Santa Monica, it became clear that the museum could survive only by moving to another part of the city. At that point, most of its Santa Monica-based board stepped down and the survival of the museum was in doubt. The director, Elsa Longhouser, decided to pursue a transition to a new location under a new name. She brought members of the Artist Council together with remaining board members and senior staff with the agenda to “reinvent our museum... craft a new mission,” and “build a new board and staff.”

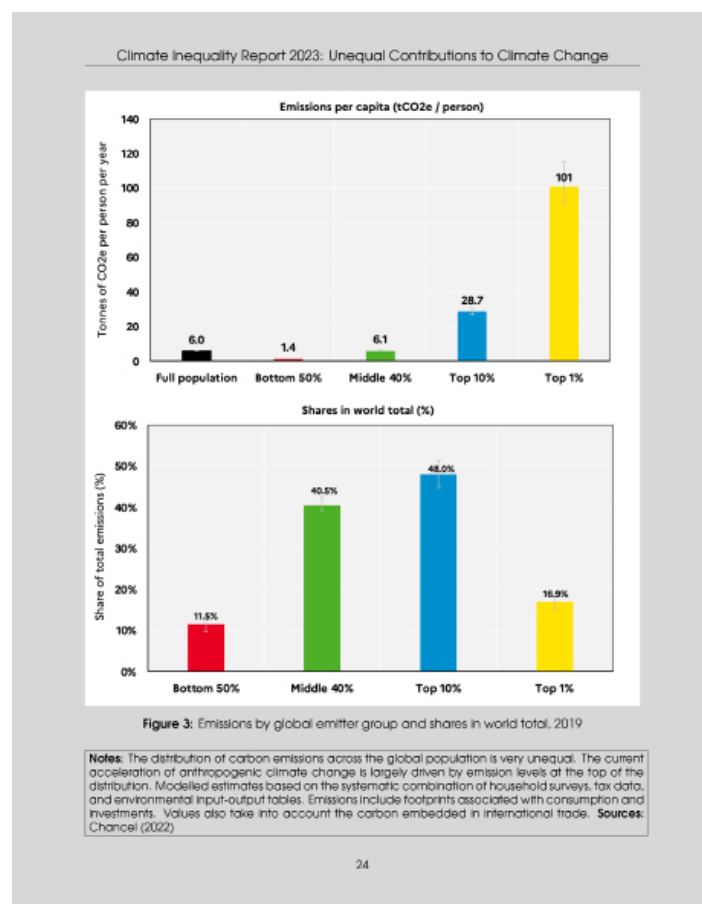
We started out by considering the existing mission statement of the Santa Monica Museum of Art:

Through its exhibitions, education and outreach programs, the Santa Monica Museum of Art fosters diversity, innovation, and discovery in contemporary art — local, national, and international.

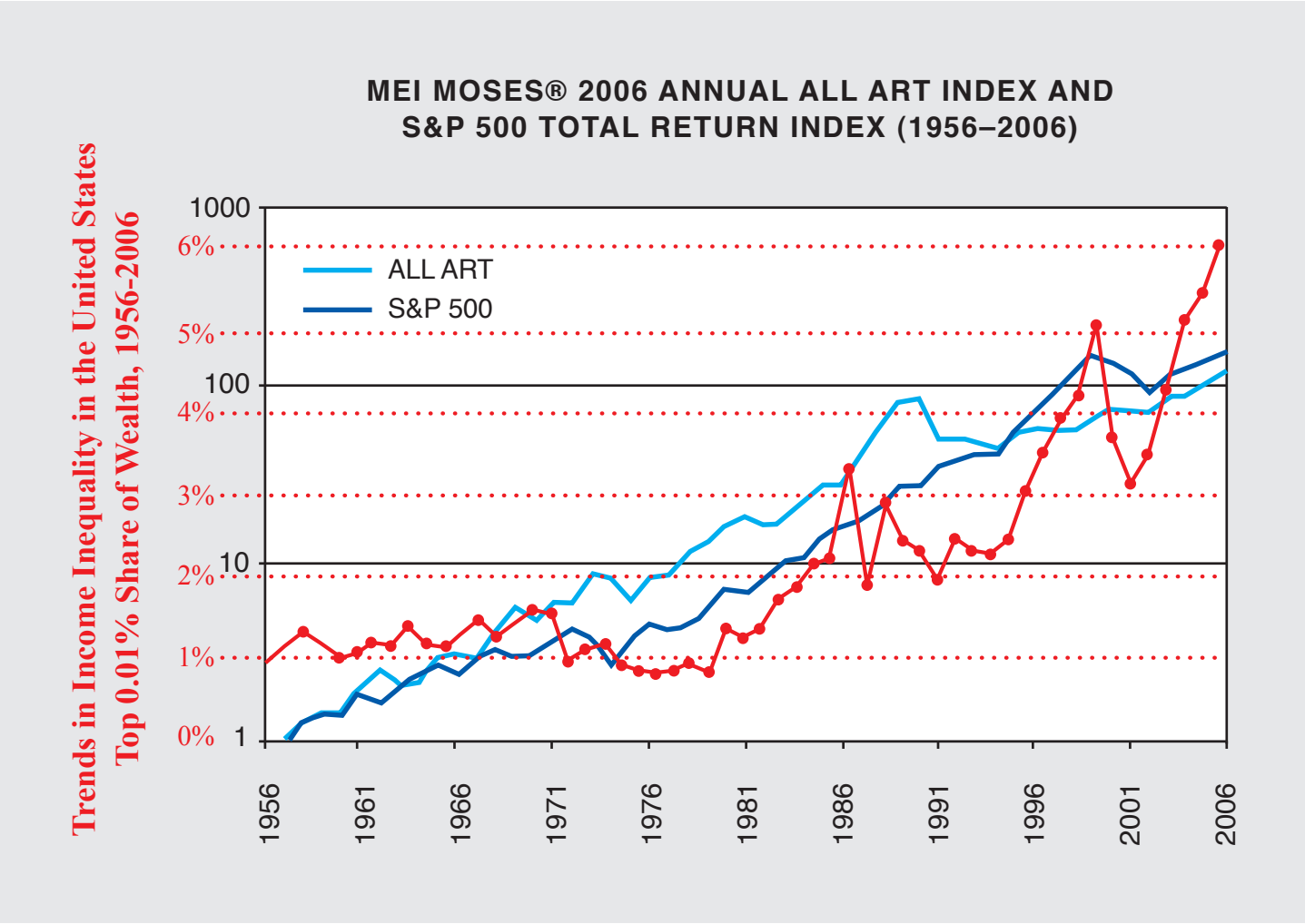
We discussed building a new narrative. We discussed using language that is active, definitive, and specific. We discussed speaking not only to institutional values, but to artistic values and criteria. With the history and programs of the Santa Monica Museum of Art and the values and criteria they reflect in mind, we came up with something quite a bit more specific.

The Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles supports art that sparks the pleasure of discovery and challenges the way we see the world, ourselves, and each other. ICA LA is committed to upending hierarchies of race, class, gender, and culture. Through exhibitions, education programs, and community partnerships, ICA LA fosters critique of the familiar and empathy with the different.

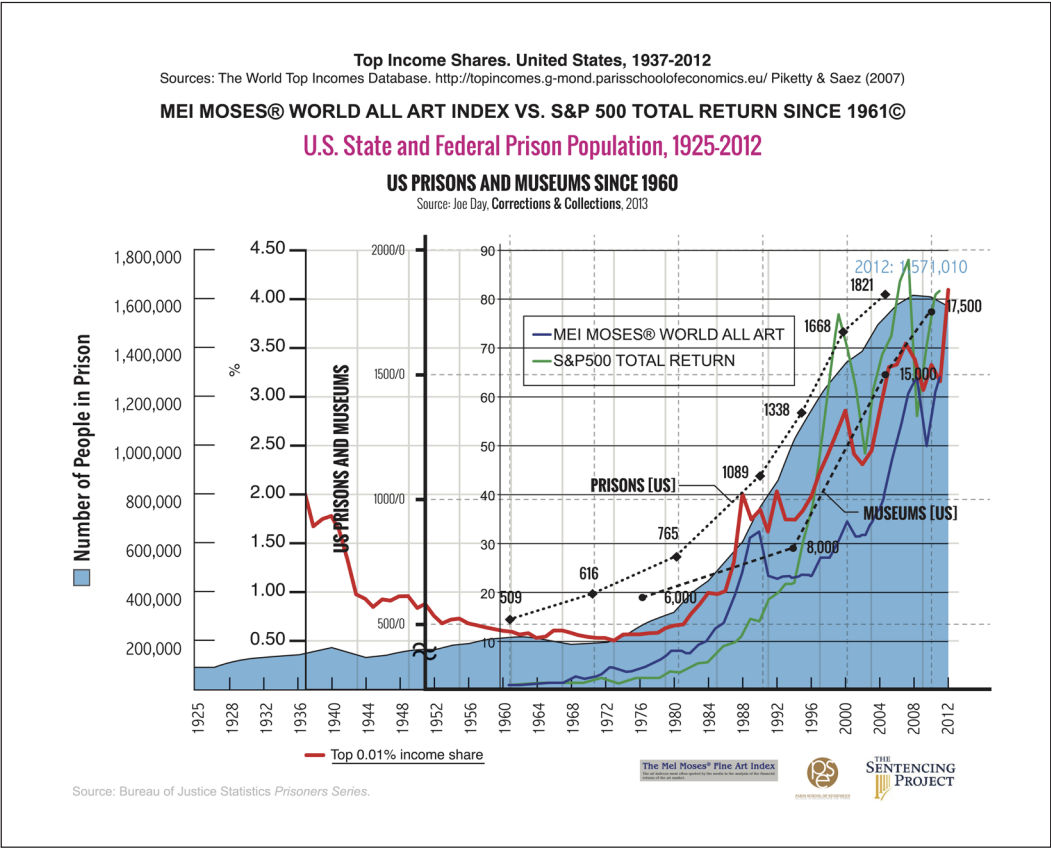
A new board was built up with this mission framing its governance role. A new building was found. Transitions in key roles of director, chief curator, and board president were accomplished. The ICA LA has now bought its building and embarked on a successful capital campaign. In 2019, with the financial and technical support of one of its new board members, ICA LA completed a rooftop solar installation to become what may be the first museum to be run on 100% renewable energy.



Source: Chancel, L., Bothe, P., Voituriez, T. (2023) *Climate Inequality Report 2023*, World Inequality Lab Study 2023. 24. <https://wid.world/document/climate-inequality-report-2023/>

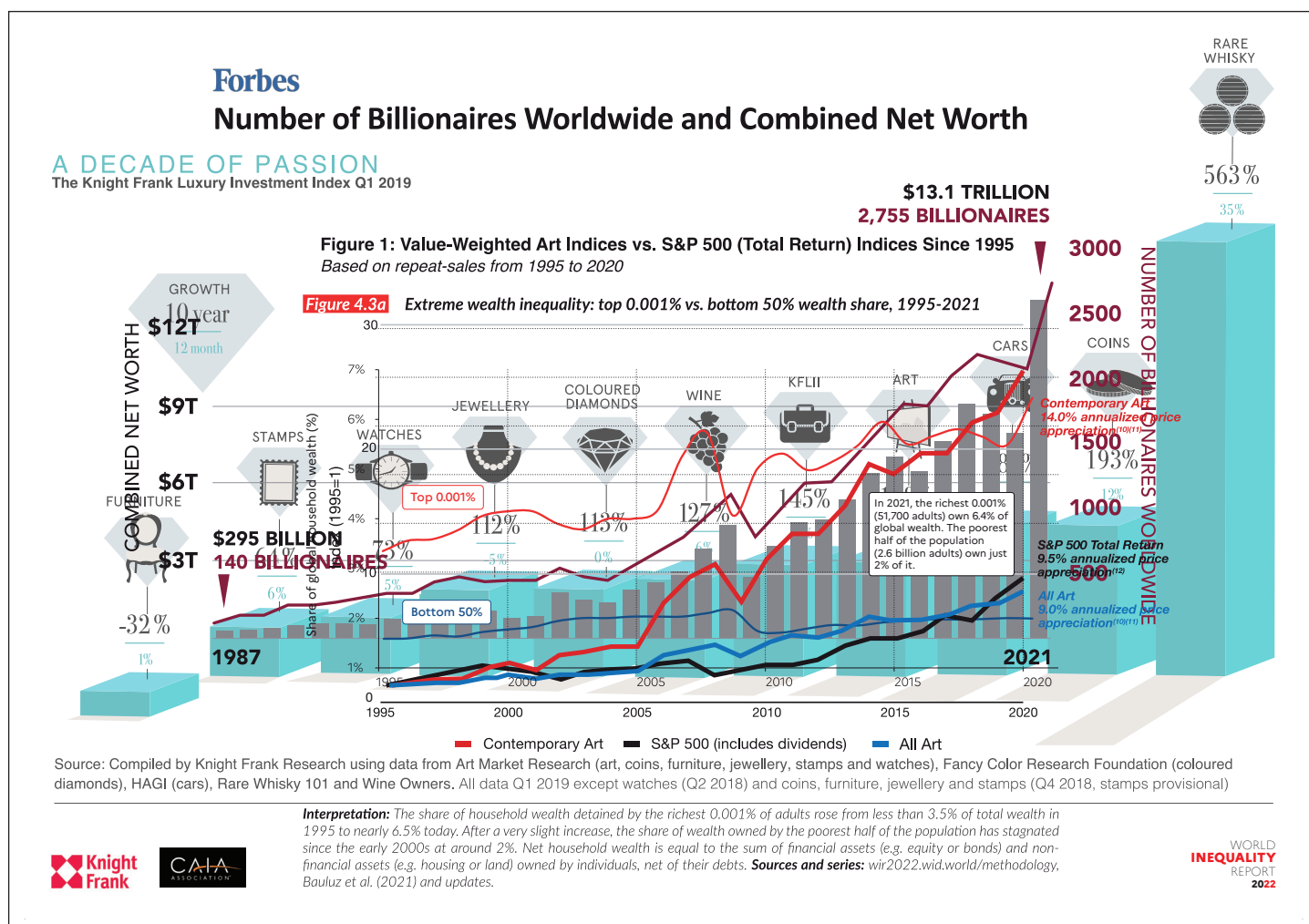


Andrea Fraser, *Index*, 2011, graph.

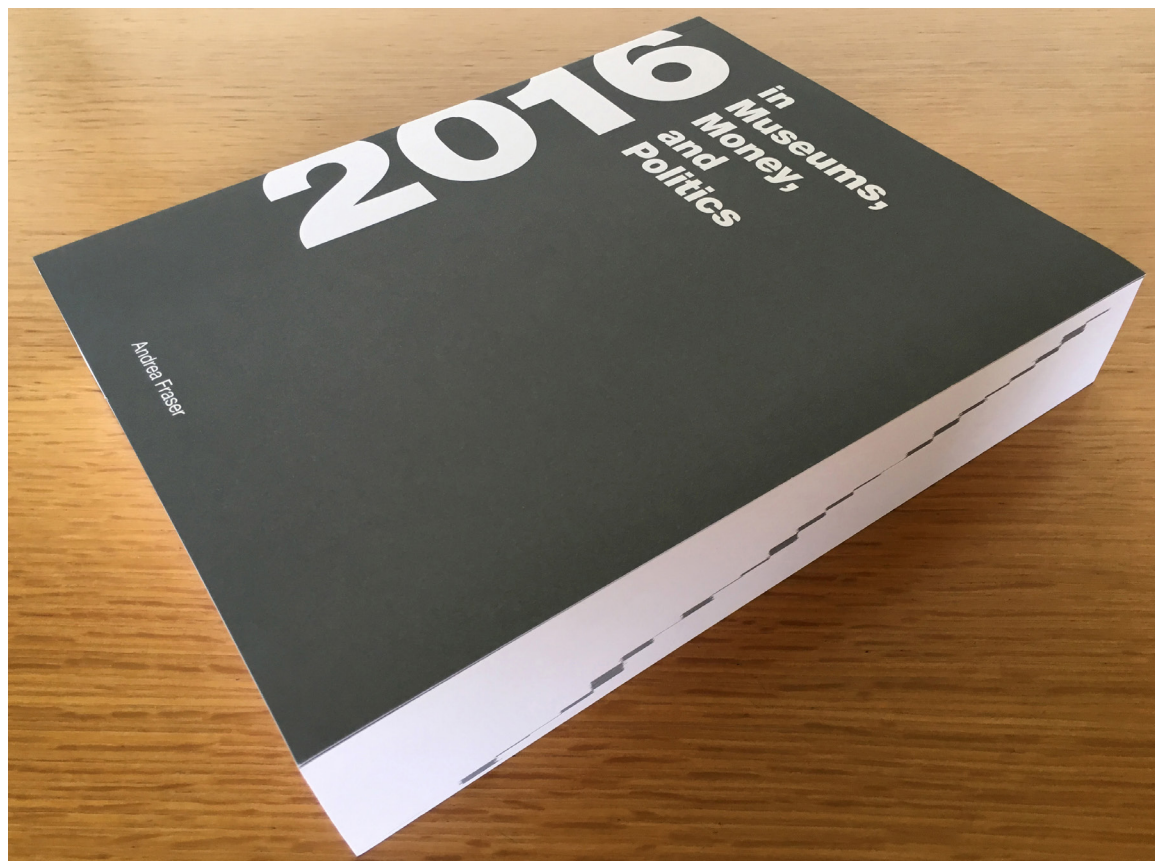


Andrea Fraser, *Index ii*, 2014, graph.





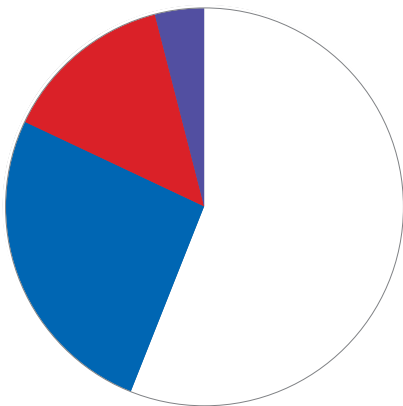
Andrea Fraser, *Index iii*, 2024, graph.



Andrea Fraser, *2016 in Museums, Money, and Politics*, book. Westreich Wagner Publications, CCA Wattis Institute, The MIT Press, 2018.

Additional Data

PARTISAN OR IDEOLOGICAL ORIENTATION FOR ALL BOARD MEMBERS  
BY LIKELY POLITICAL CONTRIBUTION RECORDS FOUND\*

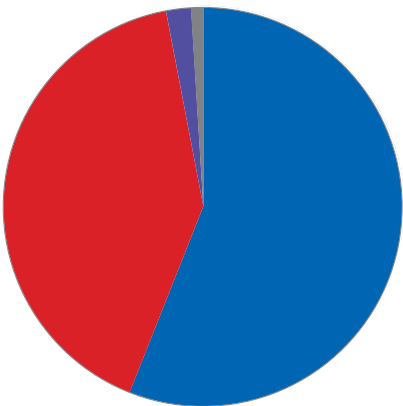


Total number of board members: 5,458  
Likely records found for: 2,411 (44.1%)  
Democratic/Liberal: 1,422 (59%)  
Republican/Conservative: 778 (32%)  
Both parties: 205 (8.7%)  
Non-partisan, third-party, and unknown: 6 (0.1%)

\*Contributions listed with board members are "likely" because identification could not be made with complete certainty in every case.

2016 in Museums, Money, and Politics

TOTAL CONTRIBUTIONS FOR ALL LIKELY POLITICAL CONTRIBUTION RECORDS FOUND  
BY PARTISAN OR IDEOLOGICAL ORIENTATION\*



Total contributions for all likely records found: \$212,405,878  
Democratic/Liberal: \$121,328,340 (57.1%)  
Republican/Conservative: \$89,218,587 (42%)  
Both parties: \$1,218,916 (0.6%)  
Non-partisan, third-party, and unknown: \$640,026 (0.3%)

\*Contributions listed with board members are "likely" because identification could not be made with complete certainty in every case.

Andrea Fraser, *2016 in Museums, Money, and Politics*, book, detail. Westreich Wagner Publications, CCA Wattis Institute, The MIT Press, 2018.



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# Artist Talk: *Two drops per heartbeat: A free-fall in the Thyssen-Bornemisza collection.*

Walid Raad, Artist and Professor, Bard College, Anandale-on-Hudson, United States

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## Biography

In part, an artist and a Professor of Photography at Bard College (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, USA). The list of exhibitions (good, bad and mediocre ones); awards and grants (merited, not merited, grateful for, rejected and/or returned); education (some of it thought-provoking; some of it, less so); publications (I am fond of some of my books, but more so of the books of Jalal Toufic. You can find his here: [jalaltoufic.com](http://jalaltoufic.com)), can be found somewhere online.

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## Artist Talk: *Two drops per heartbeat: A free-fall in the Thyssen-Bornemisza collection.*

A few years ago, I was invited by TBA21 to propose an exhibition about Baron Hans Heinrich Thyssen-Bornemisza's art collection. Until that point, I'd known almost nothing about him, his family, personal life, businesses, and art collection. My main links to him were his daughter, Francesca, and an Oriental carpet he owned that I'd been trying to find for years. But before I had time to reflect on this invitation, I found myself deep in several Thyssen-Bornemisza tunnels. These tunnels began with a daughter and a carpet, and then forked and braided into several historical and fictional spaces. These ranged from images of clouds that appeared mysteriously on the back of several Old Master paintings to gold and silver cups that attract specific types of arthropods; and demon-like creatures tugging at the edges of swamps.

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**Day 3**

**Sunday, December 8**

**Los Angeles County Museum  
of Art (LACMA)**

***Sustainable Communities:  
Indigenous Perspectives and  
Worldviews***



# *The State of Not Being a Museum*

Candice Hopkins, Executive Director and Chief Curator, Forge Project, Taghkanic, USA

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## *Biography*

Candice Hopkins is a citizen of Carcross/Tagish First Nation and lives in Red Hook, New York. Her writing and curatorial practice explore the intersections of history, contemporary art, and Indigeneity. She is Executive Director of Forge Project, Taghkanic, NY and Fellow in Indigenous Art History and Curatorial Studies, Bard College. She is curator of the recent exhibitions, *Indian Theater: Native Performance, Art, and Self-Determination Since 1969*, at the Hessel Museum of Art; *Impossible Music*, co-curated with Raven Chacon and Stavia Grimani at the Miller ICA; and the touring exhibitions, *Soundings: An Exhibition in Five Parts* co-curated with Dylan Robinson, and *Double Vision*, featuring textiles, prints, and drawings by Jessie Oonark, Janet Kigusiuq, and Victoria Mamnguqsualuk. Her notable essays include “The Gilded Gaze: Wealth and Economies on the Colonial Frontier,” in the *documenta 14 Reader*; “Outlawed Social Life,” in *South as a State of Mind*; and “The Appropriation Debates (or The Gallows of History),” in *Saturation: Race, Art, and the Circulation of Value* (New Museum/MIT Press, 2020).





*Introduction by Joselina Cruz, Director/Curator, Museum of Contemporary Art and Design (MCAD) Manila.*

Thanks, Rita. So, welcome to the third day, the last day of the conference.

We've reached this part of the conference when we have been able to move quite gingerly from the so-called centers of art. Yesterday, we learned about the important work that our colleagues have been undertaking to manage the very necessary work needed to ensure that "we turn money into fish," to quote the very wise words of Zita's father, when he advised her. And, as she wisely advised us, we must recognize the localities we occupy, whether this be in the Fogo Islands or in Brussels reaching towards the Arab world, or in Ghana, creating precious pedagogical moments with community, or the Reina Sofía in Spain, when they process complexities of a public institution, or that space of being an artist here in the US, as Andrea reflects on her position as board member within artistic institutions.

The intense localities we find ourselves in—I think we can agree that all of us find ourselves in very trying and very fraught circumstances across the world—are now what... I would like to quote Mai Abu ElDahab, when she commented as to how we now have to deal with the practicalities of daily living in crisis.

From this point, I'd like to introduce our keynote speaker for the day, who will be speaking on the work that needs to be done in our working and reconstituting the work of institutions through the lens of contemporary indigeneity. I have the pleasure of introducing Candice Hopkins, who will be speaking about the Forge Project at Taghkanic, New York, and the work they do there—I think very important work—and I think it sets us up for the rest of the day: A new model for indigenous-led organizations and looking into care for collections while working with living indigenous artists and cultural leaders. So, Candice Hopkins.

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### *The State of Not Being a Museum*

Thank you for that kind introduction, Joselina, and thank you all for listening to me today. I want to thank the organizers for thinking alongside me as I was developing what I was going to share—a collection of thoughts, reflections, and also very much indicative of an organization in formation. I also want to thank Rita for acknowledging the traditional custodians of this land. I deeply appreciate that and I am also looking forward to the contributions of all the folks who are

going to join in the panel. I think they're going to shift what we've been speaking about and certainly shift the perspectives in which we're thinking about our work.

So, I've titled this talk "The State of Not Being a Museum." This state of not being a museum is one that gives permission to follow other protocols, to center other values, to develop different roots. I think about this a lot. In this regard, it is a good question to ask, and that is, if we didn't inherit the structures and the organizations in which we work, what would they be instead? I don't feel like we give enough space for this question. So, if we didn't inherit those structures, what would they be?

At Forge Project, the organization I run with a small team of seven, eight, including me, the reason that we do the things that we do, the ways that we can work across practices like food justice, land remediation, indigenous language revitalization, critical writing, and also contemporary art, all from indigenous perspectives, I think, is because we're not a museum. We chose not to inherit that model, even if we use some of its parts.

So, Forge Project is just that; it's a project. A project implies change, it implies a sense of temporariness. I think that one of the roots of sustainability might be in thinking in more temporary terms rather than from the perspective of permanence. Something that I know is kind of antithetical to the way that museums tend to operate. We think in terms of the legacies that we're creating that extend beyond us. And this includes environmental legacies, social ones, and economic ones as well. So, we are indigenous-led and governed, and like Ibrahim's idea of the gift yesterday and my people, Tlingit people are our potlatch people, so this deeply resonated with me because the way that we gain status in our community is by how much we can give away, by how well we can host, not by how well we can hoard wealth or accumulate, but by how well we can host.

So how do we center hospitality and reciprocity? This is something that we think about at Forge all the time. It's also important to us that, when we start our work, that we come in a good way. And this coming in a good way means that our decision-making is often via consensus. And if it's not, then we've kind of failed. That we value sustenance over consumption. And again, that we take that idea of being a good host very seriously. I've been thinking a lot about this over the weekend, that there are so many ideas put forward about sustainability, but often only as shifts to modestly offset highly unsustainable practices. So, instead of sustainability, I would much rather think about what sustains us.

I want the state of not being a museum to mean that we don't reward acceleration and growth overall else. Acceleration and growth run counter to creating a depth of relationships. Instead, to cite my colleague Sarah Biscarra Dilley, who is the director of Indigenous Programs and Relationality, what we do at Forge is "we move at the speed of trust." This is the pace that we use to guide our works, even when this means moving slowly, it might mean taking pauses. It means having parts of the year deliberately set aside for research and reflection, parts of the year where we're close to the public and we're in that stage now.

And what I'm sharing next are the things that sustain us. I'm sharing how and why we do the work that we do. Like Shorefast, we're coming from a very hyperlocal and place-based perspective. And being hyperlocal means, first, thinking deeply about the history of the lands that we're on so that we can consider that history as something we attend to always — how it frames and conditions our present actions. I would love it if more museums thought in hyperlocal means and fashions.

So, this is how you enter Forge's website. We lead with a land acknowledgement as a social contract. This is the way that the land acknowledgement should operate, not as an acknowledgement necessarily, but as a contract. One that necessarily includes obligations and it necessarily should include actions, because many land acknowledgements are simply platitudes, they often rely on pastness to speak of the people on whose traditional territories they occupy, largely as uninvited guests. And I want to think of land acknowledgements more like declarations, declarations of action. And they should be about present relationships, and what you as an institution are doing to enable those relationships. They should also provide a sense of what your institution is doing that is of direct benefit to the traditional custodians of the land, with no obligation that they provide you with anything in return.

So, we are on Moh-He-Con-Nuck land, the People of the Waters that Are Never Still. The Mahicannituck is the name for the river by which we are closely situated. And it's a name that carries knowledge of what the water does in the region. Mahicannituck means the "Waters that Flow Both Ways." Most now know it as the Hudson River, but we're totally fine with doing away with the name of Henry Hudson. And indeed, the waterway at this point is not exactly a river, it's actually a tidal estuary — its currents travelling in both directions, an ecosystem that's uniquely contingent on this relationship.

The Mahicannituck was renamed the Hudson during the height of non-native settlement, a time when native names for waterways, for mountains, for rocks, for valleys were rapidly supplanted by the names of white men. Never women, always men. It was their way of staking out territory linguistically as well as physically, translating land into property. And with the supplanting came a kind of act of forgetting, a kind of historical amnesia that's still thick in these parts. And when the Mahicannituck was renamed the Hudson, industry followed on its heels and the water became the gateway for commercial shipping, which reshaped the region rather radically, including at Forge, which is on a road that was once host to two iron ore forges, both near the shores of Lake Taghkanic. It shores itself rapidly reshaped through extraction. So, beginning in the 1700s, Moh-He-Con-Nuck people were removed a total of eight times. So, they were removed and removed and removed... by force, by false agreements, by false promises. And after following many paths, which they call many trails, from their homelands to necessitate their survival, their present community is Stockbridge-Munsee Community, located near Bowler, Wisconsin, more than 1,000 miles away from the Mahicannituck Valley, through a land agreement that they made with Menominee people.

And in sharing this brief history, I wanted to foreground the words of the late Mohican diplomat, John Quinney, who you see here. So, while standing on what should have still been the territory of his tribe, the legal territory, Quinny asked: Where are the 25,000 in number and the 4,000 warriors who constituted the power and population of the great Moh-He-Con-Nuck nation in 1604? He noted that, in two and a half centuries, nothing that deserved the name "purchase" was ever made. He said, "I say that the spot on which we stand was never purchased or rightly obtained. And that by justice, human and divine, it is a property now of the remnant of the great people from which I'm descended." And what I shared before is worth repeating here. And that is, with the supplanting of native names with non-native names came an active forgetting, a kind of historical amnesia that's still thick in these parts.

And then these kinds of paintings started happening. This is a painting that's just a power move. You know, you have the painter in this cape looking over his vista, one that's been very conveniently depopulated. It's no surprise that Thomas Cole, the founder of the Hudson River School of Painting, was also close friends with James Fenimore Cooper, the author of the highly influential book — I think because it feeds into violent, romantic narratives of the removal



and disappearance of native people. A story that contains no truth about Mohican people, but is more a novel that performs rather complex moves of what I call “settler innocence,” where the violence of colonialism is positioned, it’s excused, it’s defended as natural and inevitable. And this happens over and over again, and it’s happening now.

And in the early to mid-1800s, these men went pretty far with this. So, Thomas Cole was commissioned to paint a series of landscapes of the Mahicannituck, now known as the Hudson River, for passengers traveling on a train between New York City and Albany along its shores. Think of this as early advertising for industry and for settlement.

So, what we do at Forge might seem rather simple in this context, because it’s one of the most radical things we can do, given these histories. We come together, we gather, we work in formal diplomatic relations with Stockbridge-Munsee Community, and I’ll talk about that more in a bit. We share, we learn from one another. We create active solidarities, because solidarity-making is a practice, as Fred Moten recently reminded. And that’s what we do on this land that’s adjacent to the Mahicannituck — solidarity-making as a practice. This is decidedly a space by and for indigenous people. It’s a space that shouldn’t be rare, but it is. And self-determination is behind all that we do as an organization.

We started as a private organization, a non-income earning LLC, but in the past year we shifted to be a not-for-profit. We did this to leverage funds and assets provided by our cofounder, a philanthropist named Becky Gochman. And we did this to also shift the nonprofit landscape to introduce a model of indigenous leadership that might be transferable. And it’s not necessarily a new model, it’s actually an old model. Indigenous leadership is built on consensus-making. It is built on putting those who have the most knowledge at the top of our organization, and that’s not me.

So, to do this work, we spent a year considering what it might mean to be native-led. We developed a governance structure that includes a seven-member indigenous steering council that sits above the board of, currently, five directors. So, the Indigenous steering council includes artists, cultural leaders, legal scholars, some museum professionals. They set the high-level vision and direction for us as an organization, and their priorities guide us. And two members of that steering council also hold board seats. This creates spheres of influence and shared knowledge. And the reason that I’m foregrounding this is because all too often, as native people, we’re asked to be part of committees, but committees that don’t often have

a lot of influence, they don’t often have a lot of power, and they don’t enable long-term native leadership.

When we started in 2021, and we are custodians of just over 60 acres of land, we operate out of two buildings that were designed by the artisan-activist Ai Weiwei together with HHF architects. They were designed first as a private home for a collector in the mid-2000s, and then they became under our custodianship in 2021. So, what we began with was a fellowship, and a fellowship where we bring in, native cultural leaders, you see them here. Now, we’ve expanded that fellowship, so we host six people a year who each spends up to three weeks at the organization. So, in this first year, I just want to share a bit about what all these folks do.

So, Brock Schreiber is a Mohican language learner. Mohican language is considered a sleeping language, and that is one of the residues of colonialism. Some of our languages are sleeping. And his goal, his personal goal, is so that his children will be the first two grown-ups speaking Mohican as a first language and he’s succeeding in that goal. So, that’s what he does and that’s what he dedicates his life to doing.

Chris Cornelius is an Oneida architect. Chris wants us to reconsider buildings as kin, as kin to the land, not just the land, but to the sky, to everything that occupies those places, to decenter in many ways human needs and recenter the needs of land.

Then there is the incredible filmmaker Sky Hopinka, who’s also on our indigenous steering council. Sky creates lyrical films in which archives become central to a reframing of histories.

Jasmine Neosh, who sits on our indigenous steering council, is a young legal scholar, and we needed her work in order to frame what we do.

So, each of our fellows receives \$25,000 as a cash award with no strings attached. And they spend up to three weeks at Forge doing whatever they feel is important for their work at that moment in time. They have no obligation to produce anything while they’re there, and certainly no obligation to produce anything for us. So, what intrigued me about Forge when I joined was a sense of radical openness. How can a native-centered organization in the region make an impact? Is it needed? What practices does it center and uphold? How can it be a vehicle for the redistribution of settler wealth? And I think this is key. This is different to traditional forms of patronage, which are often highly transactional. Patronage inherently centers the patron. It’s rare to see someone who sees their role like our co-founder did, as simply enabling something and then entirely stepping back. So, how can we upend generations of settler

colonialism and inspire others to give back to the people whose lands they've profited from, and to give back with no strings attached? So, by using Forge and, as an example, we want to show that this is possible and we want to set a different standard for organizations, because this for me is reparative. It's also the beginning of a pathway to reparations. And these are foundational to what we do. It's foundational to how we hold space, to how we hold space with care, with reciprocity and setting our intentions.

So, here you see the insides of Forge. Here you see what we do. We share food, we work in collaboration with local organizations like Upstate Color, and this is a meal co-hosted by them that was started by the artist Jordan Casteel. We have formal diplomatic relations with Stockbridge-Munsee Community. And this is something that I really think that any institution, any museum that has a land acknowledgement should think about doing, because it's through those formal diplomatic relations and so... that is a memorandum of understanding that's been ratified by tribal leadership and tribal governance and co-signed by us, we're able to reshape these kinds of relationships and think about how what we are doing at our organization is of direct benefit to the people on whose lands we're on.

So, this is a visit recently to Stockbridge-Munsee Community, to their farm, where they produce up to 13,000 pounds of food annually that's then shared at very low cost, with a preference to elders and youth in their community. And any of the work that we do, we also share that knowledge with them as part of this commitment. And that's actually within our legal document at the MOU.

We work with Mohican knowledge holders like Misty Cook, who was the first to begin writing down plant knowledge that was gained over generations through a book called *Medicine Generations*. So, this is her and her daughter Coral Cook leading a plant walk at Forge. We also really center people who are working in seed justice and food justice. And this is Lucy Burr with Lucy's daughter. You can see her T-shirt, "Tiny Elder," she's so adorable. And they're working in their home community to not only save but to propagate seeds. So, they show how this knowledge is transferable, and that's really at the center of what we do at Forge—just to think about how all of these processes are transferable, how you can include multiple generations in the work that you do and the work that we do.

And here's Lucy's daughter sharing blue corn seeds with Sarah Biscarra Dilley. And we want to create these situations where this kind of work is the norm, not the exception. It needs to be the norm. How

do we, you know, support these kinds of knowledge holders, these kinds of practitioners? How in our work, what do we do in our work that directly benefits them?

So, with this in mind, instead of doing a lot of public programming, we have open houses, but when we do open houses, we often work with visitors so that they can do something that's actually in direct benefit to the community. So, one of the last ones we did last year was an elderberry syrup-making workshop led by Sarah Biscarra Dilley, where all of the members were making the syrup because we're creating a seller at a nearby property that we call informally the "Yellow House." So that, when Mohican people, when we host them back in their homelands, everything is there as part of their wellbeing, including, you know, these stocks of syrup.

And here is a writers' workshop and a convening called "Estuaries" that took place over four days. One of the benefits of having these closed indigenous gatherings is that we don't have to bring people up to speed in our histories because that's deeply exhausting. We can just kind of get down to the work. So, that's what we do. We can get down to this shared knowledge. Here, we hosted folks from Aotearoa, from Australia, from Lenape, folks who are displaced from New York City, people from Nunavut in the Canadian Arctic. And that felt really revolutionary. And one of the questions that we raise at the end of these sessions is: What can we do so that this happens more often, not just where we are, but where others are, too?

We bring in a lot of native chefs over the course of the year to share their food. We also talk with fellows like Rainer Posselt, who, from 2022, is Mohican. He's just received his PhD in Mental Health, because he's looking at how to kind of stop the traumas of colonialism from the perspective of someone working in mental health.

We support fellows in what they do, but we also think about how we leverage some of the assets that we have. And this is an example of one of those. So, we are now custodians and stewards of 180 works by contemporary native artists. We focus on the work of living native artists because much of our cultural wealth has become trafficable. I call them "trafficable" because when I go to museums, I see the work of our ancestors and I always question why it's not in our hands, why it's displayed as the cultural wealth of another institution, why it's not cared by and for the community. And we center artists' rights in the work that we do as part of the collection.

So here is one of the few loans we made for a for-profit entity, and this was for a TV series called *Rutherford Falls*, which featured the artist, the real



artist, Natalie Ball. And we very rarely charge loan fees, we only do it for for-profit entities, but in this case, we asked Natalie where she would like that money directed towards. And at the time she was working with activists who were deep into the work of the Klamath Dam Removal Project, which is now complete. They've removed four dams from the Klamath River. And so, we directed those funds towards that work on her behalf.

We consider the collection a kind of form of public trust. So, that means that everything that we have is made accessible online — its primary purpose is to be a lending collection. And it's updated in real time, so anything that we acquire is basically... as we enter in data into the back end, it comes forward on our website. But it's part of centering artists' rights. We always inform the artists when there's been a request for a loan of a work so that they can consent to the context. We also do what I call a lot of redlining. So, we look at loan agreements, we ensure that artists' rights are protected within that, including copyright. We don't lend if there's not an artist fee offered. We also ensure that, for example, we've received loan agreements from other institutions that included the rights to artist images for marketing without an artist consent, for creating merchandising without an artist's consent. So, we always look through that very, very carefully and we haven't had any pushback yet. So, I'd say that there's real possibilities in ensuring that what we do as museum workers as well ensures that we center artists' rights. And some of this is not just linguistic changes, because we consider part of being good stewards and good custodians is to follow the protocols that artists are setting up and to follow the protocols of the items themselves, not ours.

Part of the work that we do out of this collection is we organize exhibitions, and this was the first one. This was hosted at the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College, and it opened last year. It was looking at the intersections of self-determination and the self-determination era that began in 1969 with the occupation of Alcatraz Island off the shores of San Francisco, as well as the emergence of the new native theater movement, also in 1969, at the Institute of American Indian Arts. Both had key documents, and the document for the Indian Theater movement was called "Indian theater: An Experiment in Process." The Institute of American Indian Arts, which is native led, was an art school that was started in 1963. That was really showing how self-determination could not only enable radical theater projects, but also was really core to this idea of our agency, whether that's

the agency of objects, but how this agency carries through in the work of many contemporary artists now.

So, there was a kind of temporality to this exhibition. It was deeply performance-based. This was a work by Rebecca Belmore based on earth that she had gathered near the grounds of Bard College, which is only 30 minutes away, it's also Mohican land. And one of the things that I wanted to share about this performance — over the course of the day of the opening she created this large X made out of clay — is that this earth that she had been given permission to use that was, she thought, perfectly sifted, and then she combined that with water from Sawkill Creek nearby. It was only later she learned that this was earth that was used from an archeological dig that was showing more than 5,000 years of indigenous placemaking in these lands. And so, this became another kind of territorial marker, and a very important one, and it's still there on the side of the museum.

So, I wanted to share one observation before I get to my conclusion. And that's something that I've observed over my career, and I hope that you hold it in mind as you listen to the next presentations. And it's a disclaimer. There's often a turn to the indigenous in times of colonial crisis. In the United States, this turn happened repeatedly in the 1800s, probably before the peak of salvage anthropology, at a time of the violent romanticization of our disappearance as indigenous people. At the same time, they were gathering all of our cultural wealth and placing it in museums like trophies of past people. And then, during the sixties, the counterculture movement, the anti-war movement, also appropriated native spirituality and Eastern spirituality at a time of their own religious crisis. And now, with the profound acceleration of the climate crisis, indigenous knowledge practices and communities are once again upheld as part of the solution. I want to name this turn and to ask us to attend to the hierarchies of power embedded within it, even here, because these hierarchies are stubborn, they aren't necessarily shifted by more consultation, by more collaboration, by strategic hires, because none of these shift the larger structures of power. I also want to name that indigenous knowledge and culture shouldn't be a place of extraction for others to learn from, to take the parts that please them, for indigenous people to continue to be unnamed consultants, but never the ones directly benefiting. A part of attending to these hierarchies is to be made acutely aware of them, including as museum workers, those that are part of the curatorial class — I like that term —, as well as in the directorial class. I'm asking you to consider what you are doing and how that is in direct

benefit of indigenous people, especially in this context here, and not how our work benefits yours and how it becomes a profit for you.

So, one of the things that I wanted to end with is here. So, part of the memorandum of understanding that we've created with Stockbridge-Munsee Community includes and was led by being good custodians of this land. And part of that includes actually generating formally this land as a cultural easement for Stockbridge-Munsee Community, which is a legal status now of the land that we're on. So, what would it mean if museums started doing this, too? Because one of the characteristics of museums is that they overly emphasize what their buildings look like on the outside and what they contain on the inside, but rarely do they ever consider the land that they're on and the health of that land. I was speaking with Davi Yanomami, an amazing leader, and we were inside a place called The Shed, in New York City, that was host to an exhibition of drawings from the Yanomami community. And images by the photographer Claudia Andújar. And Davi had spent the day in New York. And his biggest feedback was how could you live in a place where the land can't breathe, where everything was paved over? Because this is deeply antithetical to life.

So, this state of not being a museum means that we also have a co-stewardship model for the land. We consider what we're doing is in service to it as well as in service to Stockbridge-Munsee Community. And this isn't about centering our desires, but instead thinking about the needs of the land. So, we've started remediating it and now we're almost in year three of this work. It is a formal cultural easement for Stockbridge-Munsee Community. It restores their rights to gather and harvest on this land, to fish, to trap, to hunt if they desire. And this land is determined as for cultural use following the needs of their tribe. So, we've allowed dormant seeds to root and grow, and for us, we've become slowly waking up the plants.

We first invited Misty Cook to visit Forge and she did a plant analysis and identified some 30 plants of importance to Mohican people. And with her guidance, we began working with an allied botanist, Claudia Knab-Vispo, Farmscape Ecology, and a landscape architect, Jamie Purinton to develop a long-term plan. So, after a year's worth of observation, study, and research, Claudia developed a custom seed mix of native plants, local and beneficial to the ecosystem. And last year we began planting the seeds and we also began sharing them out as gifts to those who live in the area. And we're deeply invested in how to share this knowledge. And we do this through

collective labor, through meadow work days in spring and fall, where volunteers come and learn. We share plant knowledge, we identify what Claudia calls "exuberant plants" because she doesn't like the word "invasive species," those that need weeding by hand and removal. And slowly, we're replacing what was a mown lawn, a kind of norm for the region, and a non-native mono-crop with something that's far more robust. And that is an ecosystem.

And since we've begun this work, many species of birds have returned. They started returning as soon as we started tearing up the lawn. And as Sarah, my colleague, said, things were really popping off in the meadow. They got really excited. There were a lot of baby birds born that year, but the most profound change has been in the insect population. One of the fellows that we hosted recently, Michaela Patton, shared that, at night, she had to close her windows because the sound of the insects was too loud. And I would like to think of the sound as the state of not being a museum.

So, thank you.

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# *Man runojelta k'o modo ni K' ayix / No todo se puede vender / Not Everything can be Sold*

Edgar Calel, Artist, San Juan  
Comalapa, Guatemala

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## *Biography*

Edgar Calel (Chi Xot, San Juan Comalapa, Guatemala, 1987) studied at the Escuela Nacional de Arte Rafael Rodríguez Padilla. He works in a variety of media, exploring the complexities of the indigenous experience, as seen through the Mayan Kaqchikel cosmovision, spirituality, rituals, community practices, and beliefs, in juxtaposition with the systematic racism and exclusion that the indigenous people of Guatemala endure daily.

In 2023, Calel had his first institutional solo show *B'alab'äj* (Jaguar Stone) at SculptureCenter, New York. In 2021, he had his first solo show, *Pa Ru Tun Che'* (From a Tree Top), at Proyectos Ultravioleta, Guatemala City. Additionally, he has participated in numerous group exhibitions including *Choreographies of the Impossible*, 35<sup>th</sup> São Paulo Biennial (2023); *uMoya: The Sacred Return of Lost Things*, 12<sup>th</sup> Liverpool Biennial (2023); *Soft and Weak Like Water*, 14<sup>th</sup> Gwangju Biennial (2023); *Is It Morning for You Yet?*, 58<sup>th</sup> Carnegie International, Pittsburgh (2022); *The Crack Begins Within*, 11<sup>th</sup> Berlin Biennial, (2020); *Los Jardineros* (The Gardeners), Proyectos Ultravioleta, Guatemala City (2020); *Continuous*



*Fire | Feu continuel*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (2019); *Virginia Pérez Ratton. Centroamérica: Deseo de lugar / Centra America*, MUAC Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporáneo, Mexico City (2019).

His works are part of the permanent collections of Rijkscollectie — National Collection of the Netherlands; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Tate, London; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid; the National Gallery of Canada, Ontario; Fundación TEOR/ética, San José, Costa Rica; MADC Museum of Contemporary Art and Design, San José, Costa Rica; and Kadist, San Francisco.

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*Man runojelta k'o modo ni K' ayix / No todo se puede vender / Not Everything can be Sold*

In Comalapa, there is a word that you say when you wake up, and we want to ask if the sun has risen for us in our hearts. And that is a question that I want to ask you all right now, if we are OK, if we are present, if we are alive. So, if you are alive, please let me know, send me a little sign that you are.

I was invited to present a work that was developed about two or three years ago, but I would like to go further back. Maybe hundreds of years back, to find the actual roots and connection where that work comes from, and that's what I'm showing for the ones living and breathing here today.

Part of the works that I will show are inspired by... And it's not just inspiration, it's also an acknowledgment of the legacy of my ancestors and what they left for my communities, for my peoples, and also for myself. So, behind the ideas and images and knowledge and rituals here, there has also been a lot of sweat, tears, and blood spilled over our land, so I want that to dignify my land and my people through my work.

One of the main spaces that allows us to generate knowledge of the ancestors is actually being in the kitchen, being around the fire, heating food, and also heating our bodies to go outside and work. So, I'm going to be showing some images related to that.

Most of my work I develop and I create from the knowledge within the mundane, or the everyday, and the spaces for rituals and ceremonies of the everyday life. Soil, the land, it is a central element of my work, because it is from the soil that we are able to get our food and our nourishment, and we harvest that, and also it's something that we fight for every day.

This work is a ritual to call our spirits when our spirits are outside of our bodies, so we call our names within

a pot of water, and we call our name so our spirit comes back to our body.

These are the rituals that I bring to contemporary art, and through them I am sharing the technologies that my ancestors developed, and these technologies actually did not pass through the digital, and I believe they are the answers to a lot of the issues that we have been discussing the last few days in terms of sustainability.

So actually, when I was titling this work, I thought that it was going to be named *Our ancestors' Whatsapp*.

The previous image that you saw is how we install our own ideas and our art in our town, and this is how they're installed as exhibitions in biennials, museums, and cultural institutions.

I actually started painting landscapes, and what I like to do is to bring the Guatemalan landscape into these exhibition spaces, where you can actually feel the mountains and the hills, and all these places where you do the invocations where the rituals take place.

This image is a ritual and an altar for offerings that I did back in 2013 and 2014, along with another artist whose name is Rosario Sotelo, who was visiting Comalapa at the time. And this was one of the first times that I brought this kind of offering to a space that was an exhibition space. But it was simultaneously ceremonial, and we brought the fruits, the vegetables, incense, liquor, and also the smell of pine into the space.

In 2014, my family, myself, and the artist that I worked with were invited to present some work we were developing. So, in that instance the work was called *Abuelos*, which means "Grandparents," and it was an installation along with a video. This one had the same offerings, but every time you show the work, the title changes, because every time you are offering a different thing to a different site, a different kind of thought. So, every time I change the title of the work I add to a poem I am compiling, which is still a work in progress.

In 2018, I presented it again in a convent in a church in Guatemala. And we placed the stones in this old fountain, so I thought it was very interesting to see how time destroyed the colonial heritage, the rubble left there, and I was able to reclaim it for my people.

And the one that you're seeing here, I did not move anything, I didn't move the stones, I just brought the fruit, so it's truly something where the place invited me to realize my desires, and this is in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

In 2019 and 2020 I had a very poignant conversation with Stephan Benchoam, Salma Tuqan, and Pablo Ramírez about the processes of what we do



with the works that come from a spiritual place, how to bring that work to art spaces, to galleries, and cultural centers, as well as fairs, and there was a dialogue that I think was brought to reflect on or to think about the issue or the topic of possession, of owning something that belongs to the culture or a community or a people, and how we are able to share that with the world. In 2021, it was through Proyectos Ultravioleta, we showed this work in the London Art Fair, and the idea of showing this there was precisely to share the legacy of the community. After that, we also made some drawings based on this work particularly, that I made with the brothers. And the installation was not for sale — what we had for sale were only the drawings. And I also think that there is an interest in a negotiation, in a dialogue at the moment between Tate, Ultravioleta, and my family about wanting to share that — there was this desire for sharing with many more people in a broader context. It is through this work that we are able to say that we are present and we are alive in different settings, in different art contexts.

All the elements that belong within the Maya indigenous cosmovision are on one side. It's the sacred entities, and also the people who practice that, so there are many levels of understanding the gifts that life gives us, but there are also temporary gifts. And then, there is nothing that we have forever, for our entire lives. So, for example I could say that my brother is a gift that I have, and he's next to me, but it's not going to be like I'm going to hug him all the time, all day, every day, right? There is a moment where I need to let him go, and I will also follow my own path, my own journey, and that's also part of it. So, in the same vein, we see and we present this work, and we are able to share the work in, you know, giving the opportunity for an institution to assume that responsibility of stewarding the work, but also the privilege of sharing it, and sharing the knowledge of the people that have been in the land for hundreds of years. For me, it was very important for Tate to be interested in my work, but at the same time in its stewardship, in sharing, and in generating an extension of my people in Europe, and extending the Kaqchikel territory to the other side of the ocean.

Tate's stewardship is thirteen years, so they will have the work for thirteen years. And they were going to take care of it — they will take care of it. And the number thirteen is based on the thirteen joints that we have in our bodies, and also the thirteen energies that exist in the twenty days of the Mayan calendar. We also thought of seven versions of the same work to be done in different parts of the world, as a way of visualizing and creating a constellation on earth



Edgar Calel, *'Ni Musmut (It's Breezing)*, 2024. Bergen Kunsthall, Norway. Courtesy of the artist and Bergen Kunsthall, Norway; Proyectos Ultravioleta, Guatemala. Photography by Terkel Eikemo & Thor Brødreskift



Edgar Calel, *'Ni Musmut (It's Breezing)*, 2024. Bergen Kunsthall, Norway. Courtesy of the artist and Bergen Kunsthall, Norway; Proyectos Ultravioleta, Guatemala. Photography by Terkel Eikemo & Thor Brødreskift



*The Space Between. Visions of Indigenous Art Across the Globe*, 2024. [Exhibition view] Museo de Arte Moderno de Medellín, Medellín, Colombia. Courtesy of the artist and Museo de Arte Moderno de Medellín, Medellín; proyectos Ultravioleta, Guatemala. Photography by Yohan López





*The Space Between. Visions of Indigenous Art Across the Globe, 2024.* [Exhibition view] Museo de Arte Moderno de Medellín, Medellín, Colombia. Courtesy of the artist and Museo de Arte Moderno de Medellín, Medellín; Proyectos Ultravioleta, Guatemala. Photography by Yohan López



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Edgar Cael, '*Ru Raxal qa Rayb'äl* (*El verdor de nuestro deseo*), 2024. [Exhibition view] La Nueva Fábrica, Antigua Guatemala, Guatemala. Courtesy of the artist and La Nueva Fábrica; Proyectos Ultravioleta, Guatemala. Photography by Ana Werren



Edgar Cael, '*Ru Raxal qa Rayb'äl* (*El verdor de nuestro deseo*), 2024. [Exhibition view] La Nueva Fábrica, Antigua Guatemala, Guatemala. Courtesy of the artist and La Nueva Fábrica; Proyectos Ultravioleta, Guatemala. Photography by Ana Werren





Edgar Cael, *'Ni Musmut (It's Breezing)*, 2024. Bergen Kunsthall, Norway. Courtesy of the artist and Bergen Kunsthall, Norway; Proyectos Ultravioleta, Guatemala. Photography by Terkel Eikemo & Thor Brødreskift



Edgar Cael, *'Ru k'ox k'ob'el jun ojer etemab'el'*, 2021. Liverpool Biennial 2023 at Tate Liverpool. Courtesy of the artist and Tate, London; Proyectos Ultravioleta, Guatemala City. Photography by Mark McNulty





Installation view. Edgar Calel, *Oyonik (The Calling)*, 2022. Commissioned by The 58<sup>th</sup> Carnegie International. Courtesy of the artist and Proyectos Ultravioleta  
Photo by Sean Eaton.

of the knowledge of different people. But also, the number seven is based on a Vucub Caquix character that appears in the sacred book of the K'iche' people, and that name is based on a constellation of seven stars [the Big Dipper] that serve as guidance to take time: so, time-keeping.

I think that it is a beautiful thing to be here and to share with you a few of these ancestral stories and knowledge compressed into twenty minutes.

Thank you.

# *Exhibition Making and the Question of What Lies Beyond*

Pablo José Ramírez, Curator,  
Hammer Museum, Los Angeles.

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## *Biography*

Pablo José Ramírez is a curator at the Hammer Museum. From 2019 to 2023, he was the inaugural adjunct curator of First Nations and Indigenous art at Tate Modern, where he played a key role in shaping the acquisitions strategy and advancement of Indigenous and non-Western practices. Ramírez was part of the curatorial council of the 58<sup>th</sup> Carnegie International with Sohrab Mohebbi. In 2015, he co-curated the 19<sup>th</sup> Paiz Biennale *Transvisible* with Cecilia Fajardo-Hill, and recently, he co-curated with Diana Nawi the critically acclaimed biennale, *Made in LA 2023: Acts of Living*. His work explores non-Western ontologies, brown and indigenous histories, and the politics of noncolonial aesthetics. He holds an MA in contemporary art theory from Goldsmiths, University of London. Ramírez received the 2019 Independent Curators International/CPPC Award for Central America and the Caribbean. Lectures include the Museo Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, The National Museum of Oslo, MUAC, Gasworks, ParaSite, Kunstintituut Melly, University of Cape Town, Essex University, Cambridge University, University of Chicago, Simon Fraser University, and





The New School. He has published extensively, including pieces for *Artforum*, *e-flux*, *Arts of the Working Class*, *Artishock*, and several catalogues and books.

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*Exhibition Making and the Question of What Lies Beyond*

In 1883, the eruption of the Krakatoa volcano in Indonesia produced infrasonic pressure waves traveling around the earth. However, infrasound frequencies register on a scale that is inaudible to the human ear, yet its presence is overwhelmingly powerful. Some of the most potent sounds on earth are registered on infrasound. They are a refined realism, although they cannot be heard. The fact that we cannot hear, see, or understand something doesn't come at the expense of meaning; it doesn't sacrifice its intelligibility.

I'm a mestizo, or as the Bolivian sociologist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui calls it, a Ch'ixi, a mix. I have Mayan Indigenous ancestry (obliterated by my mestizaje), but I am also a descendant of Spanish colonial settlers. I'm the embodiment of the colonial paradox itself. My body is Brown, and I travel with a Guatemalan passport. Before moving to LA, for many years I lived in three different European countries, constantly juggling with working visas that were about to expire. Surviving in this job meant moving continuously. And here I am now, drinking matcha lattes and calling Los Angeles home. I grew up in a country that survived genocide against the Mayan population and was embroiled in 36 years of a civil war, and my practice is the inheritor of this condition of movement. Today, within all the privilege of working as I do, I'd like to dedicate this talk to the millions of undocumented people living and breathing in this country they, too, call home.

It's hard to talk about Indigenous and Brown bodies without looking into contemporary forms of colonial violence. The fact that we do, to some extent, gather here, epitomizes a disconformity, perhaps an old scar that once in a while itches or hurts. Perhaps, what we are trying to do here, is to come to terms with the fact that action is what drives our institutions and our practices — or, more accurately, reflexive action. We think as we do, and in the face of this new reality, it is precisely this political agency that is being cancelled. I will share with you a few insinuations that I hope are not read as a celebratory exposé, but rather as embodied experiences that are present in my

curatorial practice. My intention with this is to build a curatorial argument, a poetic tool that is not mine but comes from the many Indigenous and Brown artists with whom I have worked. It is not museums driving change. It is the artists. It has always been the artists. We, as curators, we are just catching up.

This talk is about Brownness as a broader idea, and I am going to develop three curatorial arguments very briefly. The first is to think about time and its relationship to history, or rather, time beyond history (what I call ancestrality). First argument, "from Western teleology to indigenous and brown temporalizations." Thinking of contemporaneity and its relation to Indigeneity, I want to present two, although there are many more, of course. The first is marked by the rise of the Zapatista Movement in 1994. The Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional EZLN, took arms and shocked the political establishment in Mexico. To my knowledge, the first manifesto of la Selva Lacandona was the first political statement of an Indigenous group that claimed a form of Indigenous transnational universality, or rather a form of "planetarism." The history of this movement is to be found not in the bourgeois leftist urban intelligentsia, but in the bodies and hearts of Indigenous towns across Chiapas. The Zapatismo marked a moment of no return in contemporary politics. Their political discourse was marked by the fire of poetics before politics and politics before cultural identity.

The second historical marker is the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. This moment marked the end of a bipolar world dominated by the fear of communism, the end of the New Deal in the US, and the rise of financial capitalism as we know it today. In the cultural arena, multiculturalism was the new ad-hoc model for this new form of global political and economic hegemony. Global museums started to diversify their collections and built new decentralized acquisition committees, with groups emerging in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, which opened the path to celebrated discourses around so-called "cultural identity" in the arts.

Should we not feel that there is something odd about this? How can we celebrate diversity and inclusion while the tendency is actually toward capital accumulation? The discourses around cultural identity decentralize, while the market and institutional power tend toward centralization. The paradox of neoliberal multiculturalism is that it celebrates diversity, but it cannot contain the potential of its own enunciation. The more we insist on buzzwords such as identity, inclusion, and diversity, the more we affirm the tendency of the Western canon to assert itself as the only place of enunciation. The challenge is not

inclusion but implosion and transformation. The challenge is not to stretch the contemporary to “include” Indigenous and Brown artists, but to implode the very idea of the contemporary. Indigeneity and Brownness cannot be thought of as a topic of research, a good idea for a thematic show, or less so, a celebration without actual and concrete commitments.

Multiculturalism is seductive, and it is also a shortcut for institutions. At some point, it seems there are no limits to what is to be included and celebrated; its spell is powerful but not whole, and sometimes we see the glitches. We are now ensnared in one of the main symptoms of Multiculturalism: its inability for actual political solidarity. We have seen how the limits of liberal ethics in museums and international biennales welcome artists from the Global South with open arms. Still, they fail to engage with the political consequences of those actions.

For the second argument, “From Neoliberal Multiculturalism to the not-yet-known,” I will share two works that embody the spirit of that elusive not-yet-known. Marry Sully was born on the Standing Rock Reservation in South Dakota — a Yankton Dakota artist who created highly distinctive work between the 1920s and 1940s. This is a single piece of three panels, organized somewhat sequentially. Sully came from a long tradition of Indigenous artists and intellectuals, and her nephew is the art historian and Harvard professor, Philip Deloria, who in 2019 wrote a book dedicated to the work of Sully. In this piece, Deloria argued that Sully was looking at the tradition of representation within modernism while deliberately twisting its strategy of representation and abstraction.

On the first panel, figurative shapes depict a conglomerate of bodies: In the first tier, what seem to be modern clothes on a group of legs; in the second, the shape of single Brown bodies; and in the third, the representation of a kind of detention camp, or place of imprisonment, and no bodies in the depiction. In the last, ironically, is an idyllic representation of an Indigenous village. In the next panel, we see the abstraction of the previous shapes in synthesized form in the fashion of modernist abstraction. However, the third panel reveals a type of abstraction inspired by the Lakota textiles. This abstraction does not respond to the teleology of Western art history. It is not derivative, but the affirmation of a not-yet-known form of abstraction, only known and meant to be recognized by specific tribes. Deloria argues that Sully was actually looking for an Indigenous Anti-primitivism, an Indigenous temporalization that would ensure its contemporaneity, not by looking at history as past, but at an Indigenous time that is wide and multidimensional.

Third and last argument: “From Identity to Performative Enunciation.” I’ll present you here with a project very close to my heart, because it is the project that made me understand the immensity and deliriously exquisite urban mess of Los Angeles. This is a city to live in. Not to like, but to love. This was the Hammer Biennale, *Made in LA 2024: Acts of Living*, and co-curated with Diana Nawi. This exhibition forced us to examine an extended notion of Brownness, where Indigeneity, Latinx, and diasporic sensibilities meet, and believe me — they meet in many instances.

We didn’t start by thinking about representation and demographics as a starting point, but rather by looking at art practice itself. For us, the more we visited artists, the trickier it became to think of a curatorial discursive horizon that could group this wide arrange of artists. Most of these artists engaged with the materiality of the diasporic and Brown experience, primarily through assemblage, crafts, and the continuation of Native American traditions. There was something about the rawness of materials and the contingency of creating things that would change over time and which was indicative of the curatorial ethos we were trying to find. And then, one day, Diana and I drove to the Watts Towers and eureka, we found it. We found the correct note, the whisper, the infrasound resting on those uncanny towers.

Simon Rodia — though some people said his name was Sabatino Rodella, and his neighbors called him Sam — had a regular job as a tile setter, but on weekends and at nighttime, under lights, he was building this. There is something gnawingly enigmatic about Rodia. Why would someone want to dedicate most of their life to such a task, consuming large parts of their spare time and energy? Having no formal art education, Rodia’s knowledge came from his training as a construction worker. He used pieces from Malibu Potteries and the California Clay Products Company, while children from the neighborhood also brought him pieces of broken pottery. He would come home and work until dusk, as if there was some kind of secret plan behind the project.

Rodia was a bricoleur; more than purpose, it is what I understand as the “will to create” that drove his work. The way I think of creation in Rodia’s sense is not the outcome of a semiotic cultural gestalt — an art object, a novel, a musical composition — but an “act of living” that exceeds the object itself. It is contained by it, but it is more than it.

A couple of quick examples. When artist Maria Maea works in her studio garden, she establishes an intimate relationship with the materials with which she operates. They are cosmic bearers of an aliveness



essential to her practice. Her sculptures, often body-scale, are assemblages of organic and inorganic materials that harbor a history in their own terms. Working with palms, flowers, seeds, and concrete, among many other things, the artist arranges sites of invocation that mobilize a set of sensibilities personal to her, while also serving as a kind of offering to those who see themselves and their own stories in her materials. The unpredictability contained in the materials she uses and their organic decadence is central to her practice. Contingency is an important element. Often made in collaboration, her works form an intimate bond between the life of the materials and their crafting.

Jackie Amezcuita is an artist from my hometown in Guatemala. We grew up ten blocks from each other but never met. I did not meet her until I knocked on a door in east LA and was greeted by a sweet grandmother who offered me a shot of mezcal at 10 am. Amezcuita came undocumented to the US when she was 16 years old and is now an outstanding artist. For this work, she created 148 slabs made from a mix of soil and corn dough. She used a small stove in her studio, from where the smell of fresh tortillas emanated every day until the exhibition opened. Each slab represents one of the 148 neighborhoods that compose LA, with soil collected from those places. The slabs are framed by copper, creating the effect of the illusion of light and depth once installed. On top of each slab rests a drawing inspired by urban scenes of those neighborhoods. The slabs crack and change with time, altering the topography of the drawing itself while slowly revealing the fact that what drives the materiality of the object is not certainty but contingency and, to an extent, change.

In *Warn The Animals* (2023), the artist Ishi Glinsky presents us with Ghostface, an oversized mask that resembles the mass-produced Halloween mask that became iconic after the *Scream* movie franchise. The surface of the mask is not even, but composed of small square fragments; mosaic in a turquoise color that resembles the jade masks common in Inca and Mayan cultures. On top, a regalia-like bordering of the contours of the mask stands out, adorned by a group of small artifacts acting as bells. In this monumental sculpture, Glinsky conflates pop culture with Indigenous traditional artistry; it includes objects produced by a network of Indigenous artists, each contributing different elements to the regalia. By exploring the boundless and thriving continuation of ancestral Indigenous artistry and its critical dialog with contemporary culture, his work is an assertive quest for intertribal solidarity and celebration. *Made in L.A. 2023: Acts of Living* pays tribute to the legacy of the Watts Towers by attempting a curatorial

ethos grounded in the belief that how we do things matters. Ultimately, what drove this endeavor was the feeling of knowing that we were taking part in something larger than ourselves and our understanding of the city.

This biennale was rooted in LA, and all artists invited lived in the city at the time of the exhibition. This city always changes, as does the biennale. The fact that it is an exhibition of the city makes it meaningful to the artist's community, their families and the expanded audiences of the museum, but it is transnational because that is what the city is.

Finally, I want to close by saying that our contemporary museum ecosystem is, in many ways, the result of a multicultural ethos that might be coming to an end. As this happens, the current epistemological framework of multiculturalism and identity politics is also in crisis. What is next remains to be seen, but as Bifo Berardi would probably argue, while remembering John Maynard Keynes, "the inevitable generally does not happen because the unpredictable prevails instead."

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# *Meeting the Matriarchy. Extractivism Exposed*

Taloi Havini, Artist, Brisbane.

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## *Biography*

Taloi Havini (b, 1981, Arawa, Autonomous Region of Bougainville, Papua New Guinea; lives and works in Brisbane, Australia) is an interdisciplinary artist working across media from sculpture, photography, moving image, installation, and sound. A descendant from the Nakas clan of the Hakō (Haku) people of northeastern Buka, her research practice is shaped by her matrilineal ties to her land in Bougainville and studies surrounding Indigenous Knowledge Systems and museum collections. Havini creates immersive and site-specific experiences, often reflecting on ideas of transmission, mapping, and representation. She continues to work collaboratively on cultural heritage projects with communities in Bougainville.

Havini's artwork is held in public and private collections including TBA21–Academy, Sharjah Art Foundation; Art Gallery of New South Wales; Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art (QAGOMA); National Gallery of Victoria; and KADIST, San Francisco, CA, USA. She has participated in numerous solo and group exhibitions exhibiting at Artspace, Sydney; Palais de Tokyo, Paris; Sharjah





Biennial 13, UAE; 3<sup>rd</sup> Aichi Triennial, Nagoya; 8<sup>th</sup> & 9<sup>th</sup> Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, QAGOMA, Brisbane; TBA21's Ocean Space, Venezia; Barbican Centre, London; Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, NZ; the Honolulu Biennial, HA; and ARTES Mundi, 10 Wales.

### *Meeting the Matriarchy. Extractivism Exposed*

There is a certain kind of violence within the canon of Western art history where indigenous peoples are still relegated to the past. Art from locales such as Oceania has been viewed as “primitive”, a one-dimensional aesthetic inspiration for artists of the modernist movement. Such classifications perpetuate the attitudes of early colonial agents who were extracting natural resources while appropriating and exoticizing Indigenous peoples and cultural materials for their own profit, empire building across Europe and the global south.

Contemporary Art Museums are attempting to change their practices, moving towards more open and inclusive patronage and representation of a diversity of communities. While museums are exploring ideas of futurism and sustainability, we must also acknowledge the extent to which the creation of collections continues to be directly linked to historical events. How can a museum repair the derailing of a matrilineal organisation that took place because of colonial rule? What does this mean for artists working on the crest of these changes?

### *Introductory overview*

Firstly, may I pay my respects as it is customary for Indigenous peoples to acknowledge the First Peoples of this land of which we gather here today, their elder's past, present and emerging.

I also acknowledge my fellow First Nation speakers. Here is a map of the region of where I was born, where I live. Maps are problematic, this shows the south-west corner of the Pacific, through a very colonial perspective. They have become a subject of enquiry in my work for the ways in which they have imposed power and because of the rich minerals that are in our earth, profiting from extractive industries such as mining, deforestation, overfishing etc that continues to this day.

What I am showing here today are five slides of a ceremony showing the cultural society that I belong to. My father's generation of Bougainville leaders were

staunch, and they made this very clear when they proclaimed:

“Land is our life. Land is our physical life — food and sustenance. Land is our social life; it is marriage; it is status; it is security; it is politics; in fact it is our only world.” (Dove et al. 1974, 182).

Sustainability, for me is about Governance. Not just from the top down, but it is governing from the bottom up. This is a cultural society that places women on the shoulder of men, it says — the land will be passed through your lineage, and together we will care and manage these resources for the sake of our future generations. Another saying that came from the 60s was from Bougainville, Leader Raphael Bele said “Our land is like the skin on the back on our hands. You would not expect us to sell our skin, would you?

The colonial project being a patriarchal system derailed for a period our collective female authority.

My mother took these photos in 1970s they show a chiefly woman's marriage ceremony between the Naboin and Nakas clans — a matrilineal society in Buka and this is the dominant social structure across the archipelago. Raised on a platform is a young woman identified here as Lahio of Tankihira. She is being carried in great numbers to the neighbouring Lehuna Tsuhana at Lemanmanu village where she is being declared as the Tehekao (queen). Pictured with her is another kind of Kesa, like the photo representation of a Kessa which is held in storage a collection in the MKB in Basel. Lahio's ties are to the chiefly Naboin clan. In ceremonies of this societal significance, the Kesa represents the high status that women have in Buka and across Bougainville, as leaders and custodians over the lands and waters where they live. To explain Matriarchy in Bougainville today scholar Ruth Saovanna says:

“Rejecting the argument that tradition relegated women to domesticity, as wives and mothers, women celebrated their powerful roles as ‘mothers of the land’ and their status in matrilineal traditions. In such traditions, some women (like men) had chiefly status and women in general were seen as mothers of the matrilineage, its land, valuables, ceremonies, knowledge and history. Land is not just an economic and political resource but a source of social and spiritual identity. Women saw their role in peacemaking as one of both reviving their matrilineal status and making matriliney newly relevant in the modern context of Bougainville

society” (Saovana-Spriggs 2007, 203 f.).

These images have recently become important to me because of my recent encounter with a representation of an ancestor in an ethnographic collection in Basel in 2023 — this Kessa pictured coming into meeting her in my research and in the growing urgency in exploring ways to connect her with our communities living back on the land.

In 2002, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) and the University Museum and Collection (UMAC) conference was held in Sydney, in Australia. At that conference my late father presented a paper titled, *Indigenous Perspectives on Art Collections of Traditional Culture of the Past, Present and Future — Bougainville*.

I am going to read an excerpt of that paper:

*Interest in traditional art within the pacific region became more pronounced with the advent of colonisation in the last rush for colonies by the west in the 18th century. Unbeknown to the First Nations however, this was actually the beginning of the systematic fleecing of their “Intellectual property”. More extensive than the loss of precious traditional art and treasures that can be replaced, western domination and subjugation of our peoples forced our ancestors to stop making such artworks. They were seen as expressions of independent culture that posed a threat to the colonisation of our bodies, our minds, our beliefs and our societies.*

Modern artists of the west, taking a break I guess from the pressure of classical realism, romantically started to sniff around for something that was different and exotic. As Pablo Picasso responded to the expressive strength of African art and Monet was inspired by flat stylistic Japanese prints; so Paul Gauguin recognised light, pattern and abstraction of shape and colour of the pacific. It seems that so-called “primitive, non western art” was not so primitive after all — it liberated the art movement of the 20th century.

In our Post-Modern world, artmaking admits the eclectic mix of cultural appropriation and reinterpretation. Indigenous art, notably here in Australia, is leading the revival of revisiting cultural roots and art practice. This movement has inspired the Pacific artists, Bougainvilleans among them, to access artworks of the past that lie stored or unexhibited in university collections and museums of the world.

Revival of culture in a non-threatening, multicultural environment is an enriching, positive role for institutions of learning to initiate and foster in society.

I suggest to this important gathering that NOW is the time for institutions that hold such artworks to redress the past.

The conference was accompanied by a tour of the exhibition that he and my mother co-curated with another Bougainville family, the Sirivi’s at Macquarie University titled, “Yumi Yet” in pidgin language, translates in English to mean “This is Us”.

During this time in the early 2000’s I was in my first years of art school in the Canberra School of Art (most likely writing essays on the Enlightenment — or Primitive Art). While in Sydney my parents were spending time in the cultural collections and selected from the Australian Museum’s Pacific collection some of the earliest examples of our ancestral materials (ceremonial wands, items of cultural and spiritual significance including women’s’ and men’s ceremonial headdress initiation rites, and items and tools that were familiar to them and of course various forms of shell money / currency). Borrowing, these from the museum in the city, moving them across the Sydney Harbour Bridge to Macquarie University gallery — involved a lengthy and detailed museum and conservation process, that at the time felt confronting and unfamiliar. We were learning about these museum processes for the first time. There was practically no marketing to promote this exhibition, and in fact it was approved under the guise of accompanying the conference.

For our two families — who were exiled for a period in Sydney — this became a milestone achievement and was the first time where we, as Indigenous people intervened with traditional museum practices.

In that exhibition, we were able to break the traditional museum labels that mimic 19th century views, corrected a lot of misinformation. Call them “community labels” if you like as they were authored in person by the Havini and Sirrivi families. Some of the recommendations he listed in the paper were:

- Increased access to museum collections for Indigenous communities
- The creation of more exhibitions — including in country- for Indigenous communities to access works
- Making works available to home communities through publications
- Building links between institutions, universities



and communities for knowledge sharing, and reparation through the negotiation of safe and responsible return of works to home communities.

It has been twenty-four years since my father wrote that paper. So, what has changed for indigenous communities who are still asking these questions for engaging with their Oceanic collections?

The perception is that what is considered art from Oceania is held within historical collections. Contemporary art spaces on the other had provide room for challenging and countering this narrative. For Tongan artist Latai Taumoepeau, commissioned for the exhibition *Re-Stor(y)ing Oceania*, who I curated at Ocean Space, in Venice this year — her faiva (performing art) is centred from her Tongan philosophies of relational vā (space and time) — where she says, “the more ancient I am, the more contemporary my work is”. For her project, *Deep communion sung in minor (ArchipelaGO THIS IS NOT A DRILL)*, she brought her ancient Islander Tongan traditions of the Metupaki to Venice and with Venetians she led sports teams in her ancient metupaki to draw attention to the imminent threat of deep-sea mining to her homelands in Tonga in the Pacific Ocean. In the ancient Maori proverb on the idea of time — when we think if time we are instructed to — look back (to the past) as we walk into the future.

For me like my fellow artists from Oceania, and as the images play over and over I find myself aspiring for more of these public practicing gatherings where “ceremony” however you define this, performance and it is in the ritual of making art and exhibition-making is prompted to be the most sustainable form of cultural and artistic preservation. It may seem ironic but in fact some of the best ways in which we preserve things is to destroy them. That some things were only made for a period only. Allowing and leaning into impermanence, for some things should not have a life after its initial use. After they have been used it is time to destroy them. This is a form of protecting our intellectual cultural property rights from others.

I make this point only to highlight the need for conceptual biases to be constantly challenged, sometimes it is not the object itself that is the primary concern, rather it is the knowledge and relationships that are associated to the artwork.

The Kessa in the museum is one example for me and in working through the lens of contemporary art projects this has enabled a range of communities to meet at these intersections.

We are constantly redefining what the culture means of that place and to whom. At the very core of

Indigenous and Oceania thinking everything is considered a resource — space — time — relationships.

Thank you.

Taloi

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# *The Native Born: Objects and Representations from Ramingining, University of Sydney*

Djon Mundine, Artist, Curator,  
Activist and Writer, Australia

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## *Biography*

In 1979, Bundjalung man Djon Mundine moved to a little island in Arnhem Land called Milingimbi, where he joined the arts center as an adviser. Roughly 600 people lived on the island, and he was amazed to discover that the locals had a remarkable skill: They could identify each other's footprints on sight. "By looking at their footprint, they could tell who that was — 'That's Jim', or 'Delphine has just been here,'" Mundine tells ABC Arts. Prints and stencils of hands and feet have featured prominently in Aboriginal visual language for thousands of years: In the Red Hands Cave in the Blue Mountains, a collage of handprints and stencils adorn a rock wall. The red, yellow, and white ochre prints are believed to be between 500 and 1,600 years old. In 2003, archaeologists discovered ancient footprints at Willandra Lakes in southwestern New South Wales. Mundine, who won the Red Ochre Award for Lifetime Achievement in the Arts in 2020, calls on this rich cultural history in *Always Was, Always Will Be* — a performance work in which he leaves a red ochre print of his body on a wall.





*The Native Born: Objects and Representations from Ramingining, University of Sydney*

*Yol nhe yaku who are you — what is your name?  
Nhamirri nhe — what is your condition —  
how are you?*

*The Native Born: Objects and Representations from Ramingining, University of Sydney*

Mukarr's real purpose was to name all living things

Jack Wunuwun, *On the Creation of the World*.

The collection of paintings and objects from Ramingining (and Milingimbi) community, which were acquired by the Power Institute of Contemporary Art in the early 1980s, were brought together in a project initiated by myself in 1981 at Milingimbi, around the idea of naming and organizing natural species in an Aboriginal taxonomy. In 1983, Bernice Murphy (new Co-director with Leon Paroissien of the Power Institute of Contemporary Art) asked if I would create a large exhibition of Aboriginal art for the newly re-defined Institute at Sydney University.

Naming is a very important action. I was told by a mentor that naming brings an entity into being that didn't exist before. Naming is a central part of the structure of the technology of language and communication. Every society names beings and places in their kineosphere, but naming has become a major colonizing power tool in Australian art. The Western art world has its own often curious naming and language, dividing Aboriginal artists into insiders and outsiders. Aboriginal people carry a series of "names," and colonization adds more.

When Australia became a nation in 1901, Aboriginal people were defined; named by absence, in the constitution they were defined as equivalent to animals and plants, and not human enough to have the right to vote. In 1903, African American intellectual W.E.B. Du Bois, published *The Souls of Black Folk* in the USA, in which he posited that black people held a type of double vision; their own conscious image of themselves and of how the "white state and society" imagined them. It was also a statement that we "black people" had to refuse the outside definitions (names) placed on us.

In the 1939 Hollywood classic; *The Wizard of Oz*, the Wizard of the Emerald City redefines all three

of Dorothy's traveling companions by providing a medal of valor for the Lion (bravery), a testimonial heart-shaped watch for the Tin Man (love-empathy), and a diploma for the Scarecrow, recognizing his intelligence. It's interesting how in recent times many Aboriginal people have scrambled to obtain a Ph.D, and other academic titles in a form of naming — *I will make you intelligent!*

A colleague reminded me that you are more than your name. The spirit part of you isn't necessarily covered by your name. I think Aboriginal people have worked with three naming processes; their own personal and societal self-naming, the naming of Aboriginal art from the Western art world, and their naming of all creatures, forces of nature and the land to create a form of cosmology, of how Aboriginal people fit into the world. Many people have written on these questions (Susan Lowish on the defining of Aboriginal people, John Rudder, and Franca Tamisari on the naming of Aboriginal people in Central Arnhem Land, and the naming of natural species with John Bradley).

In David Collins account of the first years of the British penal colony, he mentioned how his Aboriginal friend-informant had adopted his English name. In the present time, following colonization, we have taken to adopting a European-style of name; Christian name and surname. All Aboriginal people have historically had an Aboriginal language name. In 1815, Governor Macquarie granted local Aboriginal figure Bungaree a grant of land, hoping to convert him to becoming a farmer in the colonial European style. He also gave him a "king plate" (the first in Australia) in a form of naming; I will make you a "king" — King of the Sydney Tribes. "King titles," were given to numerous Aboriginal men (and some Queens) across the Australian continent.

In 2017, an Aboriginal cultural figure told an international cultural workshop of indigenous people from around the world about his problem with Aboriginal site names. Having been informed that Burramatta (Parramatta) in Sydney Harbour was the place of the eel, he was puzzled to find that the names of other sites also meant the place of the eel. I observed that naming was a bit more complex than that. On Milingimbi beach, I learnt of a group of Baramundi sites (the fish called Ratjuk in the Gupapuyngu language). The Milingimbi site is named Rulku; the name of a buoyancy bladder inside the Ratjuk fish — and that across the land. There are other places named for the eye of the fish, the tail of the fish and so on. These names are also given to people and are names of God. The land is a song, is a book, is us.

Before adopting the European style of naming, all Aboriginal people historically had Aboriginal language names. In central Arnhem Land Aboriginal people have up to four names given to them at birth from several personal events and revelations that may have to do with the country of their conception. If someone dies with that name, it is not spoken in everyday conversation for up to four generations. They also have a clan name (Mala) and a language group name (Matha). They have a totem name (Madayin), a skin name (Malk), and a Moiety designation. They may also be given a nickname by their maternal grandmother's family (lefty, etc.).

*I don't have a PhD — I am not a doctor,  
but most of the time, it seems, I'm the nurse.*

Djon Mundine

My name is Djon Mundine and I'm a member of the Bandjalung people from what is now called the northern rivers region of New South Wales. I was born in 1951 in the town of South Grafton on Burrimba (the Clarence River). Unknown to me then, three books were published around that year that talked of the blak [sic] experience of colonization, which later influenced me greatly as an adult. They were: Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1951), Franz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Mask* (1952), and *Go Tell It on the Mountain* by James Baldwin (1953).

I became an art-cultural object and subject of research from the moment of my conception. I could draw well, and my mother always thought I would be an artist, but I had my formal start in the "art profession" after working in an Aboriginal art marketing company, Aboriginal Arts and Crafts Pty Ltd (AAC), in the mid-1970s. The company was head-quartered in The Rocks, Sydney, but with a reach beyond this city, with galleries in Adelaide, Alice Springs, Darwin, Perth, and Cairns.

We know how, to a large degree, any art is received and rewarded, and its question or proposition answered according to the tastes, preconceptions, and prejudices of its receiving society. Although there has been considerable growth in the market for Aboriginal art since 2000, a feeling had developed within Aboriginal society that, despite this success, the art field was a "smoke and mirrors" deception. The very success in the art field camouflaged conservative "white Australian" moves to repeal or reduce the effect of the major political economic advances made by Aboriginal society over the previous generation. AAC purchased Aboriginal art from all over Australia

and I was instructed that there were three criteria for valuing Indigenous art: one was authenticity (historical-race); two was apparent technical skills present (would the bark or canvas remain stable, would the paint stay on the surface, and, did the artist exhibit any technical innovation); only thirdly were the object's aesthetic values examined — did it evoke a visual-emotional response (along Western lines, I supposed). The criteria stood outside the colonial history and politics, and, did not consider the aesthetic values enforced by them. This is a form of naming (defining).

The company was set up by the Australian Whitlam Commonwealth Government, funded by the Australia Council for the Arts, and charged with the huge commission of raising the cultural value and appreciation of Aboriginal artwork in Australian society and across the wider world of art history. It was to counter the practices of carpetbagger art dealers who offered extremely poor prices to poverty-stricken Aboriginal artists and contributed to the belief in the low intelligence of Aboriginal cultural life.

I knew there were Aboriginal artworks in the Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW) but I had never been there. Hardly any Aboriginal people generally made use of the AGNSW in those days. There was no Museum of Contemporary Art then. We, in the company, appeared more engaged with the Australian Museum, partly because of its ethnographic and anthropological collection (exotic-primitive), and, from The Government bureaucracy had to approve any export overseas of artwork purchased from the company. The central criteria, was that artworks for export were contemporary and therefore, not considered of historical cultural significance.

The management of the company were under pressure from the Government to be commercially self-sufficient, and as a result, were continually struggling in this middle world between high-art and primitive antiquities. At one stage, the company attempted to move into the cheaper, mass produced tourist end of the cultural art world to "pad-out" their income and have breathing space to break the, then, "fine art" glass ceiling. I railed against this surrender, no matter how thought out, and with other Aboriginal staff (dancer Michael Leslie and NRL player Johnny Barker) organized a stop-work strike against handling these items. One must remember that things were different then, and unrecognizable to today's general Australian art scene.

While working with the company I had first met contemporary art figure Bernice Murphy, who, I was told, worked with Australian Galleries association, and brought overseas artists and figures to the



company's Collectors Gallery in the Rocks to have their moment with Aboriginal art. Murphy (who would become a close friend and influential mentor) apparently worked across many levels of cultural life, and recognized that Aboriginal art had the many qualities and values of any contemporary art of the time. She had initiated the 'Perspecta' survey exhibition of Australian contemporary art in 1981; designed to appear in the years in between the Biennale of Sydney of international art that began in 1973.

The AAC had an ancestor in post-Second World War Christian missions in Arnhem Land, which had a staff member whose duties (among many others) included fostering the creation and marketing of Indigenous art and craft in the local population, to provide an income that would supplement the "rations" supplied by the church and government. Some in the church also believed in encouraging retention of Aboriginal ceremonial practices and a sense of the spiritual in the belief that those who practiced them would one day see the "true" spiritual in Christ.

When the Whitlam government implemented a policy of Aboriginal "self-determination" in 1972, Aboriginal local councils took over the decision-making (from the church) to meet their social, cultural, and economic needs. Under this policy; the "art missionary" was replaced by a paid position of "Art and Craft Advisor," funded by the Australia Council. After the afore-mentioned clash with management, I left the company and took up the position of Art and Craft Advisor in the former Methodist mission, Milingimbi, in central Arnhem Land in January 1979.

I was told on arrival in the Territory that three personality types came to work on Aboriginal communities; "missionaries," "missfits," and "mad men." And with which title did I describe myself? Under this new system of art-worker, a curious mix of mainly non-church teachers, artists, photographers, and missionaries of various sorts came to play the artworker role.

The art advisor "class of 79" were serious in self-reflection on their role and the challenges posed to them in this historical moment. Not all. Myself included, some had formal training in the field of arts or anthropology or even education. Given the afore-mentioned three valuation points, what were we to foster, introduce, and value in financial terms. Discussions took place among us over whether we just kept people creating traditional "dreaming work," how did we deal with work away from this subject matter and the overall question of whether we set up sheltered workshops and mass-produce at a constant uniform output (and income) or aim for the "high-art" world

(and high prices and intellectual reading)? It was driven home very clearly that the art center in each community was really the only source of money apart from social security, some teachers' salaries, and charity. These, somewhat unfettered, self-generated monies were very important to the community (and remain even more so) in maintaining people's social and historical identity. In the end, against class, race, and language difficulties, the art advising group really sought to give the artists enabling power for self-determination, something of which the artists would determine the form.

When I first went to Milingimbi Island, and Yolngu Aboriginal community in January 1979, a left-wing teacher raised an ethical issue about my role. Was I as the Art & Craft Adviser, by buying and selling paintings, etc., really, just prostituting and trivializing the local, thousands-of-years-old culture, and ultimately destroying it? Embedded in this question was the idea that Yolngu culture was fixed in time and unchanging; and that unlike "pure" white Western artists, Aboriginal people would be contaminated and degraded by receiving money for their work, apparently.

My Bandjalung heritage came from my father; Roy Mundine, who came from Baryugil Aboriginal community, who'd worked as stockmen on the Yulgilbar cattle station (as my father originally did) of the Olgivie colonial squatter family. Many of my father's family then worked in the asbestos mine and mill of the James Hardie Asbestos company, and died from asbestosis related illness. That company has still to accept negligence and pay reparations for deaths from their criminal industrial laxity. Post-Second World War, my father and almost all other Bandjalung community members were almost wholly converted to Pentecostalism, which mixed Bandjalung creation stories and deities with Biblical figures and parables. My father later converted to Catholicism to marry my mother Olive "Dolly" Donovan from Nambucca.

When I started in Milingimbi in 1979, an American evangelist group had just traveled through Arnhem Land and converted many to their new form of Christianity. It was something I didn't expect to see. The issue of dealing with Christian imagery then became a question in whatever preconceived ideas we art advisors had brought to our role. Did we only deal with real-traditional art or would what people were doing in the present prevail? How to deal with innovative—transitional—Christian imagery or with bark paintings with airplanes or Toyota trucks! Mirroring the Australian contemporary art scene in the 1950s/60s/70s, the argument was whether abstract or patterning compositions in paintings were to be more valued than figurative

pictograph compositions. A set of wider judgements also had to be accounted for. Were we to deal in restricted or general sacred objects as other curio collectors had? We were instructed by State Wildlife Departments not to encourage feathered, shell, or animal material that could lead to an extinction of some natural species, however much sought after by Western fashions. We art advisors, all bar myself being non-Aboriginal, discussed our responsibilities to history with the colonial project still really in progress.

A neighboring community art advisor told me that when pine forest plantations were being established in that community in the 1970s, the non-Aboriginal workers frequently, in colonial fashion, would name roads, river crossings, creeks, and bridges after themselves or their fellow workers; Jacks Creek, Bills Road, etc. The art advisor and other non-Aboriginal people would just as quickly pull out the signs and throw them away.

Self-taught, Yorta Yorta artist, Lin Onus (1948–96), who was Chair of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Board of the Australia Council, visited Maningrida during the 1980s and formed a strong relationship with painter Jack Wununwun (1930–90). They influenced each other's work. In 1988, Onus's resultant *Jimmy's Billabong*, was a formal Western waterhole landscape painting, but viewed through a transparent cross-hatching veil. Further, the photorealist lagoon image (now in the NGA collection) is named after a local land-owning Aboriginal artist Lin met.

In the lingua franca Gupapuyngu language classes given to expatriate workers on Milingimbi in the early 1980s, the first sentences to learn were the “hello, how are you” equivalents in the title of the paper: *who are you, what is your name, how are you*.

I repeat here a trope I've written in different contexts over the years concerning the story of Aboriginal art as a type of Robin Crusoe story where a white Western European male is ship-wrecked on an island in the South Pacific. Dante's purgatory perhaps? He believes that this island is uninhabited (*terra nullius*), physically, intellectually, and spiritually. In this self-constructed empty space, he becomes lonely and yearns for human interaction. Then one day he sees a mark, a sign (?), of another human—a footprint, that tells him he is not alone. In the Australian context, I see that mark-sign as Aboriginal art. When Crusoe meets the “other” face to face; instead of introducing himself; *I am Crusoe*, *what's your name*, he declares; *I will name you (Friday)!*

This racist attitude, the conundrum of negatively naming-defining Aboriginal art has been central to a white Australian national conscious where Aboriginal people are not seen as intelligent adult human beings. This consciousness underlies the colonial crime of

breaking the generational bonds of Aboriginal society (societal-cultural), and attempted physical annihilation of our people. Resolving this naming question, is a matter of empowerment. I'm told the Metis of Canada say they are different to other Native Americans in that they believe that they define themselves. It may be that they define themselves as being mixed race Native American-French rather than Native American-English, which is a definite social marker in Canada. I have heard other Australian Aboriginal artists claim that they refuse to be defined by “white Australia,” and that they name themselves—possibly.

The art of Aboriginal people was still perceived as exotic, if not primitive, in the 1970s and was hardly explained in Western terms and values, structures, compositions, let alone ideas of conceptual or abstract thinking.

Financial and social-intellectual-emotional values tended to remain low. Exhibitions of Aboriginal art in the 1970s were generally constructed from the latest monthly or yearly “harvesting” of work brought into that exhibiting Church mission community center in the central deserts or north of Australia. There were some star artists with a recognized name, but how they became so was undetermined, except for those Aboriginal artists who had a non-Aboriginal patron (academic, social-liberal, Church missionary, anthropologist).

Having, myself, as an Aboriginal person, suffered from a lifetime of being seen (named) as, unintelligent, lazy, inarticulate, if not dirty, unclean, stinking, and other insults, I strove to find ways to prove and exhibit the opposite—the intelligence that allowed Aboriginal society to survive and thrive economically, socially, and intellectually for over 50,000 years. If I was to play the role of a trans-cultural medium (a form of higher learning), I wanted to curate exhibitions of ideas with Aboriginal stories, ideas, concepts, and beliefs. Aboriginal people from the community I was working in, who were artists, were on the National Aboriginal Council and had met other Aboriginal people from the south-east before. Some had in fact traveled in an Aboriginal delegation to China with activists Charles “Chicka” Dixon and Gary Foley, and knew members of my family, so, I wasn't seen as “Balanda” (European) but something else.

In early 1980, I had planned to construct a major exhibit utilizing an array of art works, utensils, and artefacts illustrating the six seasons; Season Cycle of the Yolngu (Baramirri, Mayaltha, Midawarr, Dharratharramirri, Rarranhdharr, Dhuludur), different from the four European season cycle colonial Australia still lived under (summer, fall, winter, spring) and more



nuanced than the basic “Wet and Dry” of most non-Aboriginal territories. This approach would involve a broad cross-section of the community creators, across age and genders, painters and non-painters, weavers, weapon specialists, and tool makers.

In the process of attempting to get this project under way, I had already started to record and mark on every bark painting, the Yolngu name for every animal, bird, fish, plant, etc., and then its English and Latin equivalent. Many other researchers had collected lists of names — I was hardly the first or most correct, but I did apply this to art imagery. It was stunning how much natural science information local Aboriginal people could keep in their heads. My fellow Yolngu art workers (Alfred Gungapun, Leslie Wilson Wulurk, and Charlie Djota) were keen to point out the beings in the environment and happy that I was interested. Galiwinku art advisor on Elcho Island, Jeremy Thorne, gave me *An Introduction to Yolngu Science*, a natural science teaching text compiled by Dr. John Rudder, with Yolngu teachers at the Galiwinku community school of Elcho Island. This book was invaluable to me, and confirmed my approach. All researchers-academics of this region had compiled lists of natural species, foods, and totem-language structures (Donald Thomson-1930s, Nicholas Peterson-1960s, Ian Keen-1970s, John Rudder-1970s, who I referred to most, and Franca Tamasari-1990s). Seeking this information also confirmed that maybe the project I was working on would morph into an introduction into Yolngu taxonomy, ending as the exhibition *The Native Born, Objects and Representations from Ramingining*.

In the final year at Milingimbi, I curated a major exhibition from that art population, *The Land, the Sea, and Our Culture*, shown in 1981 at The Anthropology Museum, directed by Dr. Peter Lauer, at the University of Queensland. I had attended many rituals and ceremonies by then, and saw art in a new context, in the naming in Yolngu language and an extended, three-dimensional view of what was an *object d’arte*. In discussions with curator Dr. Lindy Allan, the installation included string apparel, jewelry, woven bags, weapons, and utensils that, as much as possible, matched the appearance in the stories in the paintings. The exhibition was important for two other reasons; it was opened with a speech by my Milingimbi co-art-worker Tony Buwa’nanu, in his Djambarrpuyngu language, simultaneously interpreted into English by linguist Michael Christie. Further, the speech and a walk-through of the exhibition by Tony was videotaped (also in Djambarrpuyngu) and taken back for Milingimbi to witness.

Ramangining (the correct spelling from the Raman for

the white fur on the chest of the kangaroo and the white buds of the native cotton tree) was planned and began as a town because the settlement at Milingimbi had serious water supply problems at the end of the seventies. It was intended to shift the population to the more reliable water supply on the mainland. I had moved to Ramingining in 1983, and maintained contact with Bernice Murphy who invited me to curate two entries in the 1983 3rd Perspecta exhibition. One was a set of bark paintings from artist David Malangi (1927–99) laying out a series of sacred sites on his clan lands on both sides of the mouth of the nearby Glyde River. Bernice Murphy visited Ramingining before the opening of the 1983 Perspecta exhibition, and, visited the subject of these paintings; the Glyde River mouth. This set of works is now in the collection of the Art Gallery of NSW. The other series was another array of paintings, illustrating honey spirit stories from both moieties, and pandanus honey collecting bags, tools, and utensils, used in collecting honey. This group of objects are in the collection of the Australian Museum in Sydney. A third artwork was a set of visual and audio images of the Yathalamarra waterhole (Malangi’s mother’s land — the place of the evening star) community Malangi lived on, collected by his son Jimmy Barnabul (1959–94) and later shown at the Art Collection Karl Heinz Esl in Vienna.

The previous 1981 exhibition of Milingimbi artwork and these 1983 sets of objects acted as a trial run to put together a more comprehensive set of art objects including a full-sized dug-out canoe. It included string sculptures and other beautiful art objects. One day Rosie Rodji spun and rolled a length of “wheat yellow” handmade rope. Another day weaver Nelly Ngarra’thun unwrapped a set of red-ochred, straight sticks/rods bound up, like a small, Roman fasces, without the axe. These sticks had another power, they were fire sticks, but held a visual power all their own.

Bernice Murphy in fact purchased a painting of Garrtjambal the kangaroo — the creative spirit who shaped the land of the region — on her 1983 visit. She donated the painting by Ganalbingu artist Dorothy Djukulul to be included in the Power Institute collection that became the Native Born.

By 1984, it could be said, “post-colonialism” had arrived in the world, including Australia. Edward Said had published his 1978 study *Orientalism*. The academic Homi Bhabha had published *Representation and the colonial text: a Critical exploration of some forms of mimeticism*, on how the colonized “name” themselves through their forms of literature. The Power Institute of Contemporary Art is itself a

form of “naming-defining” in that it was set up in 1969 to bring “the art of the world” (the center) to Australia (the periphery). In 1983–84, Bernice Murphy and Leon Paroissien were appointed as co-directors of the Power Institute of Contemporary Art and set about changing this. They recognized that Australia was in “the world” and that Australian art movements and art would be in any contemporary art discourse and be acquired, including Aboriginal art.

Art from “other” societies was “hot” at that time. In the same month that the Raminingining exhibition opened at the Power Institute the important *Primitivism in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* opened at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Also in New York at that time was the *Te Maori* exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum.

In the same month, the exhibition *Koori art 84*, opened in Sydney’s Artspace Gallery, introducing the term “urban Aboriginal art” to Australia. Seven members of the Boomalli Aboriginal Art Kollektive that formed in 1987 were in the Koori art 84 exhibition (Euphemia Bostock, Fiona Foley, Fernanda Martins, Raymond J. Meeks, Averil Quail, Michael Riley, Jeffrey Samuels).

Following the success of the Aboriginal Memorial installation in 1988 and a commission from the Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection the next year, I stopped calling myself an art & craft advisor and became an Art Advisor, collapsing all Aboriginal cultural practice into “art.” In 1989, Raminingining Council President and land-owner; George Bambuma, chaired a community meeting that agreed that the name of a separate arts entity would be Bula’bula Arts. Bula'bula, the tongue, the language, the song of the kangaroo that journeyed through all the clan lands of the region bonding them together.

Two films were made about the 1988 Aboriginal Memorial: *The Aboriginal Memorial* directed by myself and “shot” by Michael Glasheen (still in post-production), and *Here Is My Hand: A testimony to an Aboriginal Memorial*, directed by Michael Edols, broadcast on SBS in 1988.

In 1984, I had a meeting with James Mollison at the still new Australian National Gallery (established in 1982). He explained that he planned to exhibit Aboriginal art alongside historical and contemporary non-Aboriginal Australian art, as equal to and not as separate from Australian art. In the latter film, Mollison was interviewed and gave the following amazing statement on the new commissioned and acquired Aboriginal Memorial and Aboriginal art in the history of the NGA and the nation;

The Aboriginal art achievement is the great art

achievement in Australia to date. Ever since European settlement of the continent, we have seen many styles develop, and many fine artists emerge, but the total white achievement doesn’t really equal the black achievement, in my mind ... the values; spiritual; moral; that Aboriginal art represents, are values that really aren’t touched upon by most other artists in this country. ...This Memorial, I believe, is the single, most important Aboriginal work, apart from the great series of paintings on the rock faces throughout Australia.

James Mollison, Director Australian National Gallery, *Here Is My Hand*, 1988

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#### *Off Site Visits in Los Angeles*

- PST ART: Art and Science Collide
- The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA
- HAMMER Museum at UCLA
- The Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA)
- Getty Center
- REDCAT
- The Broad
- The Brick
- Institute of Contemporary Art
- Vincent Price Art Museum (VPAM)
- The Eames House
- The MAK Center for Art and Architecture at the Schindler House
- Hollyhock House & Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery
- Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA)
- Art + Practice
- David Horvitz' 7<sup>th</sup> Ave Garden
- Crenshaw Dairy Mart Art Center

- California African American Museum (CAAM)
- Autry Museum of the American West
- Jet Propulsion Laboratory and Brand Library & Art Center
- Museum of Latin American Art (MOLAA)
- El Pueblo Historical Monument

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#### *List of Artists' Studios visited on Monday, December 9 2024*

- Rodney McMillian
- Charles Gaines
- Joey Terrill
- Elliott Hundley
- Paul McCarthy
- Andrea Bowers
- Tala Madani
- Nathaniel Mellors
- Kelly Akashi
- Christina Quarles
- Todd Gray
- Kyungmi Shin
- Rosha Yaghmai
- Analia Saban
- Lita Albuquerque
- Judith F. Baca
- Alison Saar



