

Testimonials

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First of all, I love “witness.” But first, thank you, Susan, and the Resnick (and Pat) Passlof Foundation for being such a great house during these three days, and for giving CPAL such a wonderful home. Thank you, Joy, for this conference, and for your years of leadership and supporting artists. For your tenacity, your stubbornness, and for all you've done to advance thinking about this greatly needed concept, this multi-artist's legacy complex. This concept is extraordinarily time-sensitive, essential to artists' needs, and critical to our thinking of our country's arts and cultural heritage. I apologize if I'm going to repeat some themes, some thoughts that you've heard throughout the conference, but I think they're important. I also apologize beforehand, if I'm not as upbeat as I should be for the end of such a great gathering. I don't do well-crafted “TED” Talks. Rather, I'm at this stage in my life, when all my remarks should be labeled “Ted foams at the mouth.” I no longer have an institutional base I have to protect. So what if I'm called an old coot. I feel free enough to express my opinions, and often mad enough to say what I suspect many other people are thinking. I know I can only try to get things started. I don't have enough time left to watch new initiatives develop. So forgive me if I sound impatient. I'm only able to plant some ideas. And if they make any sense, people like Joy, people like you will help them grow.

Let's face it, it's time to really do something very different about preserving artists' legacies. What exists now is simply inadequate. Present legacy options just don't include enough artists who've made the invaluable work during past decades are making it now and will in the future. The argument of this legacy system works for a few. It seems more of a “pay to play” system. If an artist has enough financial resources, she/he can create a lasting legacy. We need to address the challenges now of establishing a more equitable, comprehensive, affordable, and inclusive system intentionally more responsive to the diversity and breadth of the work of many more artists in this country. We need artists to do their part, we need to find ways of helping them better organize and archive their work as part of their regular practice. We need a way of incentivizing new programs like CPAL and existing programs to collaborate in building a better infrastructure for the legacy needs of American artists.

We don't have to start from scratch. This gathering alone provides numerous ideas, prototypes, and people that could be linked to developing a better legacy system. But if we don't do something soon about this, I believe a whole generation of extraordinary artists, their works, and their lives will soon be forgotten, let alone the generations of artists who will follow. This is simply unacceptable and unforgivable. This is my 50th year in the not-for-profit arts and cultural sector. It's supposed to be my jubilee year. But if you know me, I'm not exactly jubilant about the state of how we're supporting the core of this sector, its lifeblood - artists and other cultural workers. As the Executive Director Emeritus of the New York Foundation for the Arts, I was privileged to be part of NYFA for nearly 35 years, helping to shape it from a two-person operation to the presence it's become. In 1973, as Joy said, I was a pilot project for the NEA and NYSCA, the first artists in schools coordinator for a state after me any state could get one of them. I came into the field when a lot of new organizations, new systems, programs, and policies were being born, many now taken for granted.

I entered this field in the early 70s, when the spirit of the '60s still existed, when fights for civil rights and gender and LGBTQIA+ equality started to be waged, and when commitment to change, and the spirit of possibility shaped the arts community. Public funding for the arts was increasing based on a commitment that access to the arts should be available for all. New creative voices were being recognized for the first time, especially those of women and people of color. It was a time when we believed that with a nickel and a dime, we could change the world. Maybe that was naive. But we thought a new generation of artists and cultural workers would create a more inclusive arts and cultural history to truly reflect our world and times. We wanted to reshape and redefine who's included in America's story. My generation of cultural workers tried to make a difference. I'm proud of many of its accomplishments. And even with some of our failures, collectively, we imagined what was then needed to grow the arts throughout the country to make a new organizational infrastructure for the arts. That wasn't there before. But for all that growth, I know we didn't do enough to ensure that there would be a stronger responsive system to support the creative and human needs of individual artists. That's the work that's ahead for us.

Now, I fear that the very infrastructure I was part of shaping is starting to fray. Funding isn't keeping pace with growth and demands. Many programs, systems, and policies are just not

functioning well. Some are ossified and are terribly broken, unable to respond to the ever-complex needs of a dramatically changing field with many more diverse organizations, and increased societal demands, let alone the never-ending needs of individual artists. Crisis only exacerbates existing fault lines, in our personal lives, or in the systems we hope are backing us up. During these pandemic years, I worked with many colleagues throughout the country, trying to respond to the emergencies in our sector. I'm only too aware of the inadequacies of our present support system for the arts in general, and for cultural workers in particular. If new ways are needed to respond to the artists' pervasive economic fragility, in the face of life's constant demands, how can we even expect people to afford to think about legacy matters?

I'm as much to blame as anyone for not thinking enough about legacy matters. At NYFA, I was so busy dealing with artists' everyday needs, that I hardly thought about their legacies, or the system or lack thereof, for how artists and their work might be remembered. Even though I do recall, during the AIDS crisis, before visual aids existed, or the Murray Walsh Sharpe Foundation published its legacy conversations, I worked with colleagues and lawyers to develop templates of wills for artists and their loved ones to help when many blood families didn't care. But when I joined the board of the Joan Mitchell Foundation, I really came to understand the complexities of the artist's legacy landscape. From the perspective of an individual artist, from my better understanding of the many responsibilities of an artist Foundation, and from my own awareness that the majority of working artists will never have the resources to develop their own foundation. Through Grantmakers in the Arts, I also learned about community foundations – cluster management from multiple donors. And then I learned about the founders of the Artist Legacy Foundation in California and discovered the archives of the Western Reserve.

I became intrigued by how a single organization might serve multiple artists' legacies, and how the economies of scale could serve a greater good. This terrible pandemic made all of us aware of our own vulnerabilities. COVID's impact on our sector has been devastating. Too many cultural workers and individual artists in particular, sadly, have passed away. And the generation of artists who gained recognition in the '60s, '70s, '80s, and '90s are passing, everyone is more fragile, more aware of time passing, wondering who will remember we've even been around. Some of us are fortunate to have family and friends. Some might even end up as a footnote in someone's dissertation. But as I've grown older in this work, I'm well aware of how people are

quickly forgotten, remembered only by a few. Crises, AIDS, COVID, and the increasingly devastating natural and human-made disasters we're all constantly facing, have made us realize how quickly any one of us and our work can disappear and vanish. As we've all had to face our mortality, I suspect many of us have thought more than ever about how we want to be remembered.

Yesterday, Maren Hassinger's words really resonated with me. "I'd like to think I didn't devote my life to things that didn't count." But artists do count. But do they count when it comes to the issue of legacy? For most artists, the subject of life gets legacy and the present options only provoke overwhelming anxiety, anger, discouragement, and exhaustion. Legacy raises difficult questions, who wants to stop making new work to figure out what to do with my past stuff. After so many years of struggle, who's going to give a damn about me in the future when few have cared about me in my work in the present? What family or friends even understand enough about my work to manage my estate? Who will take on the burden? What do I need to do to prepare for the inevitable? What legacy models exist that work for me? What do I really want? For those of us trying to support artists' needs and understand the landscape of artists' legacy options? I sense similar anxiety. Sure, as Christine Vincent has said, if you've been able to support yourself through your artwork in your lifetime, you may be able to establish your own foundation. Or if there's room, maybe one day you'll be accepted into the Archives of American Art. Or if you do meet the criteria of some national, regional, or local initiative, you might be selected for an existing Archival Program. Maybe if you're fortunate, if you donate work to a cultural institution, or you have a family of friends or colleagues who care, your work might just get exhibited once in a while.

The majority of artists, too many who have been underrecognized far too long, know that what exists doesn't work. There is not yet any affordable project or organized system in place dedicated to preserving the work and lives of artists when they're gone. Just as artists are upset, for administrators like me who came into this field during the early years, and worked hard to help it grow, this is heartbreaking. This is a generational crisis, as we said earlier. Indeed, this is a crisis for the entire arts and cultural industry. Think of the number of artists who now think of the number of people who now identify as artists whose careers we've tried to help and who have changed our sense of American culture. Think of the number of artists whose

voice has been nurtured by the growth of the many diverse artists-centered incubators and community cultural centers, and curators all over the country.

Far too often, this generation of artists receives far too little attention from what is too often a sexist, and racist marketplace. They've been similarly ignored by our mainstream cultural institutions. Tastes do change so quickly, most never had the chance to be on the radar screen for the general public. Yet we all know they are artists whose work has lasting significance and relevance, at either the local, regional, or national level. The challenge is how we respond, especially since the sheer number of artists has grown so dramatically. Maybe every artist can't be or shouldn't be included. But how do we establish criteria for participation? How can we respond quickly, since so many are now aging, or have already passed? A generation of work is at risk and may soon disappear.

This is why the vision of CPAL is so timely and so critical to artists and to our cultural ecosystem. The concept of a multi-artist complex dedicated to housing the legacies of multiple under-known artists needs to become real now. We need the reality of this center to demonstrate its value as a model to the field. So other multi-artist complexes might be established in many other locations. We need CPAL to train the next generation of students interested in legacy matters, and help many other organizations learn from its experience. We need this complex to show a generation of artists that their work really does matter and does make a difference to our lives and the cultural history of our cities, our regions, and our nation. Imagine a regional national network of multi-artist legacy complexes in different communities linked to the first CPAL complex, all celebrating artists in their community, capturing their stories and history, all dedicated to remembering the artistic accomplishments of our nation. Whether resources with a more inclusive repository of our country's story could be developed.

Our history is our strength. When we know the efforts of all those who struggled before us. It helps us get through the present and imagine where we might be in the future. As I said earlier, this is my jubilee year so I've been doing a lot of thinking about what was, what is, and what could be. I now see CPAL as a good idea. But I know it's now going to take more than a nickel and a dime than it took when I was getting started. We need advocacy and significant funding for this demonstration model to prove the validity of the concept to find answers and solutions to

our legacy needs. At the opening of this conference, Phong told us Vermeer was unknown for 211 years, and Hilma Af Klint has just been rediscovered. Van Gogh sold only one painting during his lifetime, the rest of his more than 900 paintings were not sold or made famous until after his death. If an artist has a relative or a friend like Vincent's brother, Theo, maybe the art will be kept and not end up in a trash heap. Yes, the marketplace until only recently has generally ignored far too many underknown artists doing important work. Yes, there is a great lag in the public's broader understanding of the work of far too many artists during their lifetime. But we can change this. We have the will and we can work together to demonstrate the overwhelming strength of our collective power. The growth and diversity of the artist population demands new ideas about legacy matters, not solely dependent on an individual's worth, and personal connections.

This is a moment just like when I started in this field, when we need to imagine new possibilities. Much like the way artists envision and create new work every time they go into the studio. If we want a more comprehensive system for maintaining artist legacies, let's create it. As Dan mentioned earlier, legacy is linked with living. We need each other to change the narrative that most artists may be destined for obscurity. CPAL's multi-artist complex is an important catalyst in changing the historic and present pattern for dealing with artists' legacies and for setting in motion, our broader thinking about preserving artists' legacies. Besides CPAL, what other existing legacy initiatives could be expanded upon? How can different kinds of organizations that communities, arts, and non-arts, help preserve the legacies of the artists they value? How will we collectively and responsibly preserve the legacy of many more artists and shape the true cultural history of our country? Admittedly, such a broader system needs more subsidy. But I believe a major investment, a public-private partnership is possible if we really care about building the necessary infrastructure and shared economy to strengthen our country's diverse cultural heritage. This work won't happen overnight. But when we can all imagine what's possible, we can collectively set in motion new ways for the next generation to help many more artists be remembered for generations to come. The question is, as Monika highlights, do we value artists beyond the monetary value of their work?

I came into this field 50 years ago, when the commitment to access and change and the spirit of possibility shaped the field. Maybe I've learned a thing or two. Now I better understand how

difficult it is to start and sustain new initiatives such as CPAL. But more than ever, I believe that new possibilities still can happen if we really want them to. The Joan Mitchell Foundation's CALL workbook talks about the importance of cultural executors. Kenta said today artists need to look to their communities. In this sense, we must all look to ourselves individually and collectively and accept the responsibility to become cultural executors and stewards of our country's artistic and cultural legacy. If we really care about artists, and what they mean to this world, we must join together as a community to become the chosen family, the cultural executives, so many artists need and deserve to preserve this legacy. Artists count this generational crisis, this industry crisis, as an emergency. Let's roll up our sleeves, we've got a hell of a lot of work to do.