

Critical Conservation Assembly #1 (Bern/online, 3-4 Dec 26)

Bern, Bern Academy of the Arts / Online, Dec 3–04, 2026

Deadline: Jun 30, 2026

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Critical Conservation Assembly #1: Communities of Practice.

Conservation has often been understood as the technical stabilization of material objects, guided by professional expertise and institutional authority. While this paradigm has shaped Western conservation practice for decades, it does not fully account for the diverse ways in which communities sustain, transmit, and transform cultural knowledge.

Across many cultures, conservation takes place through care, repetition, renewal, storytelling, performance, remaking, and individual and collective memory. Cultural continuity is frequently maintained not through the preservation of objects alone, but through embodied knowledge, relational practices, and intergenerational transmission. Such modes of care can be found in Indigenous knowledge systems as well as in contemporary contexts such as performance and digital art. At the same time, practices of transmission are often entangled with colonial histories, institutional frameworks, and economic realities, raising ongoing questions about authority, expertise, ownership, and custodianship.

The Assembly is conceived both as a setting and a mode of practice through which knowledge is collectively produced. As the first gathering in the Critical Conservation: Communities of Practice series, it invites participants to rethink conservation as a relational, pluricultural, and political practice.

Central Question: How do communities of practice reshape conservation when it is understood not simply as the preservation of objects, but as a collective practice that sustains and transmits knowledge, gestures, values, and forms of community life?

Themes: Submissions may address, but are not limited to, the following themes:

Conservation ontologies: material, relational, performative, or intergenerational approaches to conservation; authenticity and its critiques.

Expertise and authority: embodied, oral, ritual, and tacit knowledge; community-led conservation practices

Remaking, renewal, and repetition: (re-)enactment, reproduction, reinstallation, and conservation through transformation.

Conservation as political and epistemic practice: colonial legacies, repatriation, shared custodianship, and decolonial approaches.

Transmission and intergenerational knowledge: storytelling, apprenticeship, embodied learning,

and other forms of cultural continuity.

Care, maintenance, and everyday conservation: practices of care that sustain cultural heritage beyond institutional frameworks.

More-than-human heritage and natureculture: conservation practices that engage with ecological systems, landscapes, animals, and other-than-human actors.

Digital and networked communities of practice: conservation, transmission, and stewardship in digital cultures, online archives, and gaming communities.

Formats: The Assembly encourages contributions both within and beyond conventional conference formats, including:

Presentations (15–20 minutes)

Duet talks – two speakers in dialogue

Storytelling or oral narrative formats

Pre-recorded audio-visual submissions

“One-slide” interventions (5 minutes)

Who can submit: We welcome contributions from scholars, Indigenous custodians and knowledge holders, artists, artisans and craftspeople, museum conservators, curators, cultural policy practitioners, community heritage workers, repatriation specialists, and activists.

Submissions from non-academic practitioners and from members of historically marginalized communities are especially encouraged.

When to submit: Please submit an abstract of approximately 300 words addressing one or more of the overarching themes, along with a short bio of up to 200 words. Submissions should be emailed by June 30, 2026, to centerforcriticalconservation@gmail.com. Selected contributions may be considered for publication.

Reference:

CFP: Critical Conservation Assembly #1 (Bern/online, 3-4 Dec 26). In: ArtHist.net, May 23, 2026 (accessed Jun 15, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/52524>>.