

FUTURE PROOFING YOUR ART:

DIGITAL PRESERVATION
FOR EMERGING ARTISTS

NOAH HERNANDEZ JULIA STODDARD

MARCH 12, 2025

WHO WE ARE



JULIA STODDARD

Digital archivist, former art student, and test subject in how not to manage a personal art archive.



NOAH HERNANDEZ

Early career library worker interested in information accessibility. Let's support each other! Patron of the arts.

PURPOSE

1

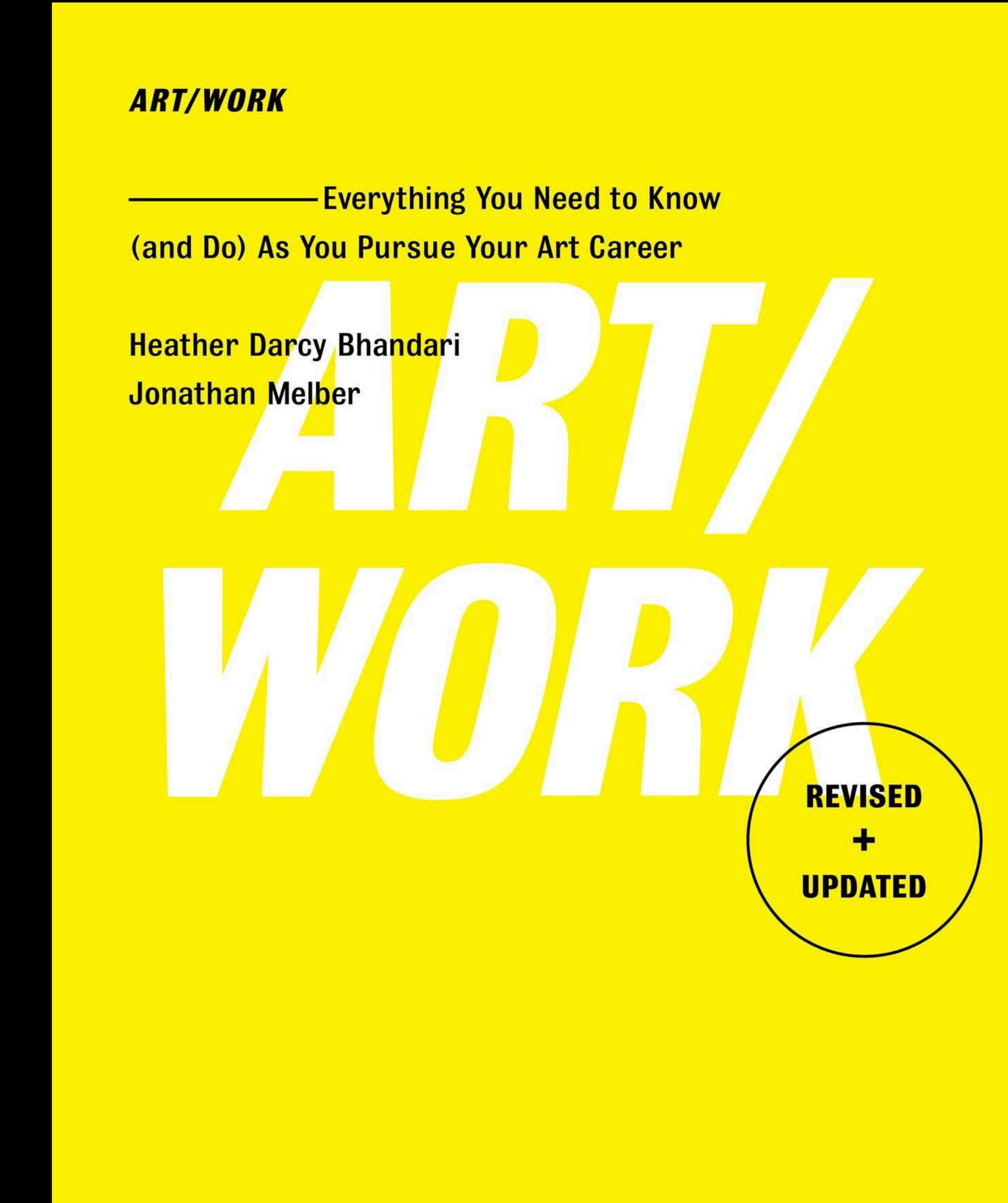
Help you understand why digital preservation matters, regardless of your medium.

2

Introduce key preservation models and best practices to develop good digital habits early.

3

Provide simple actionable steps you can start using today!



METHODS

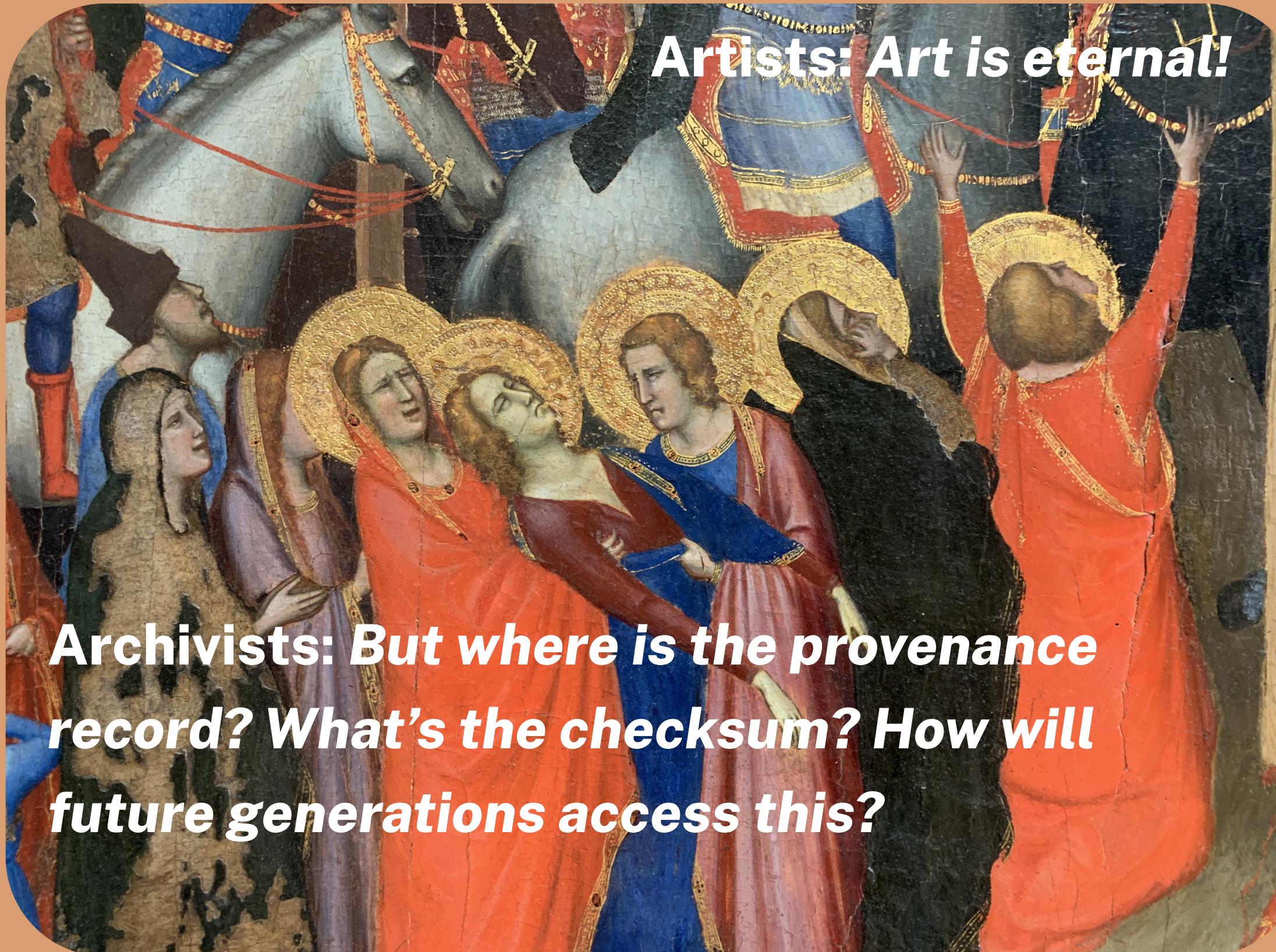
We conducted interviews with artists and art educators across various media, including painting, film photography, and digital collage

+

We developed a survey for UCLA Design Media Arts undergraduates to better understand their perspectives on preserving their artwork

↓

Our discussions with early career artists confirmed that they **receive little to no formal training on how to preserve their artwork in digital form.**



Jean Cocteau was asked what he would save if his art collection caught fire and he could rescue only one thing. “The fire,” Cocteau answered.

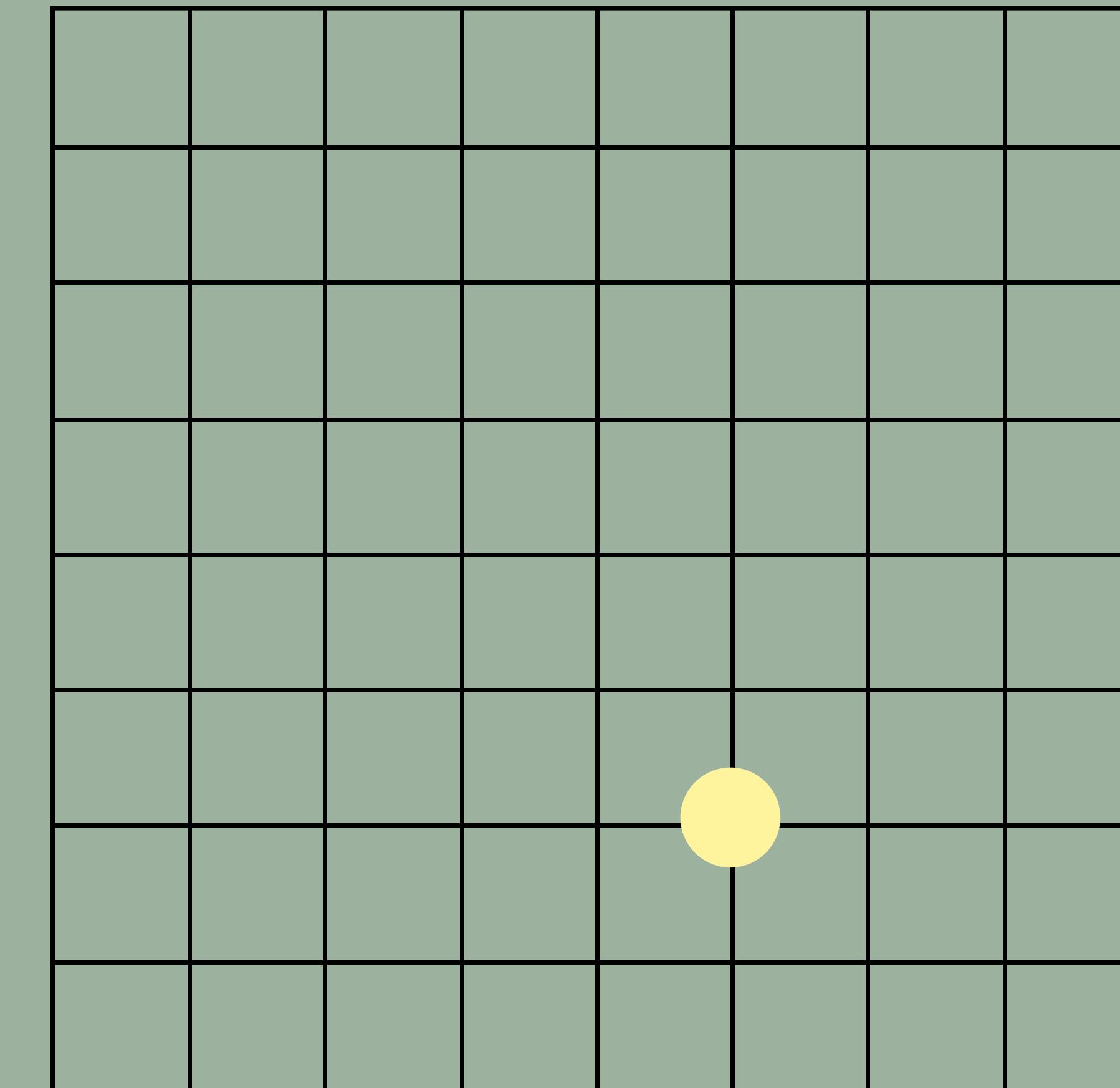
DO DIFFERENT TYPES OF ARTISTS REQUIRE DIFFERENT PRESERVATION STRATEGIES?

MATERIAL
Traditional,
Autonomous

IMMATERIAL
Digital,
Relational

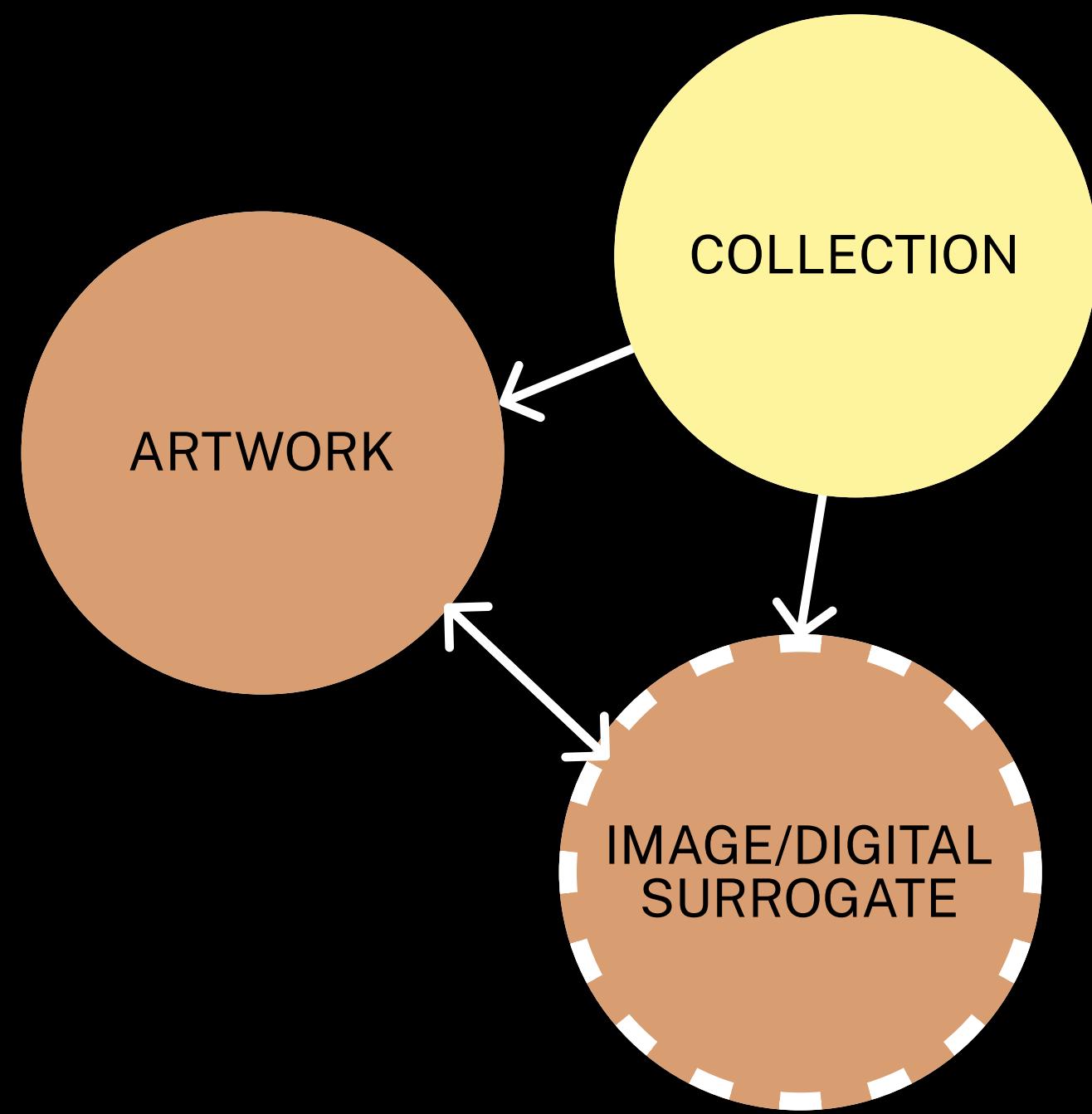
FORMAL

CONCEPTUAL



TRADITIONAL

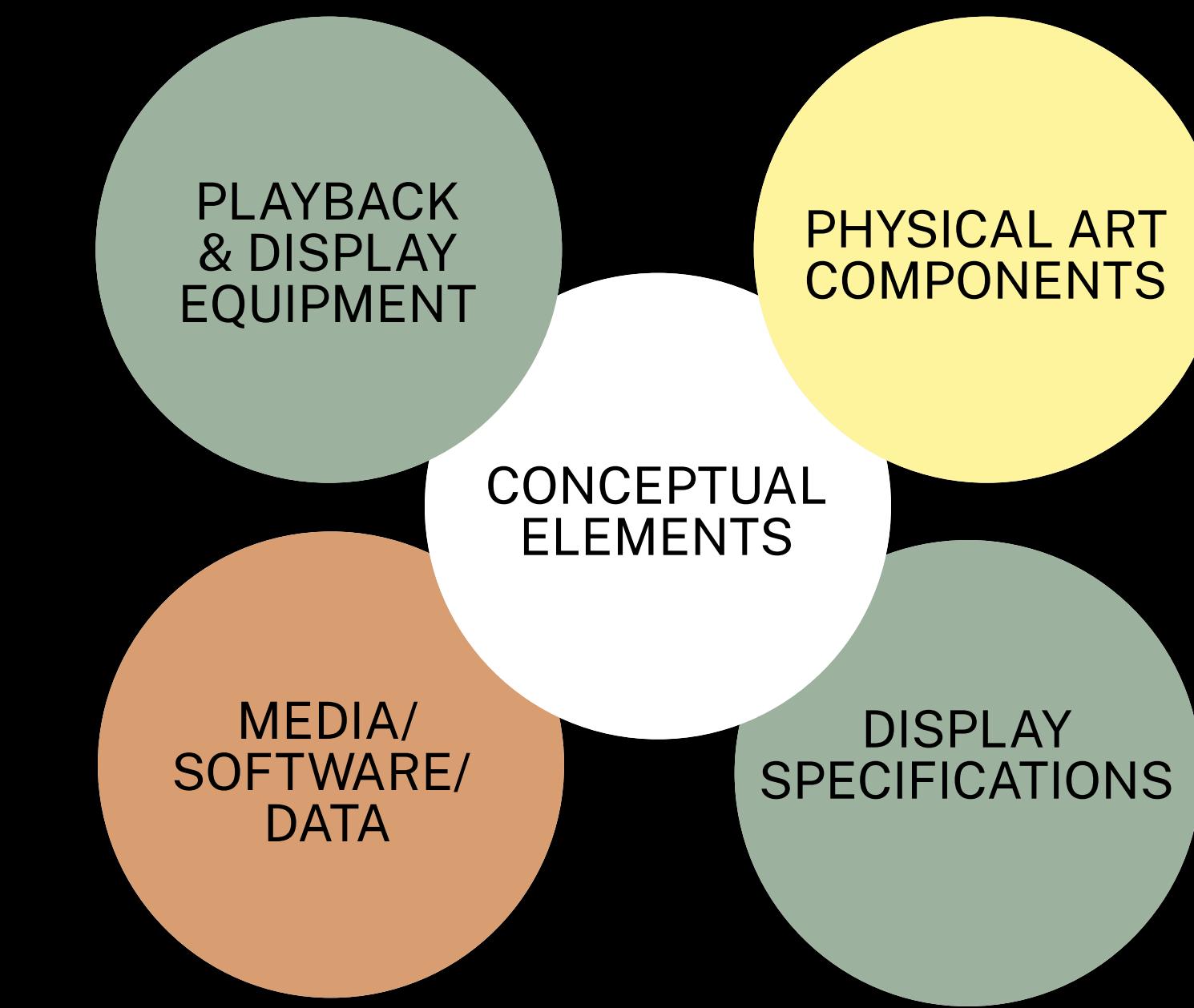
“Autonomous”



Model of traditional art elements
which require description and
preservation

DIGITAL

“Relational”



Model of digital art elements that
require description and
preservation

WHOSE PORTFOLIO LOOKS SOMETHING LIKE THIS?



No matter your medium, in the 21st century, **your art has a digital footprint!**
Developing good digital preservation habits early ensures your work survives long-term and helps you professionalize and share your work!

WHAT COULD POSSIBLY GO WRONG?

HAVE YOU EVER:

- had a hard-drive become corrupted or damaged, rendering your files inaccessible?
- accidentally deleted a digital file or documentation of your work?
- lost art or a hard-drive while moving or in a natural disaster?
- lost access to cloud storage or a website where your work was once hosted?
- used software that's now outdated or inaccessible?



LOST ALL MY ART!!!!?

The app wouldn't draw, after an hour of frustration and trying to fix it, I thought it would just be easiest to just delete the app then redownload it. After redownloading it, all my art was gone! I was so frustrated that I completely forgot about my artwork. I had a really important project on there for school, and I don't have time to re do the art work. I did not back up the photos or anything like that, I was wondering if there is any other way to get my art work back. My iPad is iOS 12.1.4, the version of Procreate I have is 4.2.5

When you delete an app, it deletes its content, unless the content is stored in a cloud.

I just lost every art piece I did from the past five years... what can I do to cope?

I seriously feel like I'm about to throw up. I don't remember everything that I drew, and I consider my art to hold precious memories. I don't know how to let this go.

Has anyone else had to deal with this? Any advice?

Archived post. New comments cannot be posted and votes cannot be cast.

“I use my website as my archive.”

As for my website, I use my website as my archive. I have all my work on there, and it's easy to access and share. I also have a backup of my website on my local drive, so if anything happens to my website, I can always restore it.

404 — File not found.

[Homepage](#)



vtdigger 

News in pursuit of truth

Reading Day Jobs Government & Politics Economy Environment Education Health Public Safety Life

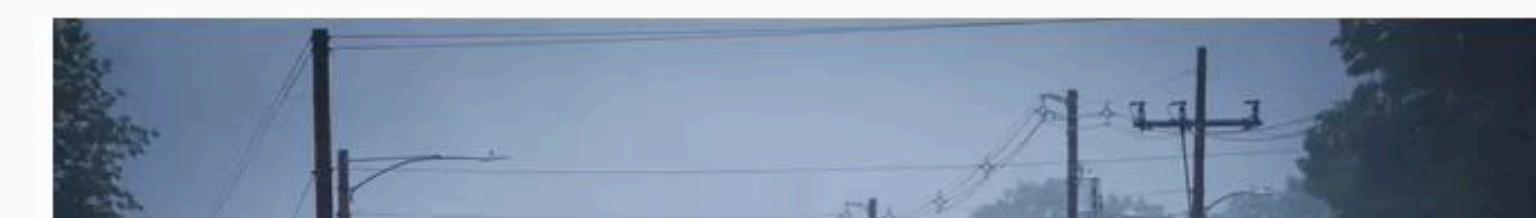
ENVIRONMENT

Vermont's flooding this week is historic. What role did climate change play?

The deluge "is an absolutely classic climate change event," said Bill McKibben, an activist and environmental studies professor at Middlebury College.

By Peter D'Auria
July 12, 2023, 6:35 pm

[f](#) [X](#) [✉](#) [in](#) [💬](#)



The New York Times

Flooding Debris Flow: What to Know Photos Electrical Equipment Irregularities Substa

Los Angeles Artists Mourn as Their Studios and Artworks Go Up in Smoke

Artists who lived and worked in Altadena and the Pacific Palisades are worrying about irreplaceable losses, and their livelihoods.

 Share full article  



Why Did It Take a Fire for the World to Learn of Altadena's Black Arts Legacy?

As Frieze Los Angeles shines a spotlight on art in the city, one community, long facing institutional apathy, calls for marking its memories in the public mind.

The New York Times

SMART NEWS

Music History and Contemporary Art Destroyed in the Deadly Los Angeles Wildfires

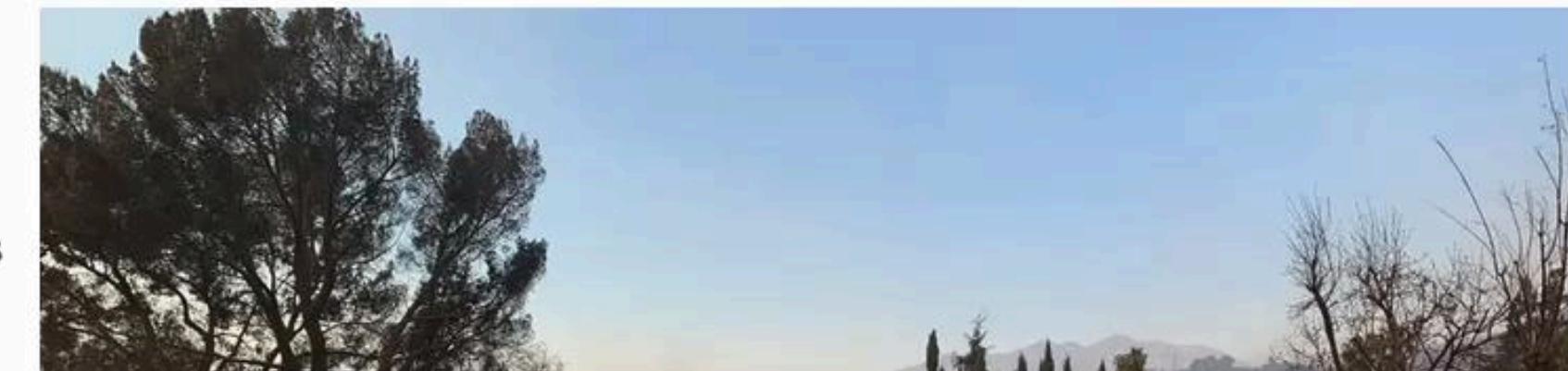
An archive of scores by composer Arnold Schoenberg and the collections of countless contemporary artists have been lost in the blaze



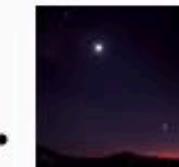
Sonja Anderson

Daily Correspondent

January 14, 2025



MOST POPULAR



Seven Planets Gather in the Sky This Week. Here's What

Lubell, Sam. "Why Did It Take a Fire for the World to Learn of Altadena's Black Arts Legacy?" *The New York Times*, 20 Feb. 2025, updated 25 Feb. 2025, www.nytimes.com/2025/02/20/arts/design/altadena-wildfires-artist-preservation-history.html.

Pogrebin, Robin, Julia Halperin, and Zachary Small. "Los Angeles Artists Mourn as Their Studios and Artworks Go Up in Smoke." *The New York Times*, 10 Jan. 2025, www.nytimes.com/2025/01/10/arts/design/los-angeles-artists-fire-destroyed.html.

Anderson, Sonja. "Music History and Contemporary Art Destroyed in the Deadly Los Angeles Wildfires." *Smithsonian Magazine*, 14 Jan. 2025, www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/music-history-and-contemporary-art-destroyed-in-the-deadly-lost-angeles-wildfires-180985829/.

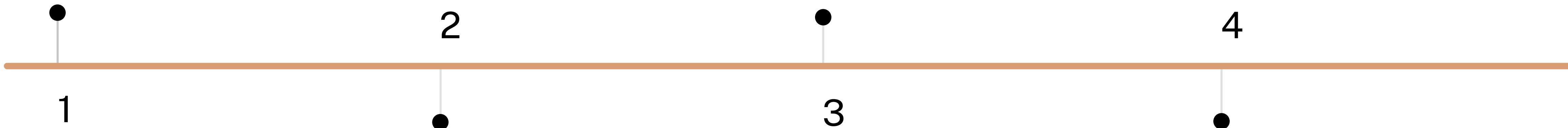
AGENDA

OVERVIEW

Introduce key digital preservation models institutions use to steward digital art and digital surrogates of tangible art

TEMPLATES

We collected and drafted some data organization templates specifically geared for artists



STRATEGIES

Scope the core principles of those models to four specific, actionable preservation strategies for artists

RESOURCES

We share additional resources to help you start building your digital preservation plan!

QUIZZES?

MINI TESTS AT THE END! TRY
YOUR BEST AND SEE IF YOU
CAN ANSWER THE QUESTIONS!



0

TERMS & MODELS

PRESERVATION TERMS TRANSLATED TO ARTIST TERMS

A digital copy of an artifact made to preserve it and allow easy sharing without risking damage to the original.

DIGITAL SURROGATE



DOCUMENTATION

Artists often refer to digital photos of their work or video of performance, for instance, as “documentation”.

Access files are digital copies meant for sharing and viewing, while master files are high-quality, unaltered copies kept safe for long-term preservation.

ACCESS VS MASTER



FILE SPECS & COPIES (?)

Artists often don't associate different file sizes or formats with different end use.

Information about how a thing was created, who created it, when it was made, and any actions taken to keep it safe and accessible over time.

METADATA



DESCRIPTIONS

Artists would often think of metadata as descriptive text, such as title, dimensions, year, medium, etc.

PRESERVATION MODELS TRANSLATED FOR ARTISTS

NDSA LEVELS OF DIGITAL PRESERVATION MATRIX

Establishes levels of redundancy and access for digital content, providing guidelines on how to maintain copies and ensure accessibility over time.



COPIES

Maintain backup copies and ensure artwork is accessible over time.

DCC CURATION LIFECYCLE MODEL

Provides a long-term active management framework for curating digital content through its entire lifecycle, from creation and ingestion to access, preservation, and disposal.



CURATION

Managing artwork from creation to long-term preservation, with an eye toward curation.

OAIS MODEL

Establishes a structured framework for managing digital archives, focusing on metadata, ingestion, and access to ensure that digital objects are preserved and accessible long-term.



ORGANIZATION

Structure to ensure safe storage and access to digital artwork and surrogates.

PREMIS MODEL

Addresses preservation metadata management and ensures that digital objects remain authentic, complete, and usable over time, with a focus on the integrity, preservation actions, and provenance of the objects.



DESCRIPTION

Track the history of artwork to ensure its integrity over time.

1

COLLECTION ASSESSMENT

WHAT DO I HAVE?

WHERE IS IT?

**WHAT DO I
WANT TO
KEEP?**

2

FILES & FOLDERS

HOW DO I ORGANIZE MY STUFF?

UP TO YOU! YOU ARE THE ONE USING IT!

HELPS TO PUT ITEMS INTO CATEGORIES.

HOW DO I ORGANIZE MY STUFF?

MATERIAL? EXHIBITS?
DATE OF CREATION?
PROJECTS?

sort sort. i love to arbitrarily sort



CONSISTENCY IS KEY

YOU CAN DECIDE HOW TO
NAME YOUR FILES, BUT YOUR
FILE NAMES SHOULD BE
CONSISTENT.



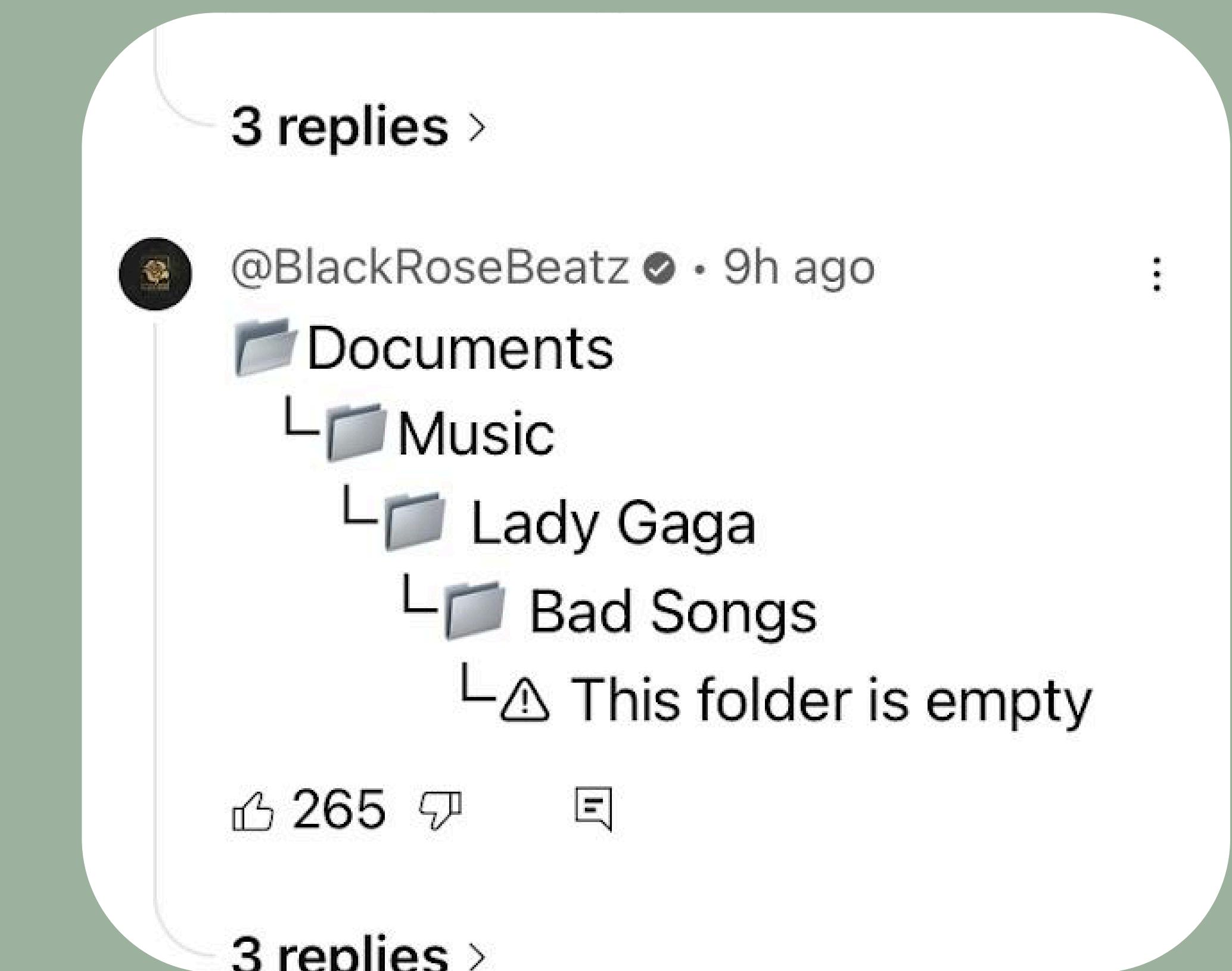
EXAMPLE FILE NAMES (SEARCHABLE?)

NAMES SHOULD BE CLEAR AND DISTINCT:
PROJECTNAME_FINAL_2.PDF

FILE NAMES SHOULD NOT REPEAT:
FINALFINAL2FORREAL.JPG

FOLDER NAMES SHOULD ALSO BE SEARCHABLE!

CATEGORIES AND HIERARCHIES!



ACTIVITY 1

**RENAME A MESSY FILE OR
FOLDER IN YOUR COLLECTION!**

3

BACKUPS & STORAGE

HOW DO I NOT LOSE MY STUFF?

NOW YOU KNOW WHAT YOU HAVE AND WHERE IT IS,
HOW DO YOU KEEP IT SAFE?

3-2-1 RULE

3

3 COPIES

2

2 DIFFERENT
STORAGE
TYPES

1

1 OFFSITE/
CLOUD
BACKUP

STORAGE RECOMMENDATIONS!

EXTERNAL HARD DRIVES + CLOUD + INSTITUTIONAL
STORAGE (WHEN POSSIBLE)

ACTIVITY 2

LIST ALL THE PLACES YOU
CURRENTLY HAVE BACKUPS.

WHERE ARE THEY? WHERE COULD
THEY GO?

4

FILE FORMATS

WHY FILE FORMATS MATTER

- Hardware obsolescence
- Software changes
- Format deprecation
- Digital records may outlast physical artwork

BUT WHAT IS FILE FORMAT, REALLY?

CODECS

Compression algorithms used for video, audio, and image data (e.g., ProRes, FLAC, AV1, JPEG 2000).

WRAPPERS

Also called containers, the formats that contain and organize data (e.g., MP4, MOV, TIFF, MKV).

FILE FORMAT

May refer to both the wrapper/container and encoding/codec used (e.g., JPEG 2000, FLAC).

DIFFERENT FORMATS FOR DIFFERENT USE

1. ALWAYS KEEP A PRESERVATION MASTER

Should be in the highest quality, uncompressed format possible. These files ensure long-term access and prevent quality loss from repeated compression.

2. CREATE COMPRESSED ACCESS COPIES FOR SHARING

For web, social media, and collaboration, use compressed copies to balance file size and quality.

3. NEVER SAVE OVER YOUR MASTER COPIES

Think of your master files as originals – always keep them untouched. Create separate files for edits, exports, and sharing.



PROPRIETARY VS. OPEN FORMATS

PROPRIETARY FORMATS

- Created and controlled by single companies
- May require specific software to open
- Often prioritize features over longevity
- Examples: **PSD** (Photoshop), **AI** (Illustrator), Camera RAW formats, **.DOC**

OPEN FORMATS

- Publicly documented specifications
- Can be implemented by multiple software tools
- Typically more stable over time
- Examples: **TIFF**, **PNG**, **SVG**, **DNG**, **TXT**

Best Practice: Create in proprietary formats, save preservation copies in open formats whenever possible

BEST FORMATS FOR LONG-TERM PRESERVATION

CONTENT TYPE	PRESERVATION FORMAT	AVOID	NOTES
CAMERA CAPTURE	RAW, DNG	JPG only	Preserve all original color data
MASTER IMAGES	TIFF, PNG (lossless), JPEG 2000	JPG (lossy), PSD	Uncompressed or lossless compression
VECTOR IMAGES	SVG, PDF/A	AI (Illustrator), proprietary formats	Include embedded fonts
VIDEO	ProRes, Motion JPEG 2000, AV1, FFV1	Compressed MP4, proprietary codecs	Quality vs. file size trade-off
AUDIO	FLAC, WAV (PCM)	MP3, AAC at low bitrates	Uncompressed or lossless compression
TEXT	TXT, Markdown, HTML, PDF/A, CSV	Word with complex features, formats with DRM	Plain text whenever possible
3D/VR	glTF (basic version), X3D	Engine-specific formats	Emerging standards - still evolving

HEIC (High Efficiency Image Container) files fall into the "**short-term to medium-term**" category for preservation. As Apple's implementation of the HEIF standard, they offer excellent compression and quality but have some preservation limitations:

- Limited cross-platform compatibility
- Apple's implementation of HEIF
- Default lossy compression
- Relatively new format (2017) without proven long-term stability

For documenting work, HEIC is fine for sharing, but **TIFF** or **PNG** remain better choices for preservation masters.



ACTIVITY 3

**CREATE A PRESERVATION
VERSION OF YOUR CURRENT
PROJECT IN APPROPRIATE LONG-
TERM FORMATS AND DOCUMENT
YOUR PROCESS**

5

METADATA & DOCUMENTATION

WHAT IS METADATA?

Think of it as data about your work, whether it be original work or documentation of that work, that helps describe, explain, and track it.

The **who, what, where, when, and why** of your work...

WHO: Artist's name and collaborators
WHAT: Description of the artwork, medium used, production narrative
WHEN: Creation date, exhibition dates
WHERE: Location of creation, exhibition venue
WHY: The artist's intent, themes, project statement

WHY CREATE METADATA?

- Contextualizes your work for future audiences, curators, and collectors.
- Preserves your intent and details so that your artwork can be understood and exhibited long after it's created.

SPREADSHEETS

Don't rely on your website to track your work! Create a spreadsheet for artwork metadata (e.g., name, size, medium, creation date, etc.)

Columns might include: Artwork Title | Creation Date | Medium | Dimensions | Location | Exhibition Dates | Installation

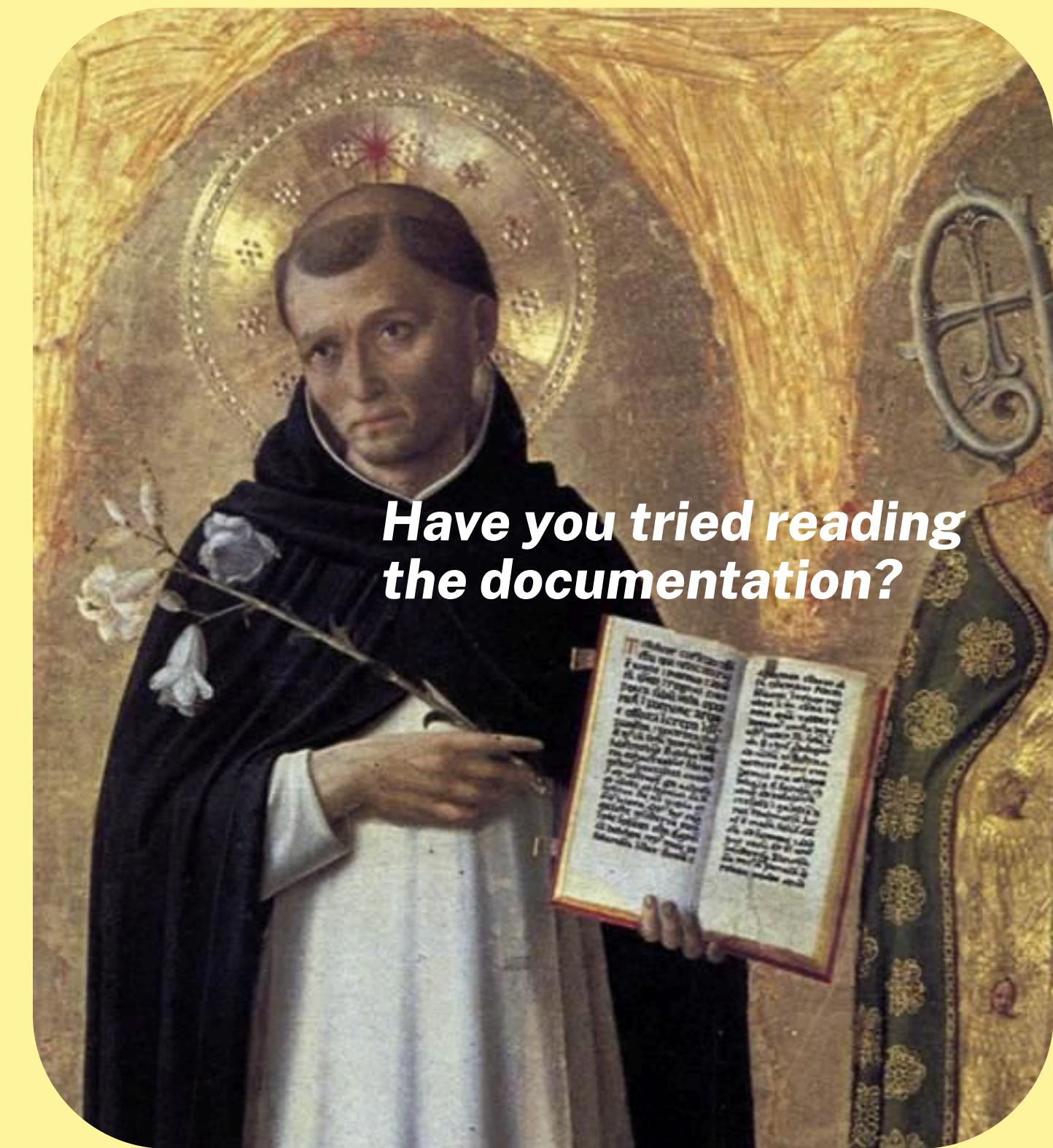
Include exhibition history: dates, venues, installation instructions.

Centralizes information, making it easier to track an inventory of your work, where your work has been, or what version it is.



README.TXT

- Provides context & instructions for future viewing, archiving, or exhibiting.
- Useful for software dependencies, version control, and exhibition setup to maintain the integrity of the work.
- Helps ensure correct playback and installation of digital/multimedia works.
- Explains what the project is and its intended purpose.
- Describes the file structure and naming conventions.
- Documents updates and version changes over time.
- Provides instructions on how to install, open, or use files.



INSTALLATION AND DISPLAY

*Image of original
installation lost :(*



WORKFLOWS

- **STREAMLINE YOUR DOCUMENTATION AND PRESERVATION PROCESS.**
- **ENSURE CONSISTENCY IN DOCUMENTING YOUR WORK THROUGHOUT ITS LIFECYCLE.**

KEY ELEMENTS TO INCLUDE

FILE NAMES	Create a file naming convention so you can easily find and identify your work
METADATA	Capture metadata at creation (date, medium, dimensions, etc.)
BACKUPS	Backup files and metadata on a schedule (set reminders for yourself)
README	Creates a guide or instructions for the project as a whole, noting version history, software used, etc.

ACTIVITY 4

CREATE A README.TXT FILE FOR YOUR MOST RECENT PROJECT OR DOCUMENTATION FOR RECENT WORK. WHAT THINGS WOULD YOU INCLUDE?

5 MAIN TAKEAWAYS

1. NAME FILES CONSISTENTLY SO YOU CAN FIND THEM LATER.
2. BACK UP YOUR WORK IN MULTIPLE PLACES.
3. USE SUSTAINABLE FILE FORMATS.
4. WRITE SIMPLE METADATA TO DOCUMENT YOUR WORK AND EXHIBITION HISTORY.
5. THINK ABOUT FUTURE ACCESSIBILITY – YOUR WORK SHOULD OUTLIVE YOUR HARD DRIVE.

AS PROMISED...

QUIZ TIME!



QUIZ: QUESTION 1

**TRUE OR
FALSE:**

WHEN SENDING YOUR WORK TO A CURATOR OR HOSTING IT ON THE WEB, YOU WOULD TYPICALLY USE COMPRESSED ACCESS COPIES.

Hint: Think file size and load time...



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True

QUIZ: QUESTION 2

HOW
SHOULD
FILES BE
NAMED?



QUIZ: QUESTION 2

HOW
SHOULD
FILES BE
NAMED?



Consistently!

QUIZ: QUESTION 3

EARLIER IN THIS PRESENTATION WE GAVE A NAME OF A RULE REGARDING HOW TO STORE YOUR DIGITAL FILES AND ART!

WHAT WAS THE NAME AND WHAT DID IT RECOMMEND DOING?

HINT!



QUIZ: QUESTION 3

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3-2-1 Rule!



QUIZ: QUESTION 4

You are preparing photos of your paintings for long-term preservation while also preparing images for social media sharing. Which of the following best describes the correct workflow to ensure both quality preservation and efficient sharing?

- A) Save all files in a single high-quality format, then compress and overwrite them when sharing.
- B) Store a lossless preservation master, create compressed access copies for sharing, and never edit or overwrite the original master file.
- C) Use only compressed formats like JPEG and MP3 to save space, since modern platforms can upscale quality as needed.
- D) Convert all master files to a smaller, more manageable format immediately to ensure compatibility with various devices and platforms.



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QUIZ: QUESTION 5

Why is metadata important for the long-term preservation of art or documentation?

- A) It ensures that you, future viewers, curators, and archivists have important context about the work.
- B) It prevents the file from being accidentally deleted.
- C) It automatically improves the visual quality of digital artwork over time.
- D) It allows an artist to sell their work at a higher price.

POV: It's 11:47 PM and you're piecing together two years of exhibition history from memory before the midnight grant deadline...



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TEMPLATES

README TEMPLATE

README template for digital works

=====

Title of work

Date

Artist

=====

ABOUT THIS WORK

brief description of the work

-concept/content/medium/playback equipment/experience

=====

FILE FORMATS

list the files and describe their significance and functionality

describe the file structure/organization

ex.

|Filename_function_.fileextension

|Description and function of file

|Archival? Y/N

|Codec:

|Dimensions/Aspect Ratio

|Speed/Frame Rate

|Notes:

ARCHIVAL FILES

include uncompressed, high-quality files for preservation on our art server [if possible]

Can these files also be used to display the work

Can these be used for preservation purposes in the case of software/hardware malfunction or obsolescence

DISPLAY FILES

include compressed files if this is what your work uses for display

SCREENSHOTS/DOCUMENTATION FILES

include screenshots, brief viewable video photos of the work with a description

Are these for preview purposes only?

ANY OTHER NOTES

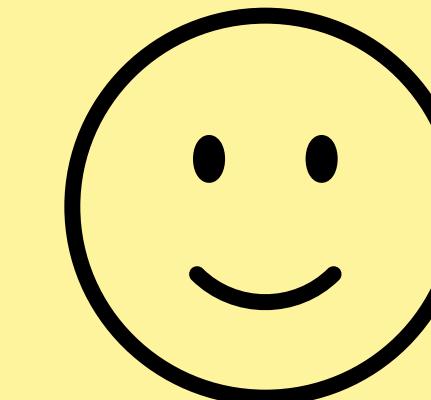
METADATA CSV TEMPLATES

Digital Art

Title, Date Created, Medium[s], Dimensions [HxWxD], Edition [if applicable], Location [Where work was created], "Artwork Description [Concept, theme, medium]", "Classification [e.g., Digital Art, Sculpture, Video, etc.]", Installation Notes [any specific installation requirements], "Software Used [for digital works, e.g., Photoshop, Blender, etc.]", "Hardware Required [e.g., monitors, projectors, etc.]", "File Format[s] [e.g., .jpg, .mp4, .obj]", Resolution/Aspect Ratio, "Audio/Visual Specifications [if applicable: sound, video channels, resolution, etc.]", "Collaborators/Assistants [Names, Roles]", Exhibition Title/Venue/Location, Dates of Display, Additional Notes, Current Owner, Previous Owners [if relevant], "Components Included [e.g., software, hardware, sculptures]", "Exhibition/Acquisition Requirements [specifications for display, additional components required]", Preservation Instructions [Any preservation steps or risks], "Copyright Status [Original work, under license, etc.]", "Display Setup [e.g., wall color, lighting, display equipment]", Installation Notes [step-by-step instructions for setup], "Environment Preferences [e.g., light levels, acoustic preferences]", File Size, "Source Code/Source Material [e.g., all relevant project files, software dependencies]", "README/Documentation [Description of files, how to operate the work]"
1

Traditional Art

Title, Artist Name, Date Created, Medium/Materials, Dimensions [HxWxD], "Classification [e.g., Painting, Sculpture, Photography]", "Description [Concept, Theme, Style]", Subject Matter, Location [Current/Studio/Exhibition], Provenance [Ownership History], Exhibition History [Title/Venue/Dates], Condition & Conservation Notes, Copyright & Usage Rights, Display & Installation Notes, Preservation Instructions, Production Narrative, Project Narrative, Additional Notes
2



COMPARATIVE LONGEVITY OF FORMATS AS OF 2025

FORMAT	SHORT-TERM	MEDIUM-TERM	LONG-TERM	INDEFINITE FUTURE
TEXT FILE	Proprietary formats with DRM	PDF, DOCX with complex features	Plain text (TXT), Markdown, HTML, JSON, XML	Nothing
WEB APPLICATION	Flash (now obsolete), Silverlight	Single-page apps with complex dependencies	Progressive Web Apps, JAMstack sites with static generation	Nothing
DATABASE	Proprietary formats, Access	MongoDB, SQLite	PostgreSQL, MySQL, JSON/BSON	Nothing
SERVER SCRIPT	Older .NET Framework, deprecated languages	Ruby, PHP	JavaScript (Node.js), Python, Go, Rust	Nothing
SPREADSHEET	XLS (legacy Excel)	XLSX (with macros)	CSV, TSV, XLSX (without macros)	Nothing
VECTOR IMAGE	AI (Illustrator), closed-source formats	PDF with embedded fonts	SVG, EPS	Nothing
RASTER IMAGE	PSD (Photoshop), WebP (with lossy compression)	JPEG, PNG	TIFF, PNG (lossless), JPEG 2000, AVIF	Nothing
AUDIO FILE	Copy-protected formats, lossy, low bitrate formats	MP3, AAC	FLAC, WAV (PCM), Opus	Nothing
VIDEO FILE	Copy-protected streaming formats	H.264/AVC, VP9	AV1, H.265/HEVC, ProRes, Motion JPEG 2000	Nothing
3D/VR CONTENT	Proprietary game engine assets	glTF with custom extensions	glTF (basic version), USDZ, X3D	Nothing

RESOURCES

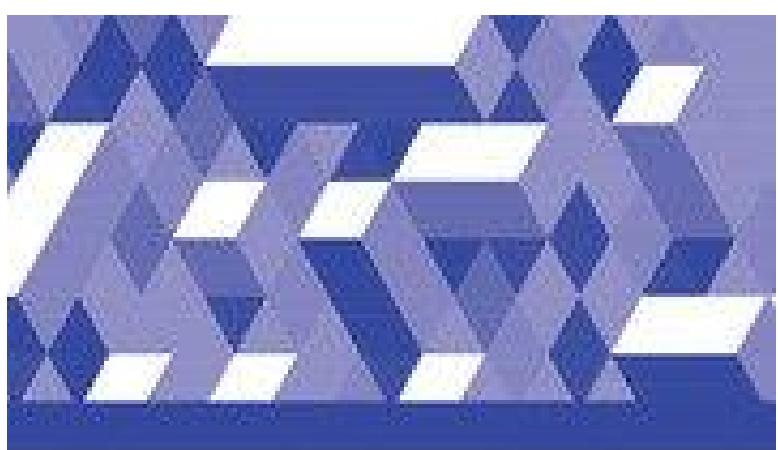


RE-COLLECTION

Art, New Media, and Social Memory

Richard Rinehart

Jon Ippolito



COLLECTING AND CONSERVING NET ART MOVING BEYOND CONVENTIONAL METHODS

Annet Dekker



Rinehart, Richard, and Jon Ippolito. *Re-Collection: Art, New Media, and Social Memory*. The MIT Press, 2014.



<http://doi.org/10.7207/twg/24-02>

Preserving Digital Art

Patrícia Falcão

DPC Technology Watch
Guidance Note
September 2024

DPC DigitalPreservationCoalition

Falcão, Patricia. *Preserving Digital Art: DPC Technology Watch Guidance Note*. Digital Preservation Coalition, 2024.

Dekker, Annet. *Collecting and Conserving Net Art: Moving Beyond Conventional Methods*. Routledge, 2018.

RESOURCES

- Digital Preservation in the Artist's Studio by Cass Fino-Radin, <https://medium.com/@finoradin/digital-preservation-in-the-artist-s-studio-8951e564bb3e>
- Best practices for conservation of media art from an artist's perspective by Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, <https://github.com/antimodular/Best-practices-for-conservation-of-media-art>
- Making Practice Practical: Developing Digital Preservation for Storage of Artworks at the Museum of Modern Art by Amy Brost, <https://resources.culturalheritage.org/emg-review/making-practice-practical-developing-digital-preservation-for-storage-of-artworks-at-the-museum-of-modern-art/>

USE THE LIBRARY!



- HOW MANY OF YOU USE THE LIBRARY?
- A LOT OF MATERIAL NOT AVAILABLE ONLINE!
- EXPLORATORY SEARCH!
- ASK THE LIBRARIAN OR CIRCULATION DESK!

USE THE LIBRARY!

**LIBRARY OF CONGRESS: N (VISUAL ARTS) OR
N7433.8 (COMPUTER ART)**

**DEWEY DECIMAL SYSTEM: 700 (ARTS) OR 776
(DIGITAL ART)**

ASK FOR HELP IF YOU CAN'T FIND IT!

FEEDBACK NEEDED!



Digital Preservation Survey for Art Students

This survey aims to understand how art students think about documenting, organizing, and preserving their work, especially in digital formats. Your responses will help shape better resources for students interested in building sustainable documentation habits.

This should take less than 10 minutes to complete.

What is your current level of study?

- Undergraduate art student
- Graduate art student

What mediums do you primarily work within? (Select all that apply)

- Painting/Drawing
- Photography/Video



ADDITIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

A huge thank you to Professor Anne J. Gilliland!

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THANK YOU!

