
Chapter Eighteen

Acquire

**...AS YOU ASK
SOMEONE WHO
RAISED YOU TO
CARE FOR YOUR
PROJECT.**

**PRACTICE
INTEGRITY...**

**DON'T FORGET
THIS PROJECT
RELIES UPON
MUTUAL AID.**



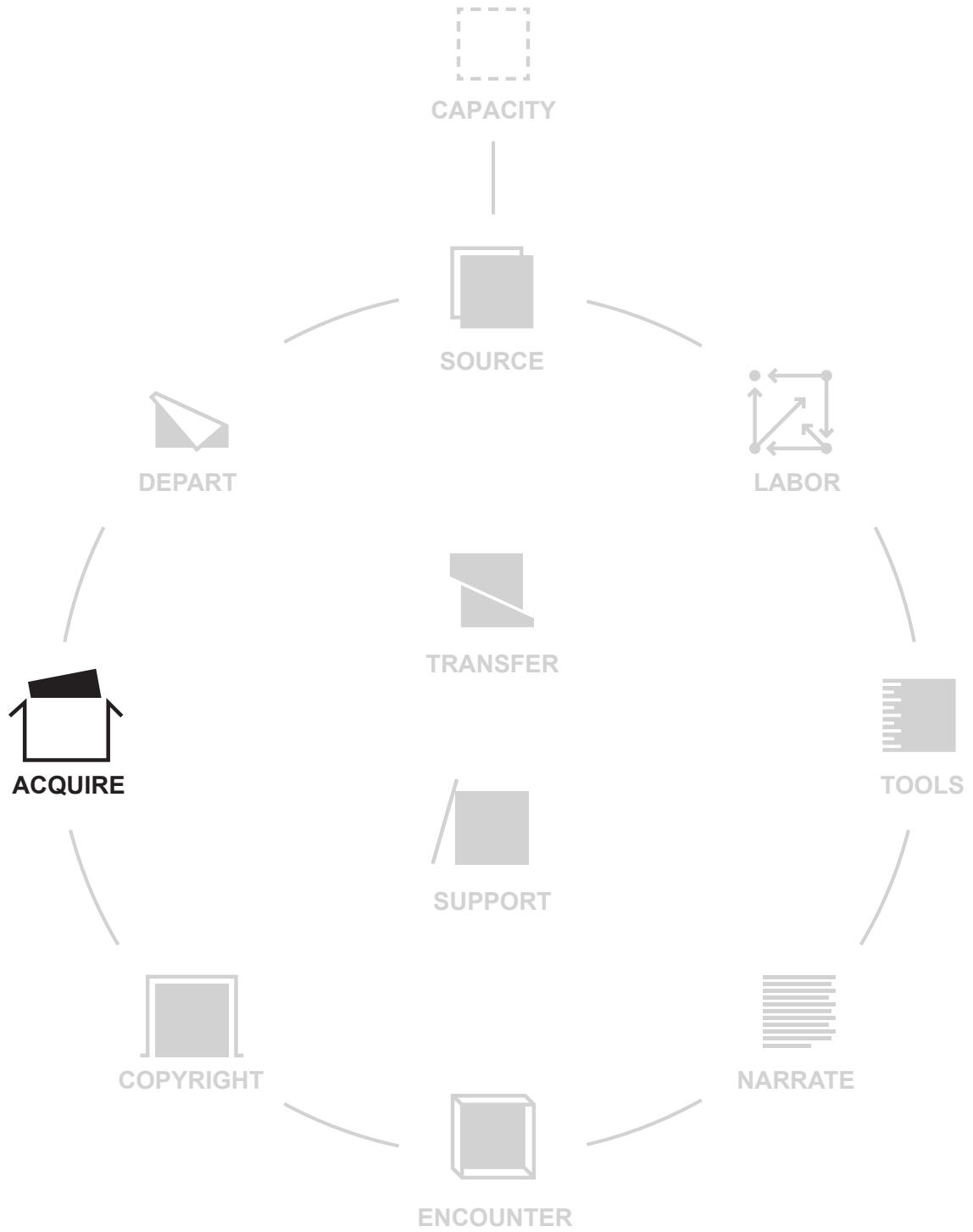
Acquire: the storage, maintenance, and stewardship of your project.

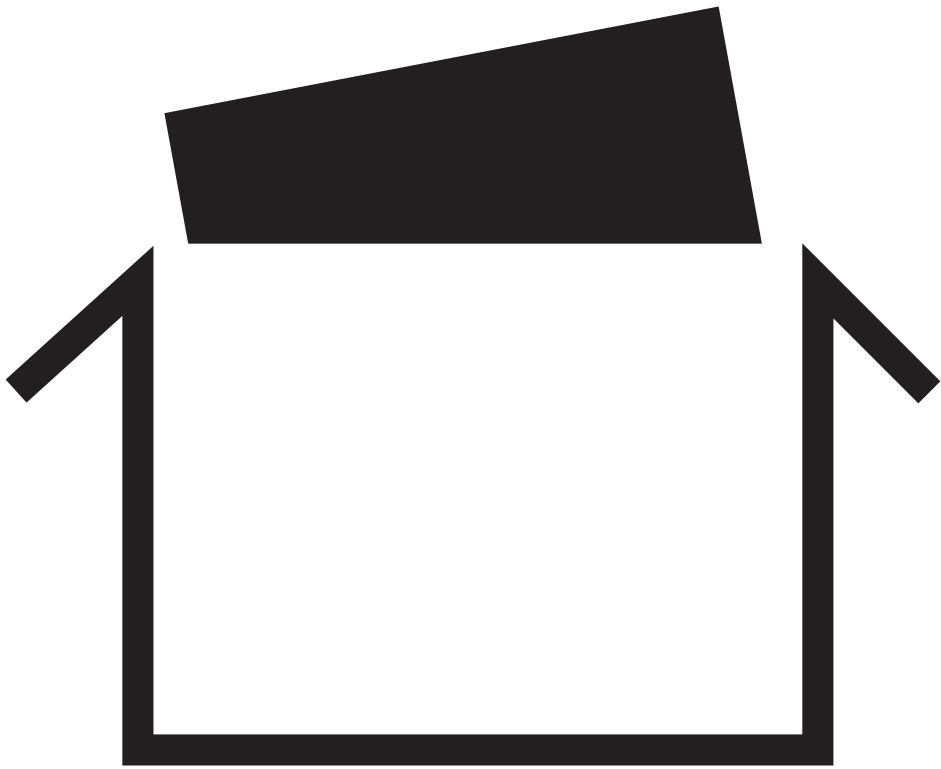
People who might acquire your work include: you, as you store and maintain your work somewhere; a friend or family member who might keep it in their house; community members who might keep it in a gathering space; someone working for a private collection, or a public museum or any person or institution who might steal your project and place it in their collection without your consent.

What if the acquisition of your project were integral to the project?

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We suggest that the following section be shared with the group as best suits your context, either read aloud—in whole or in part—or assigned to be discussed in your space of learning. Before you begin to read, we invite you to ground yourself in the space: notice the air on your skin and your feet on the ground. What are your feelings and sensations at this moment? What are you bringing to this text? Take a moment to become aware of this. We invite you to notice what comes up for you, as you are reading this chapter. We will ask you to reflect upon this at the end of this chapter.





Introduction

The phase of the lifecycle of any project that we refer to as “acquire” considers the storage, maintenance, and stewardship of your projects. You might dream that your project will be acquired by an elite institution with the resources to care for it for a hundred years or more. But in all likelihood, every project will either live and travel with you for your whole life, live with friends or family members, or be discarded. Even if your work *is* acquired by an elite institution, they cannot acquire all of your projects and they will not acquire them immediately after they are made. Your projects will be with you for years, or forever. We ask: What would happen if you made projects with yourself or your community as the desired stewards or acquirers of the project?

Story

Artist Antonio Serna created artCommon as a way for a community to acquire projects locally, for their neighborhood, and then circulate the projects from home to home. Serna said in our interview with him, “There’s [often] not a connection between artists and the communities they live in while making art. So I thought, well, there’s a surplus there [of artworks]. Why not open it up and get those works in circulation?”¹ Serna states that after art is added to a local artCommon, “the community is then free to borrow the art in the artCommon. The artCommon is collectively managed by all participants in the community. From this collective effort new relationships are made within the community on an individual and collective level.”² The first version of artCommon was piloted in Jackson Heights and was included in the Queens International 2013 at the Queens Museum in New York City. Serna is excited by the idea that someone reading this book would start an artCommon in their neighborhood. If you want to do so, contact Antonio Serna.³ Serna embodies the capacity that we call “Understand (Art) Community,” defined as the ability to be “reliably able to interact as an artist with other artists (i.e., in classrooms, in local art organizations, and across the art field) and within the broader society.”⁴ Serna hopes that artists will connect to their neighborhood, so that the capacity of “understanding art community” includes place, neighbors, and geography. *See Chapter 6: How Are You in the World and How Is the World in You? and Chapter 15: Encounter* ■ *for more.*⁷

Discussion

While you might dream that your project will be acquired by an elite institution, Elka Krajewska, artist and founder of the Salvage Art Institute,

reminds you, and all artists, to be wary of the fantasy that a collector cares about the non-monetary value of your project or, you, as an artist. Collectors often acquire projects for their speculative monetary value, keeping them in vaults as assets for potential future sales without ever looking at them or allowing others to see them.⁵ In an interview with us, Krajewska asked:

Is that all we have [as artists] ... to be in our studios, produce those things, and let them sit someplace else, and never see them again, and never have our friends see them again? The majority of the aspirations of an artist—to be bought or be shown—it is not part of what art is about for me. Discovering space where there is air between this contraption [the marketing and selling of artwork] for me, is where there is freedom.⁶

Krajewska is speaking about a relatively recent historical shift in the acquisition of projects by individual collectors. In tandem with the financialization of the global economy in the 1980s, where the scale and profitability of the finance sector increased exponentially, art was seen by financiers as a substantial investment asset, alongside stocks and real estate.⁷ The speculative acquisition of the work of *living artists* changed collectors (and artists) perception of art from one of cultural to financial significance.

If many collectors are driven by financial gain while acquiring projects, the given function of any cultural institution that acquires projects is to act as a gatekeeper for the transmission of knowledge from generation to generation. Projects that are deemed culturally valuable by the institution are acquired. The omissions in any collection speak loudly. Currently, the numbers of artists of color and female artists who are represented in major collections do not reflect the population at large. For example, since 2008, just 2.3 percent of all acquisitions and gifts and 7.7 percent of all exhibitions at 30 prominent United States museums have been of work by African-American artists.⁸ Works by women make up only 3–5 percent of major permanent collections in the United States and Europe.⁹ This occurs despite the fact that women make up 70 percent of students with BFAs and 65–75 percent of students with MFAs in the United States.¹⁰ These statistics do not account for nonbinary artists. Who do *you* see represented in the cultural institutions—museums, galleries, and community art spaces—around you?

In an attempt to create cultural equity, some institutions are changing their policies to prioritize acquiring the work of artists of color and female artists. The Baltimore Museum of Art announced in 2018 that it would deaccession seven works by white male artists, including Andy

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Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg, and Franz Kline, to “make room for works by contemporary female artists and artists of color.”¹¹ Even with increasing efforts to acquire these works, many artists do not trust cultural institutions whose practices and legacies of exclusion continue to haunt them.¹² Linda Goode Bryant, founder and director of Just Above Midtown (JAM) from 1974–1986, refuses to give JAM’s archival materials to dominant institutions that have approached her because she knows that her archive will be bound by the rules set by those institutions, and in many cases, these rules make it difficult for people to access the materials.¹³

Many artists believe that their projects should be cared for and acquired by people and groups who share similar cultural, political, or environmental concerns. Recognizing that the entity which acquires a project will have control over the circulation of that project, these artists seek out modes of acquisition that promote practices such as mutual aid, intimacy, and solidarity art economies. For example, the writer and scholar bell hooks decided to create an institute to house her life’s work in her hometown, close to the Appalachian hills in Berea, Kentucky.¹⁴ When asked why she would not prefer to place her work in a “reliable” institution like the New York University Fales Archive, she said, “I want my work to be accessible to my people.”¹⁵ For hooks, this means that the archive is located in geographic proximity to the communities that she wants to share her materials with. In New York City, Interference Archive is an archive that exists “to animate histories of people mobilizing for social transformation.”¹⁶ They animate these histories by allowing anyone to visit the archive, browse the stacks, touch the materials, and suggest public programs that matter to them.¹⁷ If you create materials in the context of social movements, or have a relevant collection that you want to donate to Interference Archive, you can contact them directly at info@interferencearchive.org.

If bell hooks and Interference Archive make entire archives accessible to the communities in which they are socially and historically important, how might you connect with collectors who truly care about your work, at the scale of one project and one collector? From 2009–2015, artist Adam Simon ran the Fine Art Adoption Network (FAAN), an online network, which “used a gift economy to connect artists and potential collectors.”¹⁸ All of the artworks on view were available for adoption. “Adoption” in FAAN means acquiring a project without purchasing it, through an arrangement between the artist and acquirer (or collector). Simon allowed artists to decide what agreements they wanted to make with the future stewards of their work. For example, would the work need to be on view? Who would be able to see it? Who would pay for shipping? Could the work be sold in the future? All of these agreements between artist and acquirers were negotiated, creating an alignment between the

artists' ideas about the acquisition of their projects and the many people who hope to own artwork but who cannot afford it. After six years, the project is no longer running because Adam Simon decided that he did not want to prioritize the labor required to maintain it, including writing grants to pay the computer engineers who built the database for the website. If you are interested in reviving FAAN, there are many artists looking to donate their works to people who will care for them. For advice from Adam Simon about his experiences running FAAN, write to us and we will put you in touch with him.¹⁹ Antonio Serna's artCommon, Adam Simon's Fine Art Adoption Network, and Interference Archive all use the language of the commons to refer to resources that are collectively managed. Interference Archive states that "[our] materials should be held in common: they belong to all those who played a part in their creation."²⁰

Some artists make incredibly specific requirements for the acquisition of their work, but few spend as many years thinking about it as the artist Dale Henry. In 1986, at age 55, Henry decided to stop producing art, and to focus instead on finding sites for the acquisition of his work. He continued to prepare his work for acquisition for over four decades, attempting to find appropriate collectors until his death in 2011, at age 80. Before he died, Henry dictated a letter to his attorney with instructions that it be sent to the curator of MoMA PS1 at the time, Alanna Heiss. It stated "This bequest is the total of my art and comes without request or consultation. Please forgive me. You are the only person I trust who has the standards required. If you do not accept the placement of the art over a period of years, the art will be destroyed."²¹ The letter further stipulated that if the request, consisting of over 200 paintings, was refused, Henry's work was to be burned. Heiss had curated Henry's work into a number of exhibitions in the 1970's. From 2013–2014 she mounted exhibitions of his work at the Clocktower Gallery and at Pioneer Works in New York City. Subsequently, many of his works were placed in major collections, including MoMA, which acquired an installation of eighty paintings.²² While this story is exciting, as it reinforces hopes that your projects will find a home in elite institutions, it is unusual.

The artist Adrian Piper's project, *What Will Become of Me* (1985–ongoing), speaks to the fantasy that many artists have of immortalizing themselves through the acquisition of their work in elite institutions. You might feel that if your work is held forever, you will be remembered forever. The artist requires that MoMA hold on to all of the hair and fingernails that she produces over her lifetime. As the museum describes in the text for *What Will Become of Me*:

Piper has filled honey jars with her hair and fingernails whenever she cuts them. The last container to be added will hold her cremated

remains. The jars are displayed on a shelf flanked by two documents: One is a personal account of the artist's experiences in 1985 when she started the project, and the other is a notarized statement in which Piper declares her intention to donate this work to The Museum of Modern Art. As both an African American and a woman—two groups that have traditionally been marginalized in the history of art—she is literally inserting herself into the Museum's collection.²³

In 2013, only 8 percent of the permanent collection at MoMA was made by female artists.²⁴ Piper demonstrates the extreme version of the dominant narrative about the famous artist—both the work and the artists body will be forever preserved in an elite institution. Note that institutions often represent their collections as being the final resting place for projects, yet they can deaccession, or take projects out of their collection, without notifying artists. Very rarely is the phase we refer to as depart discussed by institutions. See *Chapter 11: Depart* and *Chapter 14: Narrate* for more.²⁵

Quotations

“Part personal therapy, part naive entrepreneurship, we invite you to shop this collective purge of art, books, film and ephemera. As artists and art-workers, we all experience anxiety around our old work and our personal archives. Faced with these spectres of our former selves, whether from one's childhood or from last year the question becomes: what are we saving it for? Should we pull a Baldessari and light the shit on fire? Cathartic as that might be, the gesture is too grand for such a common problem. We've gone through those old “archival boxes” with our black and white photography. We peeked under the bed at our “early work.” And we invite you to buy it, gift it, hang it on your wall, adopt a little piece of our *oeuvres*.”

—Julia Sherman, 2014²⁵


“Many art students, especially those that live in rural agricultural communities, don't get to see [MoMA's collection of] artworks in person, and I wanted to emulate that experience for them. *not-MoMA* became a way to bring the students into the conversation by having them act as fabricators or “remakers” of iconic artworks.... The resulting exhibition in 2010 was a success and the artwork was subsequently “acquired” by the Portland Art Museum (PAM) via a donation from a social practice class at Portland State University (how that itself happened is actually quite complicated, but essentially the class used their course funds to buy the instructions to

create notMoMA, and then donated it to the museum to test the museum's capacity for owning an ephemeral artwork that was essentially a set of instructions that they would have to activate in order to ever show it). It's quite a commitment on everyone's parts to do this, and I appreciate that PAM is putting the collaborative effort into making the artwork happen again!" —Stephanie Syjuco, 2018²⁶

"Last year I accidentally discovered that one of my photographs was in the photography collection at the Los Angeles Contemporary Museum of Art (LACMA). I then did a deeper search and discovered that many of my photographs were in other collections that I had no knowledge of. I asked myself, as the maker of these works, do institutions that acquire works of art through secondary sources have a responsibility to inform makers that their work has been acquired by them? What if I don't want my work to be stewarded by certain institutions? What are my rights, having not gifted or sold these works to these institutions in the first place?" —Susan Jahoda, 2019

"At some point, when my storage unit was full, I realized that I had to stop making work the way I had been. I had been paying \$500 a month for the storage unit, and over twelve months that means I was spending \$6,000 a year to store my work. I could remake the work at least two times (in terms of labor and materials) for the same cost that I had paid to store it for one year! I realized that everything I make will come back home to live with me. So I started making sure that the sculptures I make can fit well in a gallery or public space, *and also in my apartment in New York City*. Recently, I made a table for a project and I designed it to look beautiful in the gallery space and *also to perfectly fit the width of my office at home*. I made another table for a public art commission and I made it to match my partner's work table, so that the two tables can sit side by side in our living room to form one big square table. I don't tell the curator or commissioning organization, but my partner always knows. I think of my home, and where the work will go in my home, when I make a new sculpture. This is very difficult for me because my home is small and I want to keep making things."

—Caroline Woolard, 2019



Here are more artists, groups, and projects that come to mind when we think about acquire: Conrad Atkinson / The collective Will Brown / Whitney Develle / João Enxuto & Erica Love / the Fine Art Adoption Network / Micol Hebron / Pablo Helguera / William H. Jackson / Jay Koh

/ Caleb Larsen / George Maciunas / Anontio Serna / Adam Simon. What artists, groups, and projects come to mind for you?

Reflection

1. Imagine the ideal place that might store, maintain, and steward a recent project of yours, for future generations. Is this place a home, an archive, a community space, a museum? Imagine it in detail and describe this place in 3–5 sentences. What conditions make it ideal for your project?
2. Would you want to have your work acquired through artCommons, Interference Archive, the Fine Art Adoption Network, or MoMA? In what context would you choose (or reject) each of these locations for the acquisition of your work?
3. * What feelings and sensations came up for you while you were reading this chapter? For example, did you feel surprise, frustration, or excitement? How did you hold these in your body? For example, did you sense these emotions in your shoulders, neck, and back while reading this chapter? *See the Social-Emotional Intelligence Project Reflection activity in Chapter 4: Teacher/Facilitator Guides.*⁷
4. What would it mean to understand artmaking as a site of interdependence, both locally and globally, rather than as a site of individual use and exchange? Remember, art is a system of relationships. We understand from the long history of economically oriented critical theory that behind any object exists a system of extraction, of production, and of circulation whose very histories are hidden at the moment in which the object appears as free-standing, as individual, as a thing, often a commodity. For us, in this book, that “thing” is the art object.

1. Antonio Serna, interview by Susan Jahoda and Caroline Woolard, at the School of Visual Arts, 2016.
2. Antonio Serna, *artCommon*, Art-Sharing Project, 2013–ongoing, <http://www.antonioserna.com/v3/projects/artCommon.shtml>.
3. Antonio Serna, "Antonio Serna," <http://www.antonioserna.com/>.
4. Capacity adapted from Ellen Winner, Lois Hetland, Shirley Veenema, and Kimberly Sheridan, *Studio Thinking 2: The Real Benefits of Visual Arts Education* (New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2013). See also Harvard Project Zero, "How Do Artists Use The Studio Habits of Mind?" Artcore, 2015. <http://www.artcorelearning.org/studio-habits-of-mind/>; See *Chapter 5: Capacities for more*. The specific statement utilized in this chapter, "I spend a lot of time identifying the sources that form my beliefs, and assess whether my sources are credible. I see myself in a state of continuous transformation, seeking to identify the root causes and historical conditions that form my beliefs and knowledge," was added by the authors and is not included in "Studio Habits of Mind."
5. For further reading, see Hito Steyerl, "Duty Free Art: Chapter 1-The National Museum," *e-flux*, no. 63 (March 2015), <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/63/60894/duty-free-art/>.
6. Elka Krajewska, interview by Susan Jahoda and Caroline Woolard, at the School of Visual Arts, 2016.
7. See Nathaniel Kahn, *The Price of Everything* (2018: Hot & Sunny Productions and Anthos Media), documentary, <https://www.hbo.com/documentaries/the-price-of-everything>; Tieran Morgan, "Your Money Is Safe in Art: How the Times-Sotheby Index Transformed the Art Market," *Hyperallergic*, January 15, 2019, <https://hyperallergic.com/476003/your-money-is-safe-in-art-how-the-times-sotheby-index-transformed-the-art-market/>.
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10. Robert B. Townsend, "Taking Note: How About Those Undergraduate Arts Majors," *Art Works Blog*, National Endowment for the Arts, October 5, 2017, <https://www.arts.gov/art-works/2017-taking-note-how-about-those-undergraduate-arts-majors>.
11. "Baltimore Museum of Art to Sell Seven Works by Men, Hopes to Diversify Collection," *Artforum News*, April 16, 2018, <https://www.artforum.com/news/baltimore-museum-of-art-to-sell-seven-works-by-men-hopes-to-diversify-collection-74988>.
12. Aruna D'Souza, *Whitewalling: Art, Race, & Protest in 3 Acts*, illustrations by Parker Bright and Pastiche Lumuma, (New York, NY: Badlands Unlimited, 2018).
13. Linda Goode Bryant, "Artist-Run Spaces," (Making and Being program series, Hauser & Wirth, New York, NY, February 1, 2019), <https://www.hauserwirth.com/events/23228-making-artist-run-spaces>, audio accessible on Bad at Sports, http://hwcdn.libsyn.com/p/7/f/b/7fb3f78b63df4a48/Bad_at_Sports_Episode_678_BFAMFAPhD_-_Artist_Run_Spaces.mp3?c_id=34188836&cs_id=34188836&destination_id=13070&expiration=1560890257&hwt=f2666e28ec25020cc4664b-12c9326fbd.
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