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How to handle fakes, copyright and catalogues raisonnés: Berlin institute offers tips for artists' estates

The first organisation of its kind in Europe to provide training and support for artists and their heirs

by [ANNY SHAW](#) | 4 March 2016



Hans Arp with Charlotte Weidler in his studio, Meudon 1957 Stiftung Arp e.V., Berlin/ Rolandswerth ((IV-139) © VG Bild Kunst, Bonn 2016

Over the past 25 years, there has been an explosion in the number of artists' estates. But, except for catalogues raisonnés, there has been very little academic research on the subject. The Institute for Artists' Estates, which launches this month in Berlin and is the first organisation of its kind in Europe, hopes to change this by providing training and managerial support to heirs as well as living artists. The non-profit organisation also plans to launch a doctorate programme focused on protecting artists' legacies.

Loretta Würtenberger, who founded the Institute for Artists' Estates with Daniel Tümpel, says artists enjoyed increasing wealth throughout the 20th century, which led to a "professionalisation in the field". The academic world is only now catching up, she says.

The Institute for Artists' Estates offers practical advice on all aspects of managing an artists' legacy, from staffing and budget to legal and authentication issues. "Mid-sized estates are often run by the relatives of an artist," says Würtenberger, who co-manages the estate of Hans Arp and Sophie Taeuber-Arp and that of Keith Arnatt. "They might not know how big a job it is or the necessary steps to take." Würtenberger is publishing a new book in June, *The Artist Estate: A Handbook for Artists, Executors and Heirs*, which offers further insights to the pitfalls and benefits of the profession.

The Berlin-based organisation will also act as a central point for artists' estates in Europe to pool resources. "Meeting and connecting with others who are in a similar position is important for sharing experiences and helping each other," says H  l  ne Vandenberghe, who looks after the estate of her father, Philippe Vandenberg, with her brothers. The first conference hosted by the Institute for Artists' Estates in Berlin in September will provide a forum for artists and heirs.

Copyright is one of the main issues facing artists' estates, with some exerting strict control over the use of images and others adopting much freer policies. The New York-based Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, set up 18 years before the artist died in 2008, last week announced it was relaxing its licensing agreements to allow free access to his works for museums, scholars and journalists. W  rtenberger describes the move as "very generous" and encourages others to do the same if they can afford it.

Meanwhile, over-zealous estates—such as Oskar Schlemmer's, which prohibited the reproduction of his work until copyright lapsed last year—can hinder an understanding of the artist. "Without images you can't have a catalogue, and without a catalogue you can't have an exhibition," W  rtenberger says.

Fakes, however, are probably the biggest threat for artists' estates. W  rtenberger says a catalogue raisonn   made within an artist's lifetime is one of the best protections against forgeries. "One of our main aims is to

campaign for living artists to structure their legacies,” she says. “It may seem removed from the creative process, but we try to get artists to think of their estate as the last work of art they make.”