

TOP STORY

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ENTERTAINMENT

# Some artists lost their life's work in LA wildfires. Fellow artists are helping them recover

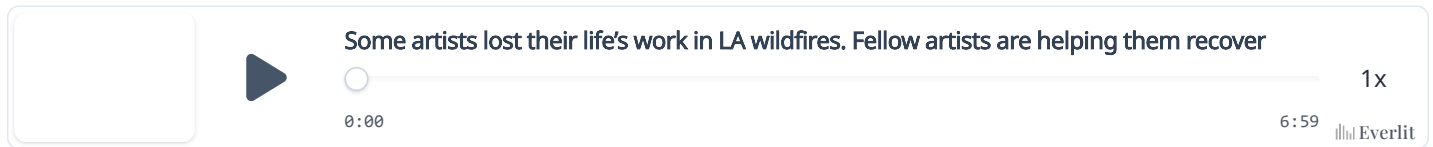
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Rapper Anthony Obi, aka Fat Tony, an Altadena resident whose home was destroyed in the Eaton Fire, poses for a portrait on Thursday, Jan. 16, 2025, in Los Angeles.

Chris Pizzello/Chris Pizzello/Invision/AP



LOS ANGELES (AP) — Anthony Obi never imagined the night of Jan. 7 would be the last time he'd step inside his safe haven.

The Houston rapper, known professionally as Fat Tony, has lived in the Altadena neighborhood for a year and says he and his neighbors were prepared for heavy winds and perhaps a few days of power outages.

"I totally expected, you know, maybe my windows are going to get damaged, and I'll come back in like a day or two and just clean it up," said the rapper.

But residents like Obi woke up the following morning to news that thousands of homes and entire neighborhoods had been burned to ash, destroyed by flames that wiped out large areas of Pacific Palisades and Altadena. Although the neighborhoods are on opposite ends of the county, they are known hubs for many of the city's creative community, housing filmmakers, actors, musicians and artists of various mediums.

"LA is not just rich, famous people who have giant mansions that were destroyed," said visual artist Andrea Bowers, who is assisting artists recover. "So many members of our community lost everything, they lost all their artworks and their archives, that's irreplaceable, a lifetime of labor and a lifetime of research."

"A lot of my collectors lost their homes," said figurative and conceptual artist Salomón Huerta, who lost his Altadena home of three years to the Eaton Fire and worries the art scene in LA will downsize as a result of the wildfire. "Before the fire, I was in talks with certain collectors. And then, after the fire, they're not in a good place to talk. I'm hoping that there's support so that the art scene can still thrive. But it's going to be tough."

Obi and Huerta lost not only personal treasures, business opportunities and homes but also vital equipment and professional archives, adding to their emotional burden.

Huerta left behind slides and transparencies of past work that he had planned to digitize for an upcoming book.

"Everything's gone," Obi said. "All of my stuff that is related to Fat Tony music that was in that house is gone, and it was the motherlode of it."

## From aftermath of one fire, a support network is born

Kathryn Andrews never imagined she'd experience another wildfire in her lifetime.

The conceptual artist was forced to flee her Pacific Palisades neighborhood as smoke drew near, the second time in four years she's had to escape a wildfire.

She lost her Juniper Hills property to the 2020 Bobcat fire, which burned a large section of rural Los Angeles County.

"I've already experienced one home being burned. I think you have a different focus after that. Maybe we become a little bit less attached to material things. And we began looking at a bigger long-term picture, thinking about, you know, how we live together in community, how we live in relation to the land and how we can work together to solve this," she said.

Andrews is the co-founder of relief effort Grief and Hope, which aims to support creatives financially as they enter the long road ahead and was founded alongside a group of gallery directors, art professionals and artists like Bowers, Ariel Pittman, Olivia Gauthier, and Julia V. Hendrickson.

"Our primary goal is getting people triage money for just whatever the most emergent need is," said Pittman.

The fundraising effort began shortly after the fires broke out with a Go Fund Me seeking \$500,000. They have now raised over \$940,000 of their new \$1 million goal via non-profit art space The Brick. As of Tuesday, Grief and Hope has received more than 450 inquiries, and Pittman says the funds will be evenly distributed to applicants. The deadline for artists to submit a needs survey has concluded, but the relief effort will continue fundraising until mid-March.

Grief and Hope also has five different groups of volunteers providing peer-to-peer support, helping with medical needs, safety issues, and renter's issues and collecting survey data to better serve their creative community.

"These are people who already have made very long term commitments in their work, including the five of us, towards building community and building sustainability around artists and art workers in our city and beyond," said Pittman.

For Grief and Hope, creating a more sustainable future for artists throughout the city begins with affordable studio spaces and housing.

## **Creative tools lost, and a long road ahead**

For photographer Joy Wong, losing her home of eight years meant losing the beauty of Altadena. She describes the overall area as "a pocket of heaven."

"I didn't want to leave," said Wong who safely evacuated with her husband and 2-year-old daughter. "We were just so in love with this house, and it wasn't just my house. It was also my studio space."

Many, like Obi, Wong and Huerta, have started GoFundMe accounts. Meanwhile initiatives and relief efforts have popped up around Southern California ready to assist with clothing donations, art supplies, professional equipment for creatives and more.

"I'm applying to everything," said Obi, who needs to replace his instruments and recording equipment.

Wong said she's received much support from family, friends and colleagues.

"I think I just have to kind of lean on the community and get back into shooting," she said. "I got to get all my gear back, too. It's going to be a long road, but it'll be OK."

## How some artists see LA's arts scene can be reborn

Superchief Gallery co-founder and director Bill Dunleavy said he believes that this is an opportunity to rebuild long-needed infrastructure for the arts throughout Los Angeles.

"Quite a lot was lost and in the areas affected by the fire. And it's going to affect rent prices and studio prices and art markets and everything else," said Dunleavy. "I've been so impressed with the amount of compassion that people feel and the sense of duty people have felt to help with this. ... I hope that continues into the coming years."

Creative director Celina Rodriguez said she hopes freelance artists and creatives continue to work and shoot production or projects throughout the city, rather than leaving because of the wildfires.

"Having lost so many locations that we would shoot, typically in Malibu, Topanga, the Palisades, all throughout. We will have to absolutely come together and figure out how we can continue working in Los Angeles ... and urging people to shoot productions here," she said.

Rodriguez and Dunleavy began collecting donations at the Downtown Los Angeles gallery and within 48 hours transformed it into a bustling donation center with over 150 volunteers. The duo are now working with displaced families to make sure their daily needs are being met.

Dunleavy said the relief effort has only encouraged him to take this work beyond just the donation center and explore the possibilities of non-profit work for the community.

"All of our wheels are turning now that we've seen the power that just self-organizing can have."

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