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L.A. Artists Mourn What Was Lost in the Deadly Fires: 'It Was a Little Paradise'


Artists share their experiences evacuating ahead of the Eaton and Palisades Fires—and returning to find their homes destroyed.



One of the McCarthy family homes destroyed in the Eaton Fire. Paul McCarthy's bronze sculpture, *Picabia Idol*, stands amid the smoking rubble. Photo by

Alex Stevens, courtesy of Paul McCarthy studios.

Sarah Cascone (<https://news.artnet.com/about/sarah-cascone-25>) January 17, 2025

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On January 7, Los Angeles erupted into flames. Fueled by drought conditions and an intense Santa Ana wind event with gusts of over 90 m.p.h., the Palisades and Eaton Fires have devastated large swaths of the city, collectively burning over 12,000 structures to the ground—among them, the homes of artists, collectors, dealers, curators, and other art professionals.

The Palisades Fire ignited around 10:30 a.m. along the Temescal Ridge Trail in the Santa Monica Mountains, quickly engulfing nearly all of the Westside neighborhood of Pacific Palisades. (Both the hilltop [Getty Center](https://www.getty.edu/) (<https://www.getty.edu/>) and the [Getty Villa](https://www.getty.edu/visit/villa/) (<https://www.getty.edu/visit/villa/>) on the Malibu Coast have found themselves within the mandatory evacuation zone but are still safe, the latter miraculously (<https://news.artnet.com/multimedia/getty-center-fire-2598364>), able to beat back fire on its grounds the first day of the conflagration.)

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Around 6:15 p.m., just over an hour's drive inland in good traffic, the Eaton Fire started burning in the San Gabriel Mountains. It spread rapidly, largely destroying Altadena, a historically diverse neighborhood with thriving Black and Hispanic communities.

The fires burned indiscriminately, incinerating nearly all in their path, including vegetation, businesses, schools, churches, and family homes. A report from the [Wildfire Alliance](https://www.wildfire.org/wildfire-alliance/) (<https://www.wildfire.org/wildfire-alliance/>), a partnership with [My Safe L.A.](https://www.mysafela.org/) (<https://www.mysafela.org/>) and the city's fire department, called the Palisades fire the most destructive in the state's history. Together, the fires have burned an area of about 60 square miles—slightly smaller than Washington, D.C., and reportedly claimed two dozen lives. For the affected communities, the loss is unfathomable.



The Getty Villa art museum is threatened by the flames of the wind-driven Palisades Fire in Pacific Palisades, California, on January 7, 2025. Photo: David Swanson/AFP via Getty Images

As firefighters continued to work to contain the blaze, I spoke with artists who lost their homes and studios to the flames. Still reeling from the unexpected disaster, these artists each have their own individual stories. But common threads unite their experiences, from initial disbelief, to unthinkable grief, to appreciation of the outpouring of support from the art world and beyond.

There are too many artists affected by this tragedy for me to speak to them all. A partial list of others affected (and their GoFundMe pages if applicable) is as follows: [Rebecca Baron](https://www.gofundme.com/f/supportDougandRebecca) (<https://www.gofundme.com/f/supportDougandRebecca>), [Erin Berkowitz](https://www.gofundme.com/f/support-erins-recovery-from-altadena-fire) (<https://www.gofundme.com/f/support-erins-recovery-from-altadena-fire>), [Sula Bermudez-Silverman](https://www.gofundme.com/f/znvv2s-support-the-bermudezsilvermans-after-the-eaton-fire) (<https://www.gofundme.com/f/znvv2s-support-the-bermudezsilvermans-after-the-eaton-fire>), [Seth Bogart](https://www.gofundme.com/f/help-seth-and-chris-recover-from-fire-losses-in-altadena) (<https://www.gofundme.com/f/help-seth-and-chris-recover-from-fire-losses-in-altadena>), [David Bratton](https://www.gofundme.com/f/support-heather-and-davids-recovery-from-the-eaton-fire) (<https://www.gofundme.com/f/support-heather-and-davids-recovery-from-the-eaton-fire>), [Brian Lee 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Paul McCarthy (<https://www.artnet.com/artists/paul-mccarthy/>), **Mara McCarthy** (<https://www.instagram.com/maramay8/?hl=en>), and **Damon McCarthy** (https://www.instagram.com/mccarthy_studios/)



One of the McCarthy family homes destroyed in the Eaton Fire. Photo by Alex Stevens, courtesy of Paul McCarthy studios.

For decades, Paul McCarthy, age 79, has been a pillar of the art community in Altadena, supported by his own close-knit family—three generations all living in the neighborhood, his artist children Damon (51) and Mara (45) working alongside their mother, Karen, on McCarthy's projects. But when the Eaton Fire broke out, McCarthy was thousands of miles away.

"I was setting up a show in London and my son and Karen both called me. Karen said she had left because of the high winds. It had blown out all the power," McCarthy said. Horrified, he watched events unfold from afar, before rushing back to Los Angeles later in the week, the Hauser and Wirth solo outing he was working toward postponed indefinitely.

The fires claimed all three family homes, plus Damon's editing studio, burning to ash family heirlooms, a historic art library, and countless irreplaceable artworks by not only McCarthy, but many of his famous artist friends. (The family was hesitant to identify those works by name, lest it complicate the insurance claims process.)

"We didn't get anything out," McCarthy said. "In our immediate family, within two or three hours, everything was gone."

The only surviving pieces are bronze statues and a large-scale outdoor sculpture of a snail, a collaboration between McCarthy and [Jason Rhoades](https://www.artnet.com/artists/jason-rhoades/) (<https://www.artnet.com/artists/jason-rhoades/>), singed but still standing.



"How weird is that?" Mara, who also runs the [Box Los Angeles \(https://theboxla.com/\)](https://theboxla.com/) gallery, said. "The snail carries its home on its back. And now I'm carrying my home on my back."

She and fiancé Peter Lasell, a DJ and designer, had only moved into their home a few months ago, after buying it from artist [Rachel Khedoori \(https://www.artnet.com/artists/rachel-khedoori/\)](https://www.artnet.com/artists/rachel-khedoori/), Rhoades's widow.

"We were building a future there, and it's gone," Mara said.

Her parents had purchased their home in 1989, rebuilding much of the structure themselves. There was originally no roof, after there was an incident with the previous owners cooking drugs, Mara said, but "over the years we made that place like a Shangri-La."

It was Damon who confirmed the loss of all four properties. He and his 24-year-old son, Brennan, stayed behind as long as they could, fighting to save their home of 25 years. When the garden hose ran out of water, they cut a hole in the pool cover and began filling up trash cans, dousing windblown embers that threatened to set the property on fire. The fire department was nowhere to be found, and they soon realized they were fighting a losing battle.

"We stayed until we were literally catching fire ourselves... A garden hose isn't going to do shit versus a 60-foot flame and embers the size of a plate," Damon said, his voice breaking as he recalled putting out flames on his son's shirt. "There's just a moment where you have to choose between your life or an object, and you get in the car and you go."

That was at about 4 a.m. Navigating downed tree limbs and burning cars, they managed to make it to Damon's studio, a couple of miles away, to save their pets—but not the important paintings he had stashed there earlier, or McCarthy's forthcoming films. When he drove back to Altadena three hours later, his home, renovated in 2015 with state-of-the-art fire-resistant materials, was in ashes. So too were his parents' and sister's houses, and even the studio.



One of the McCarthy family homes destroyed in the Eaton Fire. Photo by Alex Stevens, courtesy of Paul McCarthy studios.

"The houses were basically on the ground just burning. And then like six- or seven-foot-tall gas flames coming out of every piece of property, just spewing natural gas out on fire," Damon said. "Smoke and dust and wind and ash... It was like a desert on fire."

Rebuilding will be difficult, and the family has concerns about the current community of artists getting priced out, given how Altadena property values have risen in recent years. But they are appreciative of how much people seem to want to help.

"We've had a lot of outreach from a lot of people," Mara said. "it's just a little hard to know what to tell them to do."

Molly Tierney (<https://mollymtierney.com/>).



Molly Tierney's home destroyed in the Eaton Fire. Photo by Alex Stevens, courtesy of Paul McCarthy studios.

In 2009, as a 22-year-old, Molly Tierney took a major risk, moving into an abandoned Altadena home and claiming squatters rights. She became a homeowner through adverse possession, and, on artist's meager salary, painstakingly cleared out six tons of garbage and rebuilt the dilapidated 1923 home.

That included diligently refurbishing a formerly wood paneled fireplace featuring hidden [Ernest Batchelder](https://www.artnet.com/artists/ernest-a-batchelder/)—famous in Southern California—as a pandemic project, and recently building herself a wooden porch. Now, the fireplace is the only thing left standing.

"It just breaks my heart," Tierney said. "I just put so much love into it."

She realized it was time to evacuate when she could see the fire on the hill behind the property. The power was out, so Tierney lit a candle and gathered what she could. A piece of pottery by her grandmother, her camera gear and hard drives, some jewelry, a couple of books, the deed to her house, and her passport.

"When I shut the door, I just said 'everything in this house is art,'" Tierney said. That included not only almost her entire life's work as an artist, but her grandfather's oil paintings as well as works from friends and young local artists she had saved up to buy.

"I don't have a lot of money, but I was buying other people's art—I was supporting them," she added.

When I spoke to Tierney, she was sheltering with her close friends, the McCarthys—she works for Paul, and has for years co-hosted a raucous Christmas party with Mara.

It was clear they were taking comfort from their shared plight, and their ability to be together in a time when the familiar comforts of home and their community they had built had been ripped away. But despite her determination to rebuild, longterm plans, and what those might look like for Altadena, remained hard to envision.

"We all love Altadena, and we all want to be there, but the town is like a war zone," Tierney said.

Like others, she has been touched by the outreach of support she's received in the wake of the fires, including \$27,670 toward her [GoFundMe](https://www.gofundme.com/f/support-molly-in-the-aftermath-of-the-eaton-fire) (<https://www.gofundme.com/f/support-molly-in-the-aftermath-of-the-eaton-fire>).

"It's just been very, very overwhelming—but also quite beautiful," Tierney said.

Ross Simonini (<https://www.rosssimonini.com/>)



The Eaton Fire destroyed these new "Levities" paintings by Ross Simonini. Photo courtesy of the artist.

When the artist, writer, and musician Ross Simonini and his wife Katie left their home Altadena at about 8 p.m. Tuesday, it was before any official evacuation notice. Their three-month-year old baby, Sophia, was coughing because of the smoke from the fires, and they were worried about the air quality.

"We were considerably farther from the fire than seemed dangerous at that point," Simonini said. "We were not at all thinking that we would never see our home again."

The young family had a friend with them, plus their dog, so there was very little space in the car to pack more than a few essentials to get them through the night in Echo Park.

"We woke up in the morning, and our house was gone," Simonini, who got the news from a text thread with his neighbors, said. "I still get shivers thinking about it. We started watching the news of drones flying over the neighborhood. It was just endless destruction."

He had purchased his home about four years ago, and had been running a small community art space called [Alicia Zone](https://www.alicia.zone/) (<https://www.alicia.zone/>) in another small building on the property, hosting concerts and exhibitions for local artists.

But both buildings burned to the ground, the house taking with it about 20 new paintings for two upcoming exhibitions, hundreds of paintings that were never meant to be for sale—including childhood artworks—hundreds of drawings, notebooks, and the artist's whole archive. The only artwork Simonini took with him when evacuating was a couple of portfolios of drawings.

"It's just a feeling of being erased," Simonini added. "Artworks are made from moments that can never be recreated, at least for me. They are these confluences of magical experiences. You just catch them, and it's a document of that moment in time."

In the immediate aftermath, there has been an outpouring of support, including a GoFundMe for the family that has raised \$63,789 to date.

"People talk so cynically about the art community and capitalism, but the art community has been generous and loving and familial throughout all of this," Simonini said.

He's grateful he's still young enough to make new work, but mourning the loss not only of his own "perfect" white brick home, built in 1947, but of the entire neighborhood, from the hardware store to favorite restaurants.

"Altadena was a very special place, and it was the only place that ever felt like home to me. Living under the mountain there, with streams and waterfalls, it was a little paradise," Simonini said, noting that the family had a vegetable garden, a rose garden, and a native plant garden on their property.

For now, the future is uncertain, but he is committed to reopening Alicia Zone to help bring the community back together. And Katie works in the green building industry, which Simonini expects will play a big part in the rebuilding effort.

The family is now staying at a friend's home in Sebastapol, north of San Francisco, the stress of beginning to navigate the complex waters of insurance and starting over—FEMA already rejected their initial claim—compounded by caring for an infant.

"She's still not sleeping through the night. When you have a newborn, it's already as if someone has dropped a bomb into your life," Simonini said. "Everything is in turmoil, and for this to happen at this period of our life... it's pure chaos, total upheaval of life as I knew it."

Alec Egan (<https://www.artnet.com/artists/alec-egan/>)



Alec Egan in his home studio before it burned in the Palisades Fire. Photo by Chad Unger, courtesy of the artist and Anat Ebgi, Los Angeles/New York.

Five years ago, Alec Egan, age 40, moved back into his childhood home in the Palisades, with his wife, screenwriter Harper Gill. The couple has since made the 1940s ranch house their own, carrying out extensive renovations at a cost of close to \$1 million while raising two boys, now ages four and six months.

Last week, Egan was among the first to become aware of the Palisades Fire, spotting what he believes was possibly the initial plume of smoke in the hillside behind his house while he was getting ready for the day.

"It looked like a small campfire, maybe a half mile away. By the time my wife got out of the shower, it had grown exponentially," Egan recalled.

There wasn't an evacuation order yet, but he sent his wife to get the kids and began making frantic calls to try and arrange transportation for the suite of paintings he had just finished for an upcoming solo show at Anat Ebgi, his Los Angeles gallery.

Soon, he could see that the sky was black with smoke and the cars on his two-lane street were all headed in the same direction—away from the fire.

"I realized people were panicking. You would have had to fly in a helicopter to get the paintings out. There was absolute gridlock," Egan said. "You know those scenes in zombies movies? That happened in our town. People actually left their cars. Their cars melted to the ground and they ran to the beach for safety."

It took him five hours to go one mile, and every back route he knew, but Egan was able to get to safety.

Even after the chaos of the evacuation, he still had hope.

"I thought, 'this is an extreme disaster situation, but they are going to unleash the navy seals of firefighters on these hills to put this thing out,'" Egan said. "I thought they just hadn't gotten there yet."

But when he went back the next morning, borrowing a friend's motorbike to drive through police barricades, he found a worse-case scenario. The street was still actively on fire, and all that was left was the fireplace and, bizarrely, their Christmas wreath, lying on the driveway.



The studio of Alec Egan before it burned down. Photo by Chad Unger, courtesy of the artist and Anat Ebgi, Los Angeles/New York.

The family lost everything, including everything Egan had painted the last two years, as well as his earlier paintings he had saved for himself, and works traded with artist friends, including [Srijon Chowdhury](https://www.artnet.com/artists/srijon-chowdhury) (<https://www.artnet.com/artists/srijon-chowdhury>).

"It's almost too devastating to really even feel. But there's this weird existential comfort that our whole fucking town burned down," Egan said.

"I think if some collector dropped a painting or a gallery had mishandled it, I would feel some kind of way," he added, "but the fact that fire took it away and it was like this huge unbelievably awe-inspiring force of nature... I don't know man, I have this weird reverence for their death."

For now, the family is sheltering in a hotel, with the baby sleeping in a pack n play in the bathroom. They do not have a GoFundMe, but Anat Ebgi will give Egan 100 percent of the proceeds of [sales of the poster](https://shop.anatebgi.com/products/alec-egan-poster) (<https://shop.anatebgi.com/products/alec-egan-poster>) from his 2022 exhibition, available for \$100.

"People do seem to care. People seem to be treating this like it's a huge national tragedy, and that's exactly what it is," Egan added, noting that it amid the chaos, he's having a hard time telling people how they can actually help. "We have a deep commitment to our neighborhood, so I think we're going to try to rebuild."

Brad Eberhard (<https://www.instagram.com/eberharb/>)



Two sculptures were all that survived at Brad Eberhard's studio and art gallery, Alto Beta, in Altadena. Photo courtesy of the artist.

For 12 years, 55-year-old artist Brad Eberhard maintained a studio space in a small shopping center in Altadena. For the last three years, it's also served as the neighborhood's only art gallery, a space called [Alto Beta](https://www.altobeta.com/) (<https://www.altobeta.com/>) that operated on a shoestring budget, open to the public only on Sunday afternoons.

It all burned to the ground in the Eaton Fire.

"I went back with an NPR reporter and photographer. There was nothing recognizable other than an aluminum door frame," Eberhard said. "You could see rubble and smoldering ash—that was it."

The gallery had just opened a show of 10 paintings by [Mary Anna Pomonis](https://www.maryannapomonis.com/) (<https://www.maryannapomonis.com/>). And Eberhard was at his studio on Tuesday, photographing a suite of 16 ceramic sculptures that were slated to leave the next morning for a now-cancelled two-person show with Robert Gunderman at the Mt. San Jacinto College of Art and Design in San Jacinto.

"I was at my studio the day before until about 4 p.m. It was blustery and blue skies, and I didn't have a concern in the world," Eberhard said.

By the time he realized the gallery was in the path of the fire, it was too late to go back. Then the owner of the neighboring pizza place sent a video of the entire shopping center engulfed in flames.



"My gallery was small—a passionate hobby, but I think very appreciated by the art community," Eberhard said. "My mission was to show people who had never had a solo show before. I showed really high-caliber artists who just needed a door opened for them."

The amount of attention the gallery is getting now, after its physical demise, has been surreal. (Its only previous press came in in November, from *Artillery Mag* (<https://artillerymag.com/the-suburbs-are-dead/>).

"Instagram keeps giving me awards for how many views my burning gallery gets," Eberhard said. (On a more positive note, Alto Beta also received its first invitation to an art fair, to the *Santa Monica Post Office* (<https://www.santamonicapostoffice.com/>), set to debut in February.)

The artist already has a guest venue lined up for the gallery's upcoming shows.

"The response has been insanely generous. It's actually more of a community than I even knew that was there," Eberhard said. "I am very moved."

But the loss is significant—and the gallery did not have rental insurance. Eberhard estimates he lost about two dozen works traded with other artists, as well as 30 paintings and 60 ceramics from his own work. There was also his collection of some 2,000 vinyl records, perhaps a couple hundred art books, and a 60-gallon aquarium where artists staged tiny mini shows for the fish.

Amid the rubble, only two sculptures remained largely intact. One, poignantly, was a pair of lungs.

"I'm sad," Eberhard said. "I'm sorry for the things I've lost, but so many people lost more."

[Ariane Vielmetter \(https://arianevielmetter.com/\)](https://arianevielmetter.com/)



Ariane Vielmetter's home before the Eaton Fire. Photo courtesy of the artist.

When the Santa Ana winds picked up, Ariane Vielmetter took the advice of the weatherman and packed up a crate with important documents in her car. Then, she carried on with her day, eating dinner and putting her six-year-old Theodore to bed, warning him that they might need to leave before morning.

When she saw flames out her window, the 37-year-old set her evacuation plan in motion. Vielmetter's parents also live in Altadena, and also had a second house in the neighborhood, about a mile south, that was to be the meeting point if things got bad.

"We got everybody settled and we tried to go back to sleep, but at that point you could see the flames from their house as well," Vielmetter said. At 3 a.m., she woke up and smelled smoke. Now, there was an evacuation order for their evacuation safe house.

"The air was gray. You could barely see outside because the smoke was so thick," Vielmetter said.



The swimming pool at Ariane Vielmetter's home after the Eaton Fire. Photo courtesy of the artist.

The family drove to her sister's house in Claremont. By that point, friends and neighbors were beginning to get word of the extent of the devastation. Braving downed power lines and still-burning flames, her parents drove back and confirmed that Vielmetter's home was gone, as was their second home. The first—where they'd moved during the artist's high school years—had miraculously survived, likely thanks to a neighbor who had stayed behind hosing down the roofs until the threat passed.

It was a shock to Vielmetter, as she and her husband, furniture designer James Anderson, had just completed a two-year rebuild on their home, which included replacing everything with fire-retardant materials. (They had moved into the 1947 house in 2016, initially renting from her parents before taking over the mortgage in 2020.)

"My husband had just finished making custom bookcases for the whole house and my son's room had a climbing wall that doubled as storage. It was a real DIY life that we had built for ourselves there," Vielmetter said.

The one possible silver lining was that the couple had kept their art, including trades with classmates and friends, in a storage unit during renovations, and still hadn't retrieved it. But everything else they owned burned, including Vielmetter's engagement ring, and her beloved garden.

She's been astonished at the number of strangers who contributed to her [GoFundMe \(https://www.gofundme.com/help-ariane-and-james-after-fire\)](https://www.gofundme.com/help-ariane-and-james-after-fire), which has raised \$40,189 to date. But she asked that people also donate to her son's kindergarten, [Aveson Community Organization \(https://www.avesoncommunity.org/\)](https://www.avesoncommunity.org/), which also burned in the fires—along with hundreds of other businesses and essential parts of the community.

"Altadena had a special feel to it," Vielmetter said. "I have a really strong faith that it will come back."

[Kathryn Andrews \(https://www.artnet.com/artists/kathryn-andrews/\)](https://www.artnet.com/artists/kathryn-andrews/)



Kathryn Andrews took a photo of the smoke from the Palisades Fire before evacuating her home, which would burn down in the blaze. Photo courtesy of the artist.

[Kathryn Andrews \(https://kathryandrews.net/\)](https://kathryandrews.net/) is no stranger to the destructive power of fire. In 2020, she lost a small home in Juniper Hill, on the other side of the San Gabriel Mountains, in the Bobcat Fire.

"This time, my home was burned along with all of my personal belongings," she said of the house she was renting in Tahitian Terrace, a historic neighborhood of mobile homes in Pacific Palisades.

The 51-year-old had moved about a year ago, after 24 years in the city. "I learned of this place and fell in love with it. It was right on the ocean and you know that's a dream for many people in Los Angeles to live so near the water," Andrews said. "The community consisted of people of all ages, and architecture from from all different periods, with incredible foliage. The nature was just spectacular."

She learned of the fire from a friend, who called to warn her there was a large plume of smoke that seemed very near her home. Andrews got her two Bedlington terriers, Cooper and Coco, her passport, and drove to a friend's house in Santa Monica.

A firefighter neighbor, who stayed behind to try and extinguish the flames, was the one who told her of her home's fiery fate. The fire department did not arrive, Andrews said, until it was too late.



Kathryn Andrews's neighbor took this photo of the smoldering remains of their home after the Palisades Fire. Photo courtesy of the artist.

Her personal art collection, including works by L.A. sculptor [Peter Shire](https://www.artnet.com/artists/peter-shire/) (<https://www.artnet.com/artists/peter-shire/>), and L.A. painters [Alex Olson](https://www.artnet.com/artists/alex-olson/) (<https://www.artnet.com/artists/alex-olson/>), [Lesley Vance](https://www.artnet.com/artists/lesley-vance/) (<https://www.artnet.com/artists/lesley-vance/>), and [Jim Shaw](https://www.artnet.com/artists/jim-shaw/) (<https://www.artnet.com/artists/jim-shaw/>), all burned to the ground.

But in the face of unimaginable loss, Andrews has turned her energies toward aiding others, helping organize [Grief and Hope](https://www.gofundme.com/f/help-rebuild-the-lives-of-las-artists-and-art-workers) (<https://www.gofundme.com/f/help-rebuild-the-lives-of-las-artists-and-art-workers>), a GoFundMe that hopes to raise \$500,000 to distribute directly to artists and art workers impacted by the fires. Already, more than 150 victims have reached out. (Andrew's personal [GoFundMe](https://www.gofundme.com/f/help-kathryn-andrews-rebuild-after-fire) (<https://www.gofundme.com/f/help-kathryn-andrews-rebuild-after-fire>) has separately raised \$45,156.)

"We've also been trying to share information about all kinds of resources," Andrews said. "We've been in conversation with representatives from many organizations across the city who are working together to offer as much support to the community as possible, including studio space, legal assistance, medical support, and other aid."

[Alice Könitz](https://www.artnet.com/artists/alice-konitz/) (<https://www.artnet.com/artists/alice-konitz/>)



The sunset over the Altadena home of Alice Könitz and Peter Kim before it burned in the Eaton Fire. Photo courtesy of the artist.

"I don't know how I'm going to go forward with making art," [Alice Könitz](http://alicekonitz.com/) (<http://alicekonitz.com/>) said after the destruction of her Altadena home of 14 years. The fire came in the wake of another major loss. Since the death of her mother in October, she has been in Germany, helping her father make new living arrangements.

Then came the phone call from her partner, artist Peter Kim, not at their customary time. He was evacuating, and wanted to know if he should take Anton, their 25-year-old cockatiel.

"He wasn't taking it too seriously," Könitz, who is 54, said. She insisted Kim take the bird, and also their important documents. Later, she called back, suggesting he take her hard drive as well, but it was already too late.

"I lost a lot of artworks from friends. I lost a 500-piece edition. I lost many many drawings, countless notes, I don't even know. A lot of irreplaceable stuff. We made a lot of the furniture ourselves," Könitz added.

"It was an old wooden house, I think from 1908, with a fireplace and a big yard with a vegetable garden," she said. "In the summers when it would get really hot, I would put up a hammock on the porch or under the orange tree."

And it wasn't just Kim and Könitz who lost their homes on the property. Kim had converted the back carriage house into apartments, and most of their tenants were artists: [Delbar Shahbaz](http://www.delbarshahbaz.com/) (<http://www.delbarshahbaz.com/>), David Hughes, [Daniel Mendel Black](https://www.artnet.com/artists/daniel-mendel-black/) (<https://www.artnet.com/artists/daniel-mendel-black/>), and Beatriz Cortez. They had built a tight knit community on the property, and it was snuffed out overnight.

"They were all friends," Könitz said. "There is an enormous amount of art that burned up in the fire at our place."

She's delayed her trip back to California for a few more days to give herself more time to apply for emergency assistance and make temporary living arrangements. (The couple's [GoFundMe](https://www.gofundme.com/f/help-rebuild-peter-and-alices-home-and-artists-community) (<https://www.gofundme.com/f/help-rebuild-peter-and-alices-home-and-artists-community>) has raised \$47,350 to date.)

"I'm scared to go back to L.A.," Könitz admitted. "I wanna be there. I wanna support my partner and the community, but I don't know—it's going to be intense to go there."

[Beatriz Cortez](https://beatrizcortez.com/) (<https://beatrizcortez.com/>)



The inside of Beatriz Cortez's home in Altadena before it burned in the Eaton Fire. Photo courtesy of the artist.

Beatriz Cortez was one of the artists who lost her home at the property of Alice Könitz and Peter Kim. And like Könitz, she was far away when the fire ignited, about six hours north for her teaching job at UC Davis as she is for the first half of every week.

"I wasn't home, which was terrible because I wasn't able to get my things out," Cortez said. "What's difficult for me is that the whole thing reminds me of the war in El Salvador and losing my home. There wasn't a fire, but I had to leave in two hours."

That was in 1989, when the 54 year old was just 18. The few things she had managed to take with her before migrating to the U.S. are now lost forever.

"I had my memories from my childhood like my grandma's books and my dad's paintings," Cortez said, noting that she wasn't able to transfer her rental insurance when she moved in. "And it was a really beautiful home, with stained glass windows... it was so important for me to be in that community of artists where I felt safe."

But the artist, who was included in the [2024 Venice Biennale](https://www.labiennale.org/en/art/2024/nucleo-contemporaneo/beatriz-cortez) (<https://www.labiennale.org/en/art/2024/nucleo-contemporaneo/beatriz-cortez>), is also quick to point out how fortunate she is considering the situation. (She hasn't started a GoFundMe, because "other people need more help right now than me.") Cortez has her place in Davis, and, once she figures out a place to stay in L.A., her Lincoln Park studio, where much of her work remains safe. (Her next project is completing a sculpture for the [Boston Public Art Triennial](https://www.thetriennial.org/) (<https://www.thetriennial.org/>).

"When I first migrated to Arizona, I would have to move every two weeks or every month and it was very difficult," Cortez added. "But now there are so many people who have offered me their homes and who have offered to help. It's not like when I migrated, because I have so many someones who care."

Kelly Akashi (<https://www.artnet.com/artists/kelly-akashi/>)



Artists Kelly Akashi, photographed in her Los Angeles studio before it was destroyed in the Eaton Fire. Photo by Brad Torchia, courtesy of Lisson Gallery.

It was the winds and the power outage that made Los Angeles native Kelly Akashi leave her 100-year-old Altadena home and studio for the night. To avoid being alone during the storm, she and her cat, Turnip, went to stay with a friend in Los Feliz.

"I thought, 'just in case a fire breaks out, I better take things I'd be really upset leaving,'" Akashi said. "So I took my father's photo album from when our family were interned in Poston, Arizona; some family heirlooms and jewelry; my computer and one notebook; and my passport and a little cash."

Akashi, age 41, bought her home in May 2021. It formerly belonged to well-known L.A. artists [Jim Shaw](https://www.instagram.com/jimshawstudio/?hl=en) and [Marnie Weber](https://www.artnet.com/artists/marnie-weber/), and included their custom-built studio.

"It was a very big accomplishment for me to be able to purchase a home," she said. "And I had been really excited to take on this part of Los Angeles art history and an artistic lineage I always looked up to."

Once she moved in, other things about the neighborhood soon captured her heart, like her neighbor Bob, always on his porch greeting passersby.

Soon after the fire started, Akashi began to worry: "I started hearing the hardware store around the corner was on fire, but there was nothing I could do." It was Bob who went back and confirmed that the entire block burned down.

Akashi's house was filled with art—her favorite pieces of her own, and works by friends. In the studio, there was new work that was meant to be picked up on January 20 for Akashi's debut show at Lisson Los Angeles. She was philosophical about the loss.

"My work is so much about mortality. I make unique casts of my body, and I've always thought that the way that this work will resonate will be very different when I pass away, and my body won't be reproducible anymore," Akashi said.

"Considering impermanence and these forces that are bigger than us, like time, aging, mortality has always been a part of the work. It's a painful lesson, but it's also very real," she continued. "And I always feel like the power of art is to create space for these kinds of conversations that we want to suppress in our day-to-day life."

As she wades into the uncertain waters of insurance claims and government assistance, Akashi is taking it step by step. In lieu of donations for herself, she has requested donations for Bob, which can be made on his [GoFundMe](https://www.gofundme.com/f/help-the-carro-way-family-recover-from-eaton-fire).

"There's a lot of hope to rebuild in a way that reflects the values that Altadena organically grew into," Akashi said. "We don't want developers coming in buying all the property and turning it into a very different part of town."

Asher Hartman (<https://www.asherhartmanintuitive.com/>)



Asher Hartman photographed outside his Altadena apartment during the COVID-19 pandemic. Photo by Ian Byers-Gamber.

When Asher Hartman evacuated Altadena, he didn't think his home was in any danger. He went to his studio because the internet had gone out at home, and he needed to do work.

"I thought I would be gone for a few hours. I took two of my laptops and actually, my grandmother's necklace. I don't know why I took that," he said. "It's brass with this kind of roaring lion."

Hartman spent the night in the studio, and woke up to images of destruction. On Reddit, he found a photo of the restaurant in front of his house on fire. It was his landlord who confirmed that his apartment of seven years had been lost to the flames.

"I have a pretty charged up and beautiful altar in my home—or I did. And I can't even recall the personal objects that were on that altar. People's pictures, people's artworks," Hartman said. "I lost two works by [Candice Lin](https://www.artnet.com/artists/candice-lin/) (<https://www.artnet.com/artists/candice-lin/>). An original [Grant Wood](https://www.artnet.com/artists/grant-wood/) (<https://www.artnet.com/artists/grant-wood/>), print that my grandfather had bought for \$5 in the '40s."

Also lost were his hard drives, and with them Hartman's personal archive, as well as his birth certificate and other documents: "It's really *tabula rasa*. It's as if I don't exist—but I'm sure I do somewhere, in the cloud."

But he also described himself as incredibly lucky. Hartman still has a studio, and he's found a place to stay in Highland Park. He's already back to rehearsals for his performance art.

"I've been really fortunate the L.A. art world is full of incredibly giving people," he added.

While Hartman isn't a homeowner, he is still deeply invested in the neighborhood's future.

"I would love to live in Altadena again. That community is inexpressibly beautiful," he said. "I think that is absolutely, 100 percent critical that we preserve that—not as it was, because that's not possible, but with the same spirit."

[Marwa Abdul-Rahman](https://theboxla.com/artist.php?id=7212) (<https://theboxla.com/artist.php?id=7212>).



The home of Marwa Abdul-Rahman after its destruction by fire. Photo courtesy of the artist.

Nearly a life-long resident, Marwa Abdul-Rahman, now 50, moved to Altadena when she was four. In 2009, she purchased her own home, a 1949 mid-century modern nestled amid pine trees.

"I just fell in love with the trees and I wanted my children to play under them," she said. "It was a little place where we all felt safe."

But when the Eaton Fire came roaring through, no one was safe. Earlier that evening, Abdul-Rahman's fiancé, writer Robert Dewhurst, had dropped her off at an event in Eagle Rock. She hadn't wanted to drive with the intense winds.

When the fire started, he first went and got Abdul-Rahman's elderly parents, who still live in the neighborhood. Back at the house, he tried to save the three cats, but one got spooked and ran off.

"The whole time when he was evacuating he could see the fire in the mountains a couple of streets down," Abdul-Rahman said. "I felt helpless. I was somewhere else and I didn't have a car and I couldn't come back."

Robert came and got her, and they thought about going back for her car and some paintings. But the smoke was too thick. The next morning, Abdul-Rahman learned that the house was gone, along with artworks from friends, colleagues, and mentors who have since died, as well as ancient African artifacts.

"It was just a shock. It was very hard for me to understand it was gone," she said.

Fortunately, just last year, Abdul-Rahman had moved her studio from the garage to a space about five miles away. So while her journals and sketchbooks burned at home, the majority of her work was safe the studio. And her parents' home somehow managed to survive the flames. To date, she's raised \$19,480 on [GoFundMe](https://www.gofundme.com/f/support-marwa-and-robbie-after-eaton-fire) (<https://www.gofundme.com/f/support-marwa-and-robbie-after-eaton-fire>).

"We hope we will rebuild, but the value of homes here have gone up so much, so we are worried about being priced out, and we are worried about developers coming," Abdul-Rahman said. But for the moment, she's just thankful to have survived.

"When you lose so much but you have your life and your loved ones," Abdul-Rahman reflected, "you realize maybe things aren't important at all."

Camilla Taylor (<https://camillataylor.com/>).



Camilla Taylor in her art studio. Photo courtesy of the artist.

On January 7, Camilla Taylor was making the long drive home from a monthlong stay at the Sitka residency in Oregon. She returned just in time to see her home one last time.

"As I was driving home, I saw the fires just getting bigger and bigger... When I was driving up to the house, there were cars abandoned in the street and trees all over the place," she said. "I parked, and I ran inside, and I yelled at my partner, 'Grab the cats! We gotta go!'"

The only other thing they took was a bag Taylor's partner, Jason Tröff, had packed—of t-shirts. Not of any sentimental or monetary value, and not even particularly useful for his job in the legal field. They tried to go back to see what remained of their home, but were turned away by the National Guard.

Because the power was out, and because the evacuation was so rushed, Taylor has had a hard time processing the reality of the loss.

"It was the first piece of property we've ever owned. It's so hard to buy property in Los Angeles. We were very proud of the fact that we finally managed it," she said. "And we bought it because it had this amazing detached garage that was my art studio."



The remains of Camilla Taylor's home, with some of her burned sculptures. Photo courtesy of the artist.

"Thankfully, I do have two galleries that have a lot of pieces on consignment. But most of my work was at home. It really used every little corner of storage possible, packed full of sculptures and prints all over, and now that's all gone," Taylor added. "I have an upcoming solo show, and half of the work was done for that. Now I need to completely remake everything."

For now, the two are staying at the studio of a friend in downtown Los Angeles. Finding more permanent living quarters—and a studio equipped to work in glass, metal, and ceramics—will take time.



The remains of Camilla Taylor's home. Photo courtesy of the artist.

Longterm, Taylor would like to rebuild, but she is worried about the availability of construction supplies and labor given the extent of the devastation. In the short term, she is thankful for the support of the art community.

"People always say that L.A. will talk nice and be mean, but the amount of help we have received and that other people have received is incredible," Taylor, who has raised \$56,430 on [GoFundMe \(https://www.gofundme.com/t/support-camilla-and-jason-after-eaton-fire\)](https://www.gofundme.com/t/support-camilla-and-jason-after-eaton-fire), said. "I feel like I'm better dressed now than I was before the fire!"

[Fawn Rogers \(https://www.artnet.com/artists/fawn-rogers/\)](https://www.artnet.com/artists/fawn-rogers/)



Fawn Rogers's home in Mandeville Canyon before the Palisades Fire. Photo courtesy of the artist.

January 8 was [Fawn Rogers \(https://www.fawnrogers.com/\)](https://www.fawnrogers.com/)'s 51st birthday. She had spent the previous night in her West L.A. studio, and was driving back that morning to her home of 18 years in Mandeville Canyon, in the mountains north of the Getty Center. Then, her husband called about the fire.

As she neared home, "it was super scary," Rogers said. "Like Armageddon. Apocalyptic. Much, much worse than I was imagining."

Burning trees in the streets and her backyard already on fire, Rogers grabbed what she could: their dog, Fatty Arbuckle; three small works by [Miriam Cahn \(https://www.artnet.com/artists/miriam-cahn/\)](https://www.artnet.com/artists/miriam-cahn/), [Ana Karkar \(https://www.artnet.com/artists/ana-karkar/\)](https://www.artnet.com/artists/ana-karkar/) and [Sally Mann \(https://www.artnet.com/artists/sally-mann/\)](https://www.artnet.com/artists/sally-mann/); and a 1998 bottle of Dom Perignon. Her own work was too big, including *Epoquetude*, a monumental painting of an oyster that hung in the dining room.



Fawn Rogers, *Epoquetude*. She fears the painting was destroyed or severely damaged when her house burned in the Palisades Fire. Photo courtesy of the artist.

"While my husband tossed our important documents in a bag, I stood on the deck and took a few seconds to say goodbye to the first home, first safe place I have ever lived," Rogers, who was unhoused for years, recalled.

She sees the fires as a wake up call to the destructive nature of manmade climate change—something that is a major theme in her practice.

"A lot of my work really is about the conflict of human nature with the unbuilt world," Rogers said.



The Palisades Fire as seen from the West Los Angeles studio of Fawn Rogers. Photo courtesy of the artist.

When her house caught fire, the blaze presumably destroyed many of her works, as well as Roger's great-great grandmother's silver and turquoise hair pins, which represented the artist's last link to her Cherokee heritage. Safe in the studio, she drank the vintage champagne—delicious, with a beautiful golden color, she reported.

"You just have to be happy that you're not harmed," Rogers said. She was calling from the car while trying and failing to drive back up to the ruins of her home past National Guard checkpoints. (Her understanding is that the home is still standing, despite sustaining significant fire damage.)

"My heart is still racing. I'm feeling really fragile," she added. "But compared to all the displaced people all over the world who are living through wars, and the genocide that is currently still going on in Gaza, we have so many resources here. We have a lot of opportunity. There's going to be funding to rebuild."

Salomón Huerta (<https://www.artnet.com/artists/salom%c3%b3n-huerta/>) and **Ana Morales-Huerta** (<https://www.instagram.com/anamoshroom/>)



Ana Morales-Huerta and Salomon Huerta's Altadena home before and after the Eaton fire. Photo courtesy of the artists.

For three years, artist couple [Salomón Huerta](https://www.instagram.com/salomonhuerta/?hl=en) (<https://www.instagram.com/salomonhuerta/?hl=en>) (59) and Ana Morales-Huerta (34) have rented a home on a little cul-de-sac in Altadena, forming strong bonds with their neighbors. They found the place through close friends, [Patricia Valencia](https://www.instagram.com/patriciavalencia111/) (<https://www.instagram.com/patriciavalencia111/>), and [Emmett Walsh](https://www.instagram.com/emmettwwalsh/) (<https://www.instagram.com/emmettwwalsh/>), owners of the fine art print publisher [Ollin Editions](https://www.ollineditions.com/) (<https://www.ollineditions.com/>), who managed the property on behalf of Valencia's mother.

"On Monday, I heard there were going to be strong wind storms and I was super worried," Morales-Huerta said.

By 8 p.m., she could see the fire through the trees, even though there hadn't been an evacuation order yet—that wouldn't come until around 3 a.m. But Morales-Huerta only waited long enough for Huerta to return home from his studio an hour away, before heading to Van Nuys to stay with his sister.

"My car is just a two-seater. I was only able grab a David Bowie *Diamond Dogs* album that costs over \$10,000 that a collector gave me," Huerta said.



Ana Morales-Huerta and Salomon Huerta at their Altadena home before the Eaton fire. Photo courtesy of the artist.

"I grabbed one of my husband's paintings and some documents," Morales-Huerta added. The painting, still drying, was a large work just completed for an upcoming museum show.

The couple expected to be able to return home the next morning. But the news came in by text on a group chain with the neighbors. All their homes were gone, and with them, one of their own, a 95-year-old woman who must have slept through the evacuation order when it finally came through.

"It looks like a bomb exploded in that neighborhood," Huerta said. "I left my archive—old transparencies and slides that were not digitized. All my life, I've only had one sketchbook from when I was nine years old, and that was left behind."

"We lost a collection of work by a lot of our friends. We had a beautiful ceramic piece by [David Korty](https://artnet.com/artists/david-korty/) that I really miss. Our ceramics that we had collected from Oaxaca, Mexico," Morales-Huerta said. "But when we learned that our neighbor had died, that put things into a different perspective. I feel lucky to be alive."



A peacock in Altadena. Photo by Ana Morales-Huerta.

The couple, who married last year, did not have renter's insurance. Also lost were much of Morales-Huerta's early work—but thankfully, most of her more recent pieces are currently on exhibition.

They are grateful to have already raised \$44,755 in their [GoFundMe \(https://www.gofundme.com/t/help-salomon-and-ana-recover-after-fire\)](https://www.gofundme.com/t/help-salomon-and-ana-recover-after-fire), but aren't sure where they will go next, especially if landlords enact rent hikes in the wake of the fires. And the loss of Altadena and everything it represented is still enormous.

"It was the first time in my life that I felt a sense of community," Huerta said. "It was a hidden gem."

"Every time we think about it, we cry," Morales-Huerta added. "Me and Salomón always talk about how we loved it because of how much nature was around us. You know, we would wake up to birds and fall asleep to the owls."

[T. Kelly Mason](https://www.artnet.com/artists/t-kelly-mason/) and [Diana Thater](https://www.artnet.com/artists/diana-thater/)



The Altadena home of artists T. Kelly Mason and Diana Thater. Photo courtesy of the artists.

Conceptual artist [T. Kelly Mason](https://www.tkellymason.com/) (https://www.tkellymason.com/) age 60, and his wife, pioneering film and installation artist, [Diana Thater](https://www.thaterstudio.com/) (https://www.thaterstudio.com/), age 62, have lived in Altadena since 2016.

"We're not right against the urban-wildlife interface. We're a block or two away. Sometimes the mountains seem close and pushed up against your view and sometimes they seem far away, but when they have flames shooting off of them they seem really close," Mason said.

He had thought in the past about what he would do in the event of an evacuation. The first priority was the cats, and then digital materials.

"Thankfully I got the servers and the drives. I saved our digital lives. But we lost all the tapes. A lot of those have cool footage that might have been repurposed later. During the pandemic, I think I re-scanned and re-mastered every single piece of film I ever shot. But the drawings and notebooks are gone," Mason said. "My books! I'm going to miss them so much. I had a good collection of books and art catalogues and handmade guitars. I had a hand-built modular synthesizer."

"Sometimes it weighed on me, like, Why do I have so much crap? That's not a problem anymore," he added.



The couple has insurance, and rebuilding is a possibility.

"Diana's like, 'I never want to live there again,' and I'm like, 'Are you sure?' We loved it there," Mason said. "The vibe was really good. There was a main street with Williamsburg-style restaurants, good food and other cool stuff. And now it's all roped off by the National Guard and Humvees and stuff."

But on a personal level, it's hard to grapple with what the fire means for their art careers.

"I always thought my work was my insurance. No matter what happens, you've got your work," Mason said. "Then not having your work and your notebooks and drawings from your whole career, you just don't have that insurance anymore. That's what a lot of artists think about as their retirement plan. That in itself is tragic."

Reporting by Brian Boucher.

Eddie Rodolfo Aparicio (<https://www.eddieaparicio.com/>)



Eddie Rodolfo Aparicio's home was destroyed by the Eaton Fire. Photo courtesy of the artist.

With strong winds in the forecast, Eddie Rodolfo Aparicio had the foresight to pack a box of important documents in his car. But when he realized that the fire was bearing down on his Altadena home of three years, he panicked trying to pack.

"I ran around the house with a backpack, but I didn't know what to grab. Nothing seemed important enough, but then I ended up not filling the bag," the 34-year-old said.

Aparicio, his partner Jordan, and their dog Dune evacuated to Burbank, monitoring the fire's progress until he finally went to bed. While he slept, the winds shifted, setting much of Altadena alight.

When his home succumbed to the flames, Aparicio lost a large number of paintings by his father, Juan Edgar Aparicio, including a particularly sentimental early work depicting him and his siblings camping in Yosemite as children. (Most of his own work, thankfully, was safe in his North Hollywood studio.)

Buying the house, built in 1942, had been a major achievement for the artist, thanks in large part to a grant from L.A. Metro. (Aparicio also had his first institutional solo show (<https://www.moca.org/exhibition/moca-focus-eddie-rodolfo-aparicio>) at the [Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles](https://www.moca.org/) at the end of 2023, and was featured in last year's [Whitney Biennial](https://news.artnet.com/art-world-archives/whitney-biennial-2024-dissonant-chords-2466356) in New York.)

The couple had worked hard to make their house feel like home, including doing all the landscaping themselves to put in a native plant garden with cacti and boulders. Inside were handmade bookshelves, lighting fixtures they hung themselves, and hundreds of plants.

"We walk our dog a lot, and just everyday my partner and I would walk around and look at each other and just say that how lucky we were to have been able to move to Altadena, and how much we loved it and how we never wanted to leave," Aparicio said. "This is just a huge loss, this history of artists and musicians and this diverse community that hasn't been segregated in the way that most of L.A. is. That's the main loss that we're all feeling."

The artist is nervous about developers potentially buying up properties and changing the neighborhood's unique character, but takes solace in Altadena's history of organizing.

And Aparicio has found the outpouring of support he has personally received—including a [GoFundMe \(https://www.gofundme.com/f/help-jordan-and-eddie-rebuild-from-eaton-fire\)](https://www.gofundme.com/f/help-jordan-and-eddie-rebuild-from-eaton-fire) raising \$40,706—to be “life affirming,” he said. “Capitalism makes us feel like we’re detached from each other, but when we have experiences like this, people become at the forefront of everything.”



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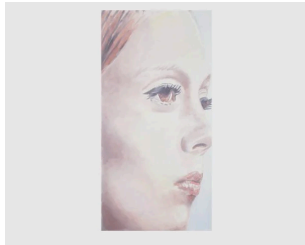
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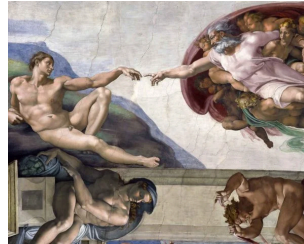
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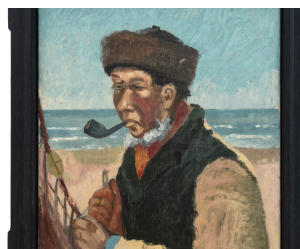
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