Who Cares? Collecting, Preserving, and Curating (Krems, 1-3 Jul 26)

Krems (AT), Department for Art and Cultural Studies, Jul 1–03, 2026
Deadline: Apr 15, 2026

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DAC (Department for Art and Cultural Studies) Summer School 2026:
"Who Cares? Collecting, preserving, and curating in museums, archives, and organizations" at the University for Continuing Education Krems, July 1-3, 2026.

Chairs:
- Department for Arts and Cultural Studies, University for Continuing Education Krems, Professor of Cultural History and Museum Studies, Anja Grebe
- Head of Archives of Contemporary Arts Collection of Literary Estates, Helmut Neundlinger
- Professor of Digital Cultures and Digital Humanities, Chiara Zuanni

In cooperation with in scope GmbH (Head of Research, Klaus Neundlinger).

Collections grow, material traces decay, organizations expand. Both analog and digital repositories are exposed to an ever-increasing flood of information and objects that require proper, sustainable, and long-term care. Museums, archives, libraries, and conservation professionals are confronted with managing fast-growing collections while ensuring their safeguard against processes of deterioration, obsolescence, disruption, and loss. Care becomes both a practical and relational challenge: it is about protecting something – people, data, objects, environments – while navigating the limits of attention, resources, and institutional priorities.

For the verb to care, derived from Old English caru (“concern, anxiety, sorrow, grief, trouble”), the Oxford English Dictionary lists 17 different meanings. Among them “to be interested or concerned,” “to give care,” or “to feel trouble or anxiety.” Within the rather vast semantic spectrum this every-day verb entails, the trans-disciplinary DAC Summer School 2026, initiated as a dialogue forum between established researchers, emerging scholars as well as professionals from the cultural and heritage sector, aims at investigating “Who cares?” in the context of museums, archives, and cultural heritage institutions as well as organizations in general.
Collections grow, material traces decay, organizations expand. Both analog and digital repositories are exposed to an ever-increasing flood of information and objects that require proper, sustainable, and long-term care.

Museums, archives, libraries, and conservation professionals are confronted not only with new materials and technologies but also with managing fast-growing collections while ensuring their safeguard against processes of deterioration, obsolescence, disruption, and loss. Companies and

public organizations face related challenges in knowledge stewardship, documentation, and long-term management of digital and physical assets.

Across these contexts, the accelerating circulation of data, materials, and responsibilities exerts continuous pressure on systems, people, and practices. Digitization – once celebrated for its potential to expand and democratize access to objects and information – has proven deeply ambivalent. The early optimism has turned into a sense of overload and fragmentation, leading to new demands for orientation, regulation, and sustainable models of incisiveness and care.

Understanding the question “Who cares?” therefore also means asking:
- Who tends to the fragile, the ageing, the damaged, the forgotten?
- Who restores and safeguards cultural goods and material as well as immaterial heritage?
- Who navigates the ethical, ecological, and emotional dimensions of conservation and loss?
- Who is affected by our work and caring practices, and how do we care for the people beyond our heritage ethically?

Care, in this specific sense, encompasses material maintenance, conservation science, preventive strategies, curatorial decision-making, and the everyday labor of those who work with vulnerable collections, objects, and environments. It is also an attitude – one of responsibility, attention, and thoughtful engagement with pasts that demand stewardship, presents that require selection, and futures that call for sustainable preservation and loss management.

Parallel tensions exist in other sectors, related, however, to the field of cultural heritage in many ways: health, child and elderly care, social work, education, or organizational knowledge management. Care practices include documentation, protocol duties multiply, however, and clash with other tasks. Digitization promises efficiency but raises ethical and ecological questions, including energy consumption, data longevity, and the carbon footprint of storage infrastructures. In all these situations, care becomes both a practical and relational challenge: it is about protecting something – people, data, objects, environments – while navigating the limits of attention, resources, and institutional priorities.

We invite participants to explore discourses, practices, ethics, and politics of care in contexts of collecting, preserving, restoring, curating, interpreting, and managing or organizing by asking:

- Who cares for objects, materials, data, and their histories – also in view of the social mission and responsibility of heritage institutions?
- How are decisions made about what is preserved, restored, or allowed to decay?
- How do we deal with fragile, ageing, damaged, repressed, or illegible materials – documents, artworks, artifacts with digital methods?
- How do we ensure the preservation of digitized records and how do develop sustainable practice for managing born-digital texts and artifacts?
- What does “curating” or “restoring” mean from a perspective of care and advocacy for long overlooked agents, materials, or practices?
- How can we make mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion visible – also in restoration practices, conservation priorities, strategies, and heritage politics?
- How do organizations collect, maintain, repair, and sometimes erase knowledge, memories, and data and how can such collective memories and repositories be restored and investigated?

- How do climate change, environmental degradation, and resource scarcity transform conservation and restoration practices, and which strategies already exist? (e.g., climate proofing collections, dealing with mold, humidity, pests, extreme weather events)
- How do care concepts and practices differ across cultural heritage institutions, companies, communities, or activist groups?
- How can the societal actors be actively involved in care practices, especially through participatory approaches and/or Citizen Science?

We welcome contributions that approach/address these questions through cultural, organizational, conservation-oriented, or interdisciplinary lenses – ranging from theoretical reflections and empirical studies to case examples, artistic interventions, or practice-led research.

Participants are invited to submit their contributions in one of the following formats:
- Workshop (30-90 minutes): Engage participants with interactive activities (for suggestions see above).
- Academic Presentation (~20 minutes): Share and discuss your research findings.
- Project Presentation (~20 minutes): Present a curatorial project or your experience as a curator, archivist or collector or from a visitor's perspective, not necessarily backed by scientific evaluation.
- Poster Presentation (5-minute presentation, open discussion within a poster session): Showcase your ideas or projects through a concise and visually engaging poster.

For each presentation format, you can opt for one of the following publication choices:
- Presentation Only: Your abstract will be featured on the Summer School website, with no additional publication.
- Research Paper (6-12 pages): A comprehensive exposition of your research.
- Project/Experience/Position Paper (3-12 pages): Share insights from projects, experiences, or viewpoints in a brief format.

Submission Guidelines:
Please submit your abstract via this form by April 15, 2026 and follow the guidelines:
https://forms.office.com/pages/responsepage.aspx?id=v3HXst56qUWhtClAjz3C5rNzd6QpTUpCi1Dagp1lZNpUM0FRN1BTVkxUUUpBQTJHWDBHNUhTOE1YRS4u&route=shorturl

The contributions to the Summer School 2026 will be part of the annual journal "DAC - Digital Journal for Arts and Cultural Studies | Digitales Journal für Kunst- und Kulturwissenschaften": https://dac-journal.at/

Review Process:
- Research Papers will be given the option of being peer-reviewed.
- Project/Experience/Position Papers will be reviewed by the editors (chairs).

Important Dates:
- Abstract Submission Deadline: April 15, 2026
- Acceptance Notification: May 15, 2026
- Participation Registration: Juni 1, 2026 (for all participants)
- Event Dates: July 1-3, 2026

- First Draft of Paper Submission: August 1, 2026
- Iterative Review Process Completion: February 1, 2027
- Publication Date: Fall 2027

Reference:

CFP: Who Cares? Collecting, Preserving, and Curating (Krems, 1-3 Jul 26). In: ArtHist.net, Feb 23, 2026 (accessed Nov 12, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/51814>.