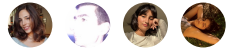


News

“It Looks Like a Bomb Exploded”: LA Artists Grapple With Loss as Fires Rage

“I literally only have the clothes I’m wearing, but that’s the same story as thousands of others,” artist Amir Nikravan told *Hyperallergic*.



Valentina Di Liscia, Matt Stromberg, Maya Pontone and Rhea Nayyar

January 9, 2025



The Eaton Fire burns through a neighborhood on January 8, 2025 in Altadena, California. (photo by Justin Sullivan/Getty Images)

LOS ANGELES — Eddie Rodolfo Aparicio had spent much of Tuesday, January 7, putting out a backyard fire caused by a downed power line when he started getting texts from friends warning of the rapidly spreading Eaton Fire approaching his home in Altadena.

“I walked outside and saw the hillside on fire,” Aparicio told *Hyperallergic*. He and his partner evacuated with essential documents and their dog and two cats only to have their worst fears confirmed when a neighbor sent a video of the entire block destroyed.

Although his studio in North Hollywood is safe, some artwork by his father, Juan Edgar Aparicio, was lost. “My dad’s important works from the 1980s and ’90s were stored there, huge paintings we couldn’t do anything about,” he lamented.

Countless artists are grappling with unimaginable loss and an uncertain future after learning that their communities, homes, studios, and artworks have been damaged or entirely destroyed as five fires tear through the Los Angeles area, two of which are presently uncontained.

The Palisades and Eaton Fires have become two of the most **destructive** fires in the city's history. Three additional blazes, the Hollywood Hills Sunset Fire and the partially contained Hurst and Lidia fires, continued to burn on Thursday, January 9.



Artist Eddie Rodolfo Aparicio lost his home in Altadena to the fire. (photo courtesy Eddie Rodolfo Aparicio)

Artist Tara Walters, who lived in the Malibu Village neighborhood, told *Hyperallergic* that she saw her home burning on live television.

“Everything is gone from my house. My car. My paintings inside. All my heirlooms. My wedding dress. Everything,” she said. “I have been trying to process this, but it has been challenging to stop the tears from constantly falling.”

“My husband used to be a professional musician and he lost all of his instruments,” Walters continued. “The entire village has turned to ash.” Estimating a loss of at least \$100,000, she added that her friends helped set up a **donation page** to aid with recovery.

At least five people have been killed and nearly **180,000** people have been evacuated, some fleeing on foot with just a few basic items and their pets. Officials **warned** Thursday that the number of deaths could rise as firefighters confronted **water shortages** due to strains on water pressure and “tremendous demand,” **according** to the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power. Some critics attributed the severity of the fires to cuts in the Los Angeles Fire Department's budget last summer. While the overall budget increased by \$53 million, cuts to

funds earmarked for firefighters' overtime pay created challenges, President of the United Firefighters of Los Angeles union Freddy Escobar told the [*New York Times*](#).



"The entire village has turned to ash," said artist Tara Walters of her Malibu neighborhood. (photo courtesy Tara Walters)

Kathryn Andrews evacuated her home in Tahitian Terrace, an historic trailer community in Pacific Palisades, on Tuesday morning, driving to a friend's house in Santa Monica with her dogs and a suitcase. "It was a 200 acre fire at that point," she said. But the rapid growth of the Palisades fire decimated the entire development located along the Pacific Coast Highway. Remarking on the magnitude of the devastation of the fires affecting LA's artists, curators, galleries, and collectors, Andrews said, "It's like history burning."

In addition to the rising death toll, [**thousands of structures**](#) spanning residential homes, [**historic buildings, and community sites**](#), including the Pasadena Jewish Temple and Center, the [**Masjid Al-Taqwa**](#) in Altadena, and the Theatre Palisades Pierson Playhouse, have been destroyed by the flames. Located in the celebrity-packed Pacific Palisades, the Getty Villa grounds was one of the [**earliest sites to be hit by the blaze**](#), and although a spokesperson confirmed that the structure was not damaged, parts of its famed surrounding gardens, trees, and vegetation were burned.

Also destroyed was the [**Zorthian Ranch**](#), a 45-acre creative community in the Altadena foothills founded by late artist Jirayr Zorthian in the 1940s.



A cloud of smoke rising from the Palisades Fire before it destroyed artist Kathryn Andrews's home, at right (photo courtesy Kathryn Andrews)

The fire has also burnt down hundreds of local businesses and neighborhood art venues; on Wednesday, the Altadena artist-run gallery Alto Beta posted a [video](#) to Instagram showing the fire overtaking its physical space. The blaze also destroyed 10 paintings by Los Angeles-based artist Mary Anna Pomonis on view in a solo exhibition that had opened earlier this week.

“Alto Beta was all about community,” Pomonis told *Hyperallergic*. The works featured crystalline geometric abstractions that she described as channeling elements of the sacred feminine power. These paintings, along with ceramic works by Alto Beta founder Brad Eberhard and Fillmore painter Robert Gunderman that were meant to be included in a [two-person exhibition slated to open next week](#) at Mount San Jacinto College, were eviscerated.

“Suddenly, the show has new meaning for me,” she continued. “This was a big wake-up call to dismantle structures that allowed this to happen in the first place.”

Pomonis views the loss of her artwork as a kind of “offering for an unknown purpose.”

“Otherwise I can’t make sense of it,” she said.



Salomón Huerta's neighbor walks through what remains of their neighborhood in Altadena, pointing out where residents used to live before the blaze destroyed their homes. (video by Adrian Thome, courtesy Salomón Huerta)

Also in Altadena, artist Salomón Huerta told *Hyperallergic* that he and his partner scrambled to evacuate their residence on Tuesday, quickly grabbing whatever valuables they could carry before relocating away from the mountains to his sister's home in Van Nuys. Their house, located on a cul-de-sac along with eight other homes, was destroyed in the blaze.

“I was coming from the studio painting because I didn’t know how close the fire was,” Huerta said. “I thought it was nowhere near our neighborhood.” While his studio space in Westwood remains untouched by the blaze, he lost the work and art supplies he kept at home.

“It looks like a bomb exploded and just wiped everything out,” Huerta said.

Like Huerta, many artists and art workers have taken to social media to report the loss of their own and relatives’ homes, art studios, artworks, and supplies. Martine Syms said her family home was completely destroyed in the Eaton Fire, which hit near the center of the **historically Black area of Altadena** and had **spread to 10,600 acres** by Wednesday. “Three generations under one roof and now everyone is displaced,” Syms wrote on **Instagram**, where she shared a link to a **fundraiser** to support her family members.

Erin Berkowitz, an artist and educator who makes natural dyes using local plants, posted a devastating **video** of her house in flames. “I have no home, no belongings, and the materials I rely on to make a living are burning,” she said in an Instagram story, also sharing a **fundraiser**.



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My house is burning in the #EatonFire ❤️

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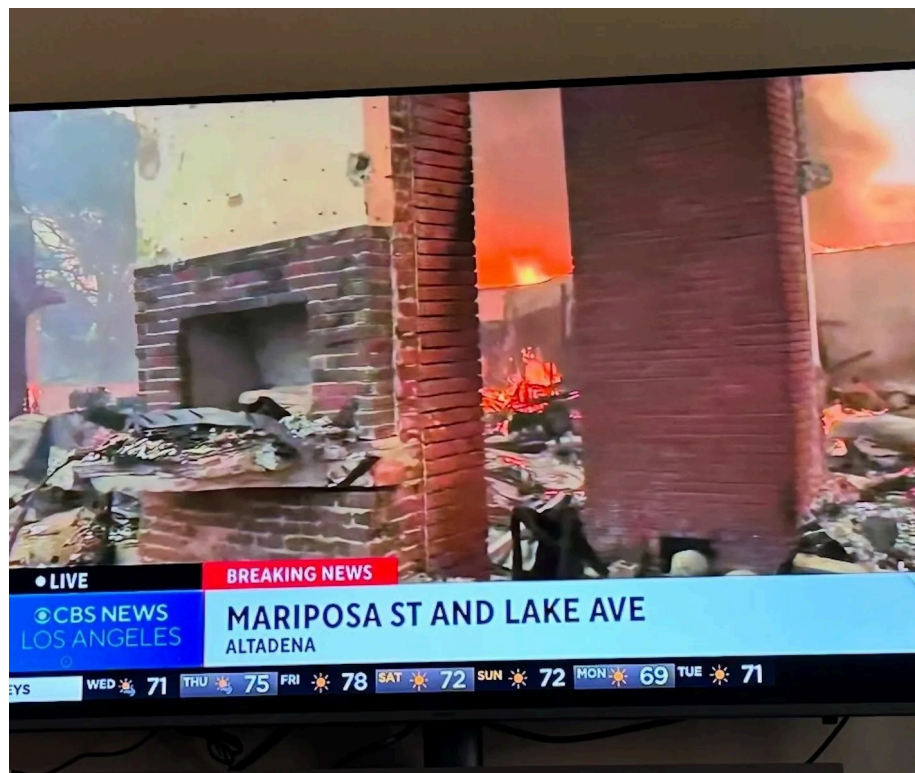
Even for those not directly impacted, the LA art world has come to a standstill, with museums and galleries shuttering and planned events abruptly called off.

Andrea Gyrody, director at the Weisman Museum of Art at Pepperdine University in Malibu, said the opening of artists **James Clar and Isabel Yellin's solo exhibitions** scheduled for this Saturday, January 11, had to be postponed because of the fires. Clar was installing at the museum on Tuesday when he received a message that his Airbnb near the Getty Villa in Pacific Palisades had burned down.

Speaking to *Hyperallergic* from a friend's guest room in Venice, practicing artist and ArtCenter College of Design adjunct professor Amir Nikravan shared that both his and his parents' Altadena homes were destroyed. Nikravan confirmed that his Pasadena art studio was untouched, but that he lost his office, all of his drawings, and 28 individual artworks that he kept at his house only blocks away from his parents' residence.

He was made aware of the destruction through a news broadcast that included footage of his family's incinerated home.

"I literally only have the clothes I'm wearing, but that's the same story as thousands of others," he said in a phone call. "Altadena is home to so many creatives, and we've lost everything. The supermarket, the coffee shop, the pottery studio, the hardware store ... The entire block across the street from me is gone."



Altadena artist and professor Amir Nikravan captured the moment he saw his and his parents' incinerated homes on CBS News after evacuating to a friend's house in Venice. (photo by and courtesy Amir Nikravan)

Unsure of how to proceed in the immediate aftermath of the Eaton fire, Nikravan worries about finding housing and how the disaster will affect the rental market as thousands of people have been left homeless. He also lamented the monumental loss of important artwork and historical artifacts in compromised private collections.

“At first, I was worried about the Getty Villa, but now I’m thinking about how many critical pieces of art history have been taken by fires destroying people’s homes and collections,” he said, listing off colleagues and friends whose homes were also destroyed.

Director, curator, writer, and painter Aaron Rose, who showcased his Hollywood home enclosed porch studio in an LA edition of *Hyperallergic*’s [***A View From the Easel***](#) series just three weeks before the fire, confirmed that he and his loved ones — and two rabbits — heeded the evacuation order last night as firefighters took on the Sunset fire that blazed across Hollywood Hills.

“Helicopters worked throughout the night and knocked down the fire. My studio is covered in dust and ash, but that can be handled,” Rose said. “Everyone (including the rabbits) is safe, but it’s a tragedy for the city as a whole. So many people have lost so much.”

In addition to the loss of his home, Aparicio mourned for the greater devastation of the Altadena community, home to scores of artists.

“Altadena is the most special place in LA. People loved its history. They cared for and preserved houses for generations,” he said. “I’m never gonna leave LA. I grew up here.”

Isa Farfan contributed reporting.