

ARTISTS' LEGACY FOUNDATION

A YEAR OF HELLOS



Installation view of Viola Frey's works at Frieze London, shown with Jennifer King and Maryam Yousif, presented by The Pit, October 2025. Image: Damian Griffiths

Dear Friends,

As 2025 closes, I'm taking a pause to look back on the incredible growth and opportunities I have been privileged to witness from my new post as Executive Director. This past year is an example of what results from artists' commitment to support each other. Legacy gains longevity through remembrance, respect and mutual care. In lean times, friends are the ones who see us through.

For over two decades, the Artists' Legacy Foundation has been supported by a team of knowledgeable and devoted board members. Over the course of this year our board has changed, and I'd like to take a moment to thank a few people personally: Squeak Carnwath, Gary Knecht, Leah Levy and Sandra Shannonhouse.

The Artists' Legacy Foundation was founded by Squeak Carnwath, Gary Knecht, and Viola Frey in 2000. Since Frey's death in 2004, Squeak and Gary have dutifully and patiently led the charge of making sure our doors stay open. They championed the *Artist Award* as a key program, often hosting the reception at their home in Oakland. This year Squeak and Gary stepped away from the daily operations of Artists' Legacy Foundation in order to focus on their own careers but remain our trusted advisors. They are examples of giving forward and of the belief that artists know best how to support each other.

Leah Levy stepped down in January after 17 years of service. Leah's knowledge and attention to detail professionalized the Artists' Legacy Foundation, and ensured our viability. Leah is a personal mentor of mine, and the well deserved and long overdue attention Jay DeFeo is receiving is a nod to her quiet but intrepid efforts.

Board member Sandra Shannonhouse passed away at the end of October. Sandy's board membership began in 2007 and her actions demonstrated that commitment to an artist after their death is not for the faint of heart. It takes diligence and a deep understanding of the relevance of that artist's work. One foot in front of the other with no expectations. Sandy was a brilliant artist who put her own work aside to develop the Robert Arneson Archives with her son Kirk. She was a driving force in the creation of the Manetti Shrem Museum at UC Davis. Our condolences to her beloved family, and thanks for sharing her innovative and opinionated mind with us through the final days of her life. I am ever grateful to have seen her conviction first hand.



Sandra Shannonhouse and Squeak Carnwath, Artist Award reception, 2018. ALF photo.

We find ourselves in the midst of a revival of scholarship and interest in Legacy Artist Viola Frey, a testament to 20 years of stewardship. The monograph *Viola Frey: Artist's Mind/Studio/World* was released to the public in January - the result of more than a decade of archival research and four years of dedicated work. Included are more than 200 images of artwork and images from the archives and other sources, paired with thoughtful essays by Nancy Lim, Janelle Porter, Jodi Throckmorton, and an in-depth chronology by Cynthia de Bos, the volume brings Frey to life. Designed by the beloved Purtil Family Business, the book vibrates with vivid color and texture, eschewing the traditional monographic format in favor of rhythm and conceptual cohesion.

The avalanche of praise has been remarkable. If you've been following along here, you'll know about Sara Hotchkiss' writing for KQED:

"there's a gap between recognizing an artist's work and knowing why that work is an important part of local art history...Reading Viola Frey 20 years after her death, it's difficult to believe this is the first monograph of Frey's work."

Sam Gordon's selection of the book for the Frieze library in London, who picked up on how [Artists' Legacy Foundation's] work to preserve and steward Frey's artwork "helped to launch a growing movement of estate organizations like Soft Network, which is also redefining how artists' archives are cared for and presented."

Most recently, Ilsey Jeon wrote for the Museum of Ceramic Art New York:

"And now, we've witnessed a gargantuan shift: ceramics has surged to an unimaginable level of popularity, and Frey's work sits in a radically different context. 'I really do feel that ceramics has a role, if it will take up its responsibility of teaching ceramics as art,' Frey remarked. Decades later, her credo rings clairvoyant. She not only instilled this belief in her students—urging them to think beyond clay's conventional, utilitarian limits—but through her tenacious creative commitment, she helped push the medium's pendulum from functional to sculptural. The book is not merely a handsome object or a collection of stunning images to admire; it honors Frey's legacy, offering the most comprehensive resource to date on an artist whose immeasurable imagination contributed to clay's transformation from a pre-20th-century craft into the linchpin of contemporary art it is today."



Interior of Viola Frey: Artist's Mind/Studio/World, 2024. Image: Gregory R. Miller & Co.

The year itself has mirrored the themes that the monograph builds upon: the mind, the studio, and the world. We began with a deeper understanding of how Frey thought and saw. The book was celebrated with three lively panels, the first held at CCA in February with Squeak Carnwath, Nancy Lim, and Cynthia de Bos. The second was held in June in conjunction with Frey's solo presentation at The Pit in Los Angeles with Jenelle Porter, Rubi Neri, and Cynthia de Bos. The third was held at the Museum of Arts and Design in New York City in July, and included Heidi Lau, Dan Nadel, and Jodi Throckmorton, with Cynthia de Bos moderating.

Days before I interviewed for this position I spent a quiet morning with Viola's work at the Oakland gem Pt. 2 gallery. The gallery worked closely with curator Christine Koppes and ALF staff, and it showed. Frey's beloved China Goddess Group (1979-1981) was shown without distraction front and center. But then I was delivered right into Frey's brain upon seeing her cut out paintings and bricolages in close conversation. The moment is confirmed by membership to the "cult of Frey".

In the spring, the depths of her studio were further cracked open and shown to a wider audience when ALF announced co-representation with the Los Angeles gallery The Pit who presented Frey's first show in Los Angeles in over thirty years.

Never shying away from following her own path, the show inspired a bit of vitriol as well as admiration. Eileen Havant Townsend wrote, "But the snobs are wrong about Frey... What makes Frey's art so necessary is the same quality that makes it uncool: its bare-faced urgency. The paintings and sculptures in this exhibition show what it looks like for an artist to be genuinely self-expressive—to make art because she has to."

Over my nine-month tenure, I have learned about the importance of the way the ceramics studio functioned as a great meeting place and a safe hub for expression, especially for Frey. She took comfort in the pot shop, continuing to work on her own pieces at the CCAC studios long after her home studio was established. The communal studio never stopped her from experimenting and pushing the medium and its tools past their traditional boundaries. Recently, the artist Sally Saul - who knew Frey when she and her husband Peter Saul lived in the Bay Area - told me a story of how Frey would use a garbage can as a kiln lid when the pieces were too tall to fit. Along the same lines, in a short archival video by Chris Felver, Frey is filmed discussing how she hoisted a kiln up to the ceiling with rigging.

"I'd like to thank Shana Nys Dambrot for coining this phrase in her wonderful shout out to Viola in the newsletter "13 Things", sign up here: https://hijinxarts.substack.com/



Viola Frey in a residency ceramics studio on site at Anderson Ranch Arts Center, Colorado, 1983. Still image: California Clay in the Rockies, film by Chris Felver, 2010.

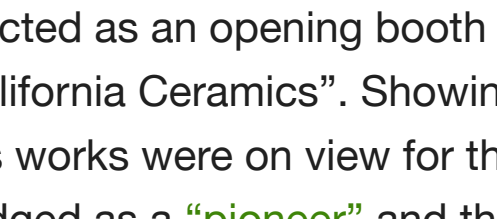
In September, I met Jun and Ree Kaneko at Jun's presentation at The Armory in New York City. Jun and Viola met in the late 1960s, and are eternally linked in the California Clay movement. Since then, Jun and Ree have built an art city within the boundaries of downtown Omaha, Nebraska. Jun and his wife Ree are true masters of artists supporting each other. The spaces they founded in Omaha, first the Bemis Center, and then the Kaneko, are monuments to the power of concerted cultivation of community support for the arts. Ree told me the Bemis itself was her legacy, and I'll be thinking about how tremendous and profound that is for years to come. During this visit I was also welcomed into three moving and carefully curated private collections that I will write about at a later date, but I'd like to give a tender nod to these collectors.

This past summer and fall three of Frey's broad shouldered and suited monumental men were installed in the Kaneko's show Big Clay 2, and in early October, Jun Kaneko welcomed me to his breathtaking studio and collection space. Standing in front of his room-sized kiln, he laughed about Frey telling him to just cut the pieces up to fit in an average kiln. Both artists devoted themselves to opposite-but-Herculean efforts to grow their works.



Left: Ree and Daisy with Jun Kaneko and one of his monumental Djungles. Right: Kaneko's room-sized kiln, Omaha, Nebraska, 2025.

KEEP IN TOUCH



The World opened up with Frieze London welcoming Frey at their October 2025 fair. The Pit was selected as an opening booth with the show "Three Generations of Female California Ceramics". Showing alongside Jennifer King and Maryam Yousif, Frey's works were on view for the first time in the UK since 1986. Frey was acknowledged as a "pioneer" and the booth was noted on multiple must-see lists. The booth was a magnet, grounding contemporary ceramics in Frey's modern past.

Back home, we are preparing for a revelatory exhibition of Frey's early work at the Bedford Gallery at the Leshner Center for the Arts in Walnut Creek, which opens January 10. Viola Frey: Foundations, curated by Emilee Enders, tells the story of the artist's work before she evolved to her iconic monumental clay figures. Featuring her slide photographs, paintings, small-scale ceramics, and monumental sculptures, these works reveal the origins of her obsession with finding unity in personal order and making something new out of something old.

The year not only focused on Frey, but also presented an opportunity to showcase what consistent work and advocacy can do for an artist's career. As the result, the 2025 Artist Award was paused so the Foundation could reflect on the last 20 years of stewardship and consider how the Foundation can best serve artists in the future.

I wish to thank our current board members for their guidance and support. Our newly elected board president, Jodi Throckmorton, brings extensive knowledge of Frey and an intimate awareness of legacy collections and archives as the chief curator at the John Michael Koehler Art Center. Caroline Black, executive director of the Pollock Krasner Foundation, passed her presidentship along to Jodi after leading us through our leadership transition. Daniel Nevers remains as our treasurer, after serving as our interim director earlier this year. He is now the Director of Development and Marketing at the Center for Craft.

Look forward to more from the Artists' Legacy Foundation and me in 2026. I am always available and always ready to discuss legacy, stewardship, and how to promote and preserve artists and their estates.

Best,

Daisy

KEEP IN TOUCH



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