

# Los Angeles Artists Mourn as Their Studios and Artworks Go Up in Smoke

Artists who lived and worked in Altadena and the Pacific Palisades are worrying about irreplaceable losses, and their livelihoods.

By Robin Pogrebin, Julia Halperin and Zachary Small

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The Los Angeles painter Alec Egan had spent two years preparing work for a solo exhibition that was scheduled to open in late January at Anat Ebgi gallery on Wilshire Boulevard. Now every one of those canvases is gone.

“It’s terror and despair,” said Egan in a telephone interview from the Beverly Hills Hotel, where he, his wife and two young children had evacuated — the only hotel he said was open.

Egan is among several Los Angeles artists who lost their studios, their artworks — and in some cases their homes — in this week’s fires. Now many are picking up the pieces of their lives and worrying about whether they’ll be able to make a living anytime soon.

Diana Thater, an artist celebrated for her nature-inspired film and light installations, and her husband, the conceptual artist T. Kelly Mason, stored their archive — including decades’ worth of raw video footage, master tapes, hard drives and paintings — in a temperature-controlled garage that burned to the ground along with their home in Altadena.



The smoldering wreckage of the Altadena home of Diana Thater and T. Kelly Mason, where they stored their archive in a garage that also burned to the ground. T. Kelly Mason

“It’s hard to live to be 62 years old and lose your entire life in one night,” Thater said from a friend’s house in nearby Atwater Village, where she and Mason are sleeping on the floor with their three cats.

Also gone is a work-in-progress she had been commissioned to make for the reopening of the expanded Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 2026. “The raw footage is the thing that kills me,” Thater said. “Now, everything we have is in this tiny room.”

Tools and materials can be replaced, like the melted camera equipment whose value Thater estimated at hundreds of thousands of dollars. But the artwork is irreplaceable.

The multimedia artist Kathryn Andrews lost her Pacific Palisades home and her entire art collection, including works she had bought or acquired through trades with prominent artists like Rashid Johnson, Jim Shaw and Charles Long. “They serve as markers of this beautiful network of friendship that happens amongst artists,” Andrews said. “It’s just really sad to lose that. Insurance can’t replace that.”



The artist Camilla Taylor, shown earlier at the Venus Over Los Angeles gallery, is mourning “over 20 years of artmaking” that was lost in her West Altadena home studio. Brad Torchia for The New York Times

The artist Camilla Taylor is mourning “over 20 years of artmaking,” including hundreds, if not thousands, of prints, drawings, and sculptures in metal, ceramic and glass that she stored in her West Altadena home studio, now rubble. She had been preparing for three exhibitions this year, including one at the University of Nevada,

Reno. “Usually, I’m a very last-minute artist, but I was so pleased with myself — half of the work for a show in December was done,” she said. “Now it’s evaporated.”

Kelly Akashi, who makes haunting glass and bronze sculptures about the impermanence of the natural world, expected to return to her Altadena home and studio when she left and drove to a friend’s house on Tuesday evening. “You’re looking around like, what am I going to do, lug a bunch of sculptures in my Honda?” she said.

In the end the fire claimed Akashi’s home and studio, including archival work, recent sculptures and several pieces she planned to show at her inaugural exhibition at Lisson Gallery in Los Angeles later this month. She had considered naming one of her recent works “Monument to Loss.” Now it is actually lost.



Egan in his studio. via the artist and Anat Ebgi, Los Angeles/New York;  
Photo by Chad Unger

Egan, the artist who lost the works for his upcoming exhibition, lived and worked out of the house he grew up in on Bienvenida Avenue in the Pacific Palisades. He described watching the fire spread from his window while his wife was in the shower. “There was a little tiny plume of smoke and by the time she got out of the shower the plume was 30 football fields big,” he said. “Within the hour the sky was black.”

Sending his wife and children out ahead of him, Egan initially stayed behind to try to arrange for trucks to rescue his paintings. But his effort quickly proved fruitless and ill-advised: the entire neighborhood was rushing to evacuate around him. When he returned days later, Egan said, his house had “burned to the ground.”

Many Pacific Palisades residents have lost treasured artworks and family heirlooms. Some of the wealthiest collectors in Los Angeles are concentrated on the West Side of the city, which includes Pacific Palisades.

On Tuesday night as the wildfire swept across the lawns, a man hopped onto his bicycle and handed two paintings to a nearby NBC Los Angeles reporter, Robert Kovacik, for safekeeping. “Backyard’s on fire,” the bicyclist said in a video that has gone viral on social media. “I’m out of here.”

Among the celebrated artists in Altadena whose homes or studios known to have been damaged or destroyed by the fire was Paul McCarthy, who lived in Altadena near his daughter, Mara, a gallerist, and his son, Damon, also an artist. “It’s the home I grew up in,” Mara said in a telephone interview from a friend’s house in Silver Lake. “Our whole family, our whole community, is devastated.” As a result of the fire, she added, her father had postponed his upcoming show at Hauser & Wirth in London.

The artist Ross Simonini said he lived right down the street from Paul McCarthy. “We lost our home, my studio, all my art from — ever,” Simonini said by telephone from a rest stop off Interstate 5. He was on his way with his wife, infant and dog to stay with his father in Northern California. “It’s so horrific, seeing it now. I have an aerial shot from our neighborhood and six blocks in every direction, there’s nothing.”

**Robin Pogrebin**, who has been a reporter for The Times for nearly 30 years, covers arts and culture. More about Robin Pogrebin

**Zachary Small** is a Times reporter writing about the art world’s relationship to money, politics and technology. More about Zachary Small

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