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

Online / Bern Academy of the Arts (HKB / Bern University of Applied Sciences), Dec 3–04, 2026

Hanna Barbara Hölling

Critical Conservation Assembly 1: Communities of Practice

Conservation has historically been shaped by an understanding of its task as the technical stabilization of material objects, guided by professional expertise and institutional authority. In recent decades, however, the field has increasingly moved beyond this paradigm, embracing participatory, people-centered, relational, and process-oriented approaches to conservation. Yet questions remain about how far these shifts transform the structures through which conservation knowledge, authority, and responsibility are organized—and how they account for the diverse ways in which communities sustain, transmit, and transform cultural knowledge.

We are thrilled to announce the first Critical Conservation Assembly: Communities of Practice, taking place 3–4 December 2026 in Bern and online.

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 physical objects alone, but through embodied knowledge, relational practices, and intergenerational transmission. Such modes of care can be found in local and 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 public gathering in the Critical Conservation Assembly series, it invites participants to rethink conservation as a relational, pluricultural, and political practice.

The Assembly does not begin from scratch. It builds on the project’s remarkable foundation of existing exchanges with knowledge holders, practitioners, conservators, and researchers from around the world and that can, in part, be explored on the Critical Conservation website.

The central question guiding the Assembly is:

How do communities of practice reshape conservation when it is understood as a collective practice that sustains and transmits knowledge, values, gestures and forms of communal life?

https://centerforcriticalconservation.com/1590-2/

PROGRAM
DAY 1 | Thursday, 3 December 2026

09:00–09:30 | Welcome & Introduction | hybrid

Hanna Hölling, Juliana Robles de la Pava & Samidha Pusalkar

Welcome to the first Critical Conservation Assembly and introduction to Communities of Practice

09:30–11:00 | Session 1 | online

Conservation as a Living Practice: Embodied Knowledge, Intergenerational Transmission and Community Stewardship

Haoyi Li
Towards an Interdisciplinary Conservation Framework through Learning from Indigenous Yolŋu Communities (Northern Australia)

Muhammad Tehmash Khan
Embodied Knowledge and Intergenerational Transmission in Heritage Conservation: Artisanal Practice in Historic City of Lahore, Pakistan

Jiayao Jiang
Tea Cultivation and Living Cultural Landscape: The Conservation of Jingmai Mountain World Heritage site in China

Three presentations followed by collective discussion.

11:00–11:15 | Coffee Break

11:15–12:15 | Assembling Communities I | hybrid

Dialogues, Duets and Situated Practices

Tara Sharma
Conservation in a Changing Landscape: Working with Living Heritage in Changthang
Invited contribution and conversation

Yumeng Hou

Capturing the Hand: Rattan Weaving and the Transformations of Digital Transmission

Followed by collective conversation.

12:15–13:15 | Lunch Break

13:15–14:45 | Session 2 | online

Practicing Care: Participation, Reuse and Everyday Worlds

Bhumika Balamatti
Community-Based Heritage Care through Adaptive Reuse of Colonial Bungalows in South India

Ben Davenport
Flexible Authenticities and Culinary Capital in Diaspora Food Heritage Conservation

Denise Petzold
Caring for Music and for Each Other: Singing the Stories of the Buurt Opera Malpertuis

Three presentations followed by collective discussion.

14:45–15:00 | Short Break

15:00–16:30 | Assembling Communities II | online

Stories, Labour and Conservation Realities

Sandeep Pathe
Udasin Math, Nagpur: The Story of Conserving a Living Math
Storytelling

Ogechukwu Elizabeth Okpalanozie
Confronting Conservation Realities at National Museum, Lagos: Bridging Western Conservation and Indigenous Care

Christopher King & Francesca Colussi
Conservation Labour, Reciprocity & Opacity
Duet/conversational format

Three contributions followed by collective discussion.

16:30–16:45 | Coffee Break

16:45–17:45 | Session 3 | hybrid

Relational Ethics of Conservation: Care, Companionship and More-than-Human Futures

Marina Herriges & Maria Siqueira — in person
Caring for Soil, Caring for Heritage: Circular Temporalities and Conservation at the Ecomuseu dos Campos de São José, Brazil

Alice Heyward
Companionship as a Mode of Conservation

Followed by collective discussion.

17:45–18:00 | Day 1 Wrap-Up & Transition | hybrid

Brief reflections on Day 1 and closing.

18:00 | End of hybrid/online program

18:00–19:00 | In Situ Workshop

Letters to Conservation

Swiss Conservation Campus students and interested participants

A participatory letter-writing workshop inviting participants to address conservation directly: its assumptions, responsibilities, practices, limits and possible futures.

In situ only.

DAY 2 | Friday, 4 December 2026

09:00–09:15 | Welcome, Housekeeping & Brief Recap of Day 1

A brief return to the questions, conversations and tensions that emerged on Day 1.

09:15–09:45 | Opening Provocations | hybrid

Jane Henderson (in person) in conversation with participants

A moderated conversation responding to the practices, questions, and tensions emerging from the Assembly. A set of prompts is available at this link to help frame and open the discussion: https://centerforcriticalconservation.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/09/Critical-Conservation-Assembly_Questions-for-Opening-Provocations_Henderson.pdf

Participants are invited to join the conversation in person or online, or to contribute a 90-second recorded response in advance. Recordings should be sent by 30 November to centerforcriticalconservation@gmail.com.

09:45–11:15 | Session 1 | online

Poetics of Memory: Artistic Practices, Community and Living Heritage

Orlando Vieira Francisco
Flags of Other Winds: Thinking About Community Through Artistic Research

Roland Alvarez Chavez
Marica Community Practices of Preserving Knowledge and Memory: Ancestry and Colonial Legacy in Play

Leticia Gomez Franco
Demystifying: Democratizing: Decolonizing :: Art Conservation

Three presentations followed by collective discussion.

11:15–11:30 | Coffee Break

11:30–12:00 | Assembling Communities III | hybrid

Salvador Muñoz-Viñas (in person): Interlude–Provisional (In)Conclusions

An interactive interlude inviting the audience into a brief set of questions, responses, and emerging ideas. With the help of the audience, the session will aim at capturing provisional connections, tensions, and (in)conclusions as they take shape.

12:00–13:00 | Lunch Break

13:00–14:30 | Session 2 | online

Indigenous Knowledge, Collections and Conservation: Transforming Relations to Material Heritage

Cecilia Benedetti
Materiality, Transformation and Conservation Among the Chané Carvers of Northern Argentina

James B. Kuboja
African Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Wildlife Conservation in Tanzania

Qianqian Pei
When the Place Is Gone: How Everyday Practice Sustains Cultural Heritage

Three presentations followed by collective discussion.

14:30–14:45 | Short Break

14:45–15:15 | Assembling Communities IV | online

Storytelling as Situated Knowledge

Victoria Vargas-Downing
Learning with the Desert, Heritage, Affect and Uywaña

Storytelling followed by conversation.

15:15–16:45 | Session 3 | online

Keeping Worlds Alive: Conservation beyond Preservation

Njabulo Chipangura
Museums as Sites of Care and Resistance

Lisa Conte, Christine Frohnert, Adrian Hernandez, Debra F. Laefer & LaStarsha McGarity
Stewardship, Care, and Communities of Practice at Joe Minter’s An African Village in America

Ellen Pearlstein
Developments in the Conservation of Indigenous Collections

Three presentations followed by collective discussion.

16:45–17:00 | Coffee Break

17:00–17:30 | Invited Contribution & Conversation | online

Juan A. Chindoy
Rethinking Conservation through Situated Times and Places

Invited contribution followed by conversation.

17:30–18:00 | Closing Assembly | hybrid

What Has This Assembly Assembled?

An open collective conversation returning to the central questions of Communities of Practice.

Speakers and participants are invited to reflect on:

- a practice or encounter that has complicated their understanding of conservation;
- a question or tension that remains unresolved;
- a relation, community or practice that should be carried forward into the next Critical Conservation Assembly.

18:00 | End of Critical Conservation Assembly #1

To access the Book of Abstracts, including information about the speakers, please follow this link: https://centerforcriticalconservation.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/10/Critical-Conservation-Assembly_Book-of-Abstracts.pdf

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Reference:

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