

Contemporary Artists' Estates and Legacies (Maastricht, 19–21 Mar 26)

Maastricht, Mar 19–21, 2026

Deadline: Dec 10, 2025

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MACCH Annual Conference - On Leaving: Contemporary Artists' Estates and Legacies.

We are pleased to announce the call for panels, papers, and artistic research contributions for the 2026 MACCH conference in Maastricht on 19-21 March 2026. This edition of our annual conference focuses on emerging networks of care around contemporary artists' estates and legacies, and is organized in collaboration with MERIAN (Maastricht Experimental Research in and through the Arts Network).

Many contemporary artists are now leaving behind significant material and immaterial legacies. Increasingly, their estates are approached by private market actors such as gallerists, consultants, lawyers, and financial advisors, also in the context of what has become known as 'the great wealth' transfer of significant assets between the baby boomer generation and their heirs. At the same time, there are artists' estates that require care despite not being considered immediately financially valuable or being in the public eye.

Whether public or private, the care for contemporary artists' estates is a complex endeavour for a number of reasons. One obvious reason is the sheer amount of such estates, which include artistic oeuvres but may also extend to artists' archives, studios, collections of other artists' works, etc. Furthermore, contemporary artists – individually or collectively, sometimes in collaboration with their gallerists and collectors – seek to question conceptions and structures of authority, power and identity. They problematize dominant politics, technologies and ethics of collecting, classifying, and archiving artworks. In fact, through their innovative artistic practices, such as conceptual art, performance, and time-based media, contemporary artists fundamentally challenge established public and private institutions in the preservation of art and cultural heritage. As a consequence, these institutions are now reconsidering their collecting and conservation practices. This may even lead to deaccessioning and letting go of (parts of) collections and archives, which is seemingly at odds with actual regulations and long held beliefs. Simultaneously, art historians, conservators, and curators experiment with new approaches to valorising contemporary artists' estates and their legacies. And more and more contemporary artists themselves engage in artistic research with the explicit aim of improving posthumous care for their own works and that of their peers, for example through cooperatives and creative commons.

This conference starts from the premise that to ensure the preservation of contemporary art in all its diversity we first need to understand who cares: who owns, controls and manages contempo-

rary artists' estates and what legacies are being cared for, how and why? We aim to investigate who speaks authoritatively and legitimately about artists' legacies (politics), how these legacies can be effectively shared and put to common uses (technologies), and how they can critically inform effective and affective networks of care for art and cultural heritage (ethics), now and in the future.

We use the term contemporary artists' estates to define the actual, legal inheritances (material and immaterial) as bequeathed to and represented by a public or private entity (or association of heirs). When we refer to artists' legacies, we mean the cultural heritage left behind by artists in a broader sense and as interpreted, contextualized and appreciated by art history, as well as by museums and the art market.

Among the questions that conference contributions may address, we would like to engage in reflection and debate on the following:

What are the institutional politics of caring and sharing in the preservation of contemporary artists' estates and how are they publicly and privately contested?

How are responsibilities assumed by and distributed among the different actors (artists, collectors, dealers, galleries, heirs, local/regional/national governments, museums, etc.) involved?

What different public and private (legal) technologies of caring and sharing are employed in the making of artists' legacies and how can contemporary artists' estates best make use of them (copyright, last wills and testaments, etc.)?

What are established ethics in the caring for and sharing of contemporary artists' estates and how could alternative norms and forms yield relevant affects and effects for artists' legacies?

We call for your submission of proposals for panels, papers and contributions in artistic research on these and/or related themes by Wednesday 10 December 2025, macch@maastrichtuniversity.nl.

We aim to bring together academics, practitioners, artists and their heirs to jointly discuss new approaches in caring for and sharing contemporary artists' estates. There is space for artistic interventions and selected conference contributions will be invited to participate in an edited volume in the Springer Series Studies in Art and Heritage, Law and the Market (open access).

Organisers:

The Maastricht Centre for Arts and Culture, Conservation and Heritage is an interdisciplinary research centre that brings together economic, legal, (art) historical, philosophical, sociological and practical expertise to the context of arts and heritage. In response to the demands of the increasingly complex challenges facing the fields of arts and heritage today, MACCH initiates collaborative research projects with researchers, professionals, and students from diverse backgrounds. MACCH is a joint effort of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, the Faculty of Law the School of Business and Economics, the Faculty of Science and Engineering, Tracé Limburgs Samenlevingsarchief and Stichting Restauratie Atelier Limburg (SRAL).

The Maastricht Experimental Research in and through the Arts Network (MERIAN) – named after the early modern artist-scientist Maria Sibylla Merian (1647–1717) – is the partnership for artistic

research and artistic research-based learning and education in Maastricht. It brings together Zuyd University of Applied Sciences, Maastricht University, and the Jan van Eyck Academie (JvE). MERIAN invites established artists and academics to engage in collaborative research in between making and thinking. By developing new norms and forms of embodied knowledge and by advocating for new and creative methods of doing research and teaching, MERIAN redefines the relationships between existing cultural and academic institutions and addresses pressing societal concerns relevant to the Meuse-Rhine Euregion.

Reference:

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