

Safeguarding future generations may be humanity's most powerful legacy and the key to our collective existence



## Good Ancestors: Art and Culture for Future Generations

Invest in culture to honour the past,  
enrich the present,  
and build a legacy for the future

*"... we are in a world where we are trying to navigate intercultural conversations, where we are trying to navigate conflict, where we are trying to navigate a digital future, where we understand technology is moving maybe at a more rapid pace than we as humans can keep up, I think this is a marvelous time to turn to artists and their capacity for imagination so that we can all think about ways to navigate this oncoming future."*

Naomi Beckwith, 18 Dec 2024, in Kassel at the Presentation of the Artistic Direction for documenta 16

# Introduction

## Good Ancestors

Culture is a vital force that can sustain fair societies across generations. It connects us through shared traditions, values, and stories, grounding a deep responsibility toward the future.

Culture shapes our identities – not just as individuals, but as custodians of a legacy that spans time. It nurtures empathy, breaks down barriers, and helps to unite rather than divide us.

Through art, storytelling, and shared heritage, we can inspire hope in young people and respect for the wisdom of those who came before, empowering all voices to shape tomorrow.

The Good Ancestors exhibition embodies this vision, inviting us to harness culture's power to create a just and sustainable world – for present generations and generations yet to come.

# Plea for action

**Invest in culture to honour  
the past, enrich the present,  
and build a legacy  
for the future.**

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# Art at work for the future

Historically, art has often served to connect generations, carrying cultural memory forward while helping societies navigate change. In our times of accelerating technological transformation, art can serve as a bridge between present concerns and future possibilities.

Through artistic interpretation, challenging questions about progress, continuity and responsibility can be explored in ways that engage both intellect and emotion. Art does not only depict potential futures, it helps us inhabit them imaginatively, creating space for consideration of multiple perspectives and cultivating empathy across temporal boundaries. This gives art a particular potential to inspire societal change, promote it and convince people of its added value.



The panels of the exhibition in this booklet have been prepared by people from 23 countries and 4 continents. The artworks, while diverse in expression, are united in the conviction that future generations matter. For example, a forest is growing paper for books that can't be read before 2114. One letter of a poem is carved into the

street every Saturday to increase the number of Saturdays. Thousands of artworks from 55 African countries are combined every four years to build towards the African Union Agenda 2063. The outline of a horse carved into a grassy hill has been maintained for 3,000 years. Future design councils spread from Japan to improve decisions. Answers to the question what should last are to be stored for a million years. Such projects show how the wish to be remembered can drive social sculptures and that the important thing about being remembered is that there is someone who can.

This exhibition was originally shown during the General Assembly and Summit of the Future in New York (September 2024) to support the UN Declaration on



Future Generations. Since then, it supported the design process of the EU Strategy on Intergenerational Fairness, during the presentation for the European Day of Solidarity between Generations at the European Commission (April 2025) and at the European Citizens' Panel for Intergenerational Fairness in Brussels (September and November 2025).

The reactions to the exhibitions demonstrated how art can inspire on multiple levels and reach people from all walks of life. The artworks highlight the importance of future generations. Set in each other's context they cease to be mere curiosities. Instead, they evoke an emotional sense that future generations matter and that the future might be prosperous for long.

Continuation-focused long-term art projects like the ones showcased here hold significant potential in creating emotional connections to future generations and making our responsibility towards them felt. More examples exist and should be added. Similar work should be widely encouraged and supported. Nothing is more important than the existence of future generations.

# Call for action

We are excited to announce that the Good Ancestor exhibition is continuing to grow. If you have a compelling artwork that reflects the spirit of intergenerational fairness and long-term responsibility - an inspiring message the world urgently needs - please share it with us via this email address: [JRC-INTERGENERATIONAL-FAIRNESS@ec.europa.eu](mailto:JRC-INTERGENERATIONAL-FAIRNESS@ec.europa.eu)

We look forward to reviewing your submission and connecting with you to explore the potential of your artwork becoming part of this transformational journey.



# Good Ancestors: Art and Culture for Future Generations

## Inspiring the development and implementation of the EU Strategy on Intergenerational Fairness

### What is the Intergenerational Fairness Strategy about?

Glenn Micallef is the European Commissioner for Intergenerational Fairness, Youth, Culture and Sport. His mission is to ensure that decisions taken today do no harm to future generations and that there is increased solidarity and engagement between people of different ages: people who are young, adult, old, and those not yet born.

The Strategy on Intergenerational Fairness will generate actions to make our policies more sustainable. It will be built on the ideas of all of us, as we are all concerned

### What do we want to do?

- Balance the needs and interests of people of all ages.
- Bridge generations for the benefit of all rather than focus on one generation in particular.
- Think about what future generations will need.
- Use science and foresight to make good decisions.
- Plan for the long term to create intergenerationally fair societies.
- Shift the narrative away from conflict between generations toward solidarity and shared responsibility.

In the early 21st Century, short-termism is ubiquitous – and yet the world has never faced so many complex challenges that require a long-term perspective to solve.

While social, economic and technological advances enable some of us to live longer and better lives, we have also created pathways to existential risks for humanity.

We are dependent on one another to create a peaceful, inclusive, just and sustainable world, not only across borders but also across time.

### How can we be good ancestors towards future generations and leave a better world behind than the one we inherited?

The 'Good Ancestors' exhibition invites you to journey across time, from the coast of the Indian Subcontinent to the depths of the Amazon, exploring art projects, cultural practices and traditions from across the world, deeply rooted in intergenerational thinking and our shared human experience.

**Safeguarding future generations may be humanity's most powerful legacy and the key to our collective existence.**

#### ORGANISATION CREDITS

This exhibition is supported by the European Commission. It is based on the Good Ancestors exhibition that was shown in the United Nations General Assembly building in September 2024 and had been organised by the Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the United Nations and the Permanent Mission of Jamaica to the United Nations. The original exhibit was organised by the two missions to the UN (the co-facilitators of the negotiations) in support of the UN Declaration on Future Generations.

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For more information on this exhibition or the IGF Strategy reach out to: JRC-INTERGENERATIONAL-FAIRNESS@ec.europa.eu



**By making wise – and long – choices at this time of crisis, we could well become the good ancestors that future generations deserve.**

Roman Krznaric, *The Good Ancestor*, 2020

# A cave where you can join hands with deep-time ancestors



## Cave of the Hands (Cueva de las Manos)

Location: Santa Cruz, Argentina

Established: ca. 7300 BCE (earliest prints)

Artists: unknown

UNESCO World Heritage Site

Photo credits: 1. © Pablo Gimenez; 2. CC BY-SA 3.0 by Ejturban; 3. CC-BY-SA 2.0 Carlos Alberto Zito

Many of the imprints of hands in the Cueva de los Manos in Argentina are almost 10,000 years old.

The strikingly modern handwave links humans across time. By imagining a man, woman or child placing their hand on the same rock surface many thousands of years ago, this ancient artwork bridges the gap between now and then, inviting people to reflect on the long-lived cultural heirlooms we have inherited – and the legacies we all leave behind.

What are we of this generation, or of any other generation, that we should usurp, and expend upon our particular and exclusive uses, what was meant for mankind? It is lent to us, not given, and it is our duty to pass it on, not merely undiminished, but with interest.

John Stuart Mill, UK Houses of Parliament, 17 April 1866

# New Mythologies



## Ancestors Dreaming

Location: Jamaica

Established: 2023

Artist: Ainsley Burrows

Photo credits: Laurielle Noel © Ainsley Burrows (3x)

The practice of artist Ainsley Burrows is deeply rooted in themes of Afro-Futurism – a way of looking at the future and alternate realities through a Black cultural lens – as well as the exploration of the future of dreaming.

His paintings often feature abstract figures depicted in disjointed movements, suggesting multiple perspectives and moments in time. The sharp lines within his compositions create a sense of confinement, yet certain elements break free from the constraints, resulting in refracted visual echoes and a simultaneous disruption of time and space.

If the present lightly colours  
our remembered pasts,  
it thoroughly infuses our imagined futures.

Daniel Gilbert



# The books that can't be read until next century



## Future Library

Location: Oslo, Norway

Established: 2014

Duration: 100 years

Artist: Katie Paterson

Maintained by: Future Library Trust

Photo credits: 1+2. Kristin von Hirsch; 3. Einar Aslaksen all © Katie Paterson Studios

A forest in Norway is growing paper for books held in secret for future generations. At a ceremony every year, a writer contributes a text that won't be published until 2114. It will be printed on the paper from the trees.

Conceived by the artist Katie Paterson, the project began with a contribution from Margaret Atwood. Each author since then has written a work they will not live to see published, which they hope will find a receptive reader in an unknown future. "Future Library questions the present tendency to think in short bursts of time, making decisions only for us living now," says Paterson.

**Act so that the results from your actions  
are compatible with the permanence of  
true human life on earth.**

Hans Jonas, 1979



# The largest African art piece ever made



## The Great African Art Banner

Location: Uganda (Presence - Pan African)

Established: Conceptualized 2010; Registered 2022

Artist: Various

Maintained by: "Great African Art Banner" Initiative

Photo credits: 1+3. © Emmanuel Motta/GAAB; 2. © Collin Isimbwa / GAAB

Over the next two years, 56,000 artworks representing the 55 African nations and the African diaspora will make a 55km-long physical art collection called the Great African Art Banner. It will be repeated every four years perpetually towards 2063.

The establishment of the first banner will build to the 2026 Great Africa Arts Music and Culture Festival (bringing 56 countries to participate) – the biggest Olympic – like convergence of the arts since 1977's FESTAC festival in Nigeria.

**Art is certainly only a more direct version  
of reality.**

Henri Bergson, *Le rire*, 1900

# The pyramid that will take 1,200 years to build



## Time Pyramid (Zeitpyramide)

Location: Wemding, Germany

Established: 1993

Duration: 1,200 years

Artist: Manfred Laber

Maintained by: Stiftung Wemdinger Zeitpyramide

Photo credits: 1+2. © Felix Schmitt; 3. © Oliver Waimann

In Bavaria in 1993, Manfred Laber initiated construction of a pyramid of 120 blocks. One added every decade. The project began to commemorate the city's 1,200th anniversary. Wemding expects to continue building and maintaining the pyramid for another 1,200 years.

Initially, the pyramid was controversial. Today, the town is invested in its construction. There are four blocks so far – the most recent in 2023. Each new placement reminds locals and visitors of the many generations who will follow them.

**[N]either you nor this property of yours belongs to yourselves, but to your whole clan, ancestors and descendants alike. ...**

Plato, The Laws, (Book XI, 923)

# This ancient horse must be maintained, or it will disappear



## The White Horse of Uffington

Location: Oxfordshire, United Kingdom

Established: ~1,000 BCE

Artist: Unknown

Custodians: English Heritage; The National Trust; Long Now London

Photo credits: © Peter Landers (3x)

Dating to the Bronze Age, a horse the size of a football field is carved into the grass of a hill in Southern England.

Left alone, it would be overgrown and disappear within a decade, so it has been maintained for 3,000 years by a process of "rechalking". Every year, the UK National Trust – and volunteers such as the Long Now London group – attend the site with mallets and buckets of fresh chalk to ensure this ancient artwork continues to exist for future generations to see. It reminds us that long-term cultural legacies often require maintenance – and if we want them to last, we need communities willing to take on that mantle within their lifetimes.

**Every child is an artist.  
The problem is how to remain an artist  
once we grow up.**

Pablo Picasso



# A clock designed to keep time for 10 millennia



## The Clock of the Long Now

Location: Texas, USA

Established: 31 December 1999

Artist: Danny Hillis

Duration: 10,000 years

Maintained by: The Long Now Foundation

Photo credits: Chris Baldwin & Jesse Chandler © The Long Now Foundation (3x)

The Clock of the Long Now is an immense mechanical monument, installed in a mountain in Texas, and designed to keep accurate time for 10,000 years. It is hundreds of feet tall, engineered to require minimal maintenance, and powered by mechanical energy harvested from sunlight as well as visitors. The Clock offers an enduring symbol of our personal connection to the distant future.

Ten thousand years is about the age of modern civilization, so The Clock will measure out a future of civilization equal to its past. This assumes our civilization is in the middle of whatever journey we are on – an implicit statement of optimism.

**Society is indeed a contract...  
between those who are living,  
those who are dead,  
and those who are to be born.**

Edmund Burke



# Oceanic feeling: sensing the eternal currents of the sea



## Fishermen and the Ocean

Location: India  
Established: 2019  
Duration: Temporary  
Artist: Subodh Kerkar

Photo credits: © Subodh Kerkar (3x)

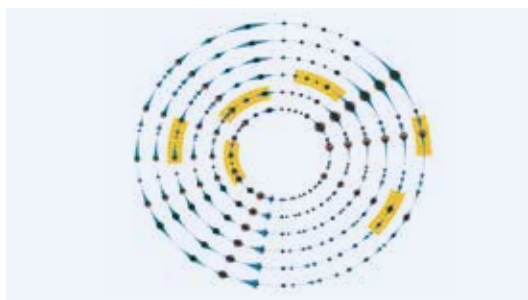
Subodh Kerkar's images of Indian fishermen celebrate the long-term role the ocean plays in shaping civilizations.

"I have had the opportunity to know the life of fishermen at close quarters, since I used to practise medicine in a fishing village. The ocean is not just the provider of fish; their existence is marinated in the ocean. Through my works I have tried to present this idea of inseparability. The fishermen become the fish bone. The fishermen become the boat. The fishermen sit in a circle to perform some oceanic ritual. The fishermen sit in two rows touching the soles of their feet to mimic the keel of a boat. The fishermen line up to pay homage to the ocean. They walk along the waves." – Subodh Kerkar

**Music is life itself.**

Louis Armstrong

# The sound of the future: A 1,000-year musical composition



## Longplayer

Location: London, UK, public listening points, audio stream

Established: 31 December 1999

Duration: 1,000 years

Artist: Jem Finer

Maintained by: The Longplayer Trust

Photo credits: 1. © James Whitaker; 2+3. © Jem Finer

Longplayer is a 1,000-year-long musical composition playing amid the hustle and bustle of London and beyond. Created from an algorithmic score and 234 singing bowls, and performed to date both by computer and by musicians in live concerts, the project encourages visitors and listeners to take a long-term perspective.

As trustee Gavin Starks writes: "Longplayer helps us ask many questions about our world and our role in its future... what might be happening in the future? What might our role be? What might our impact be? How might we communicate across 40 generations?"

**Let us be such as help the life of the future.**

Zoroaster

# Inspiration from indigenous mythologies



## Spirits of Transformation Pamürimasa (Espíritos da Transformação)

Location: Brazil  
Established: 2021  
Artist: Paulo Desana

Photo credits: © Paulo Desana (3x)

For the Indigenous peoples of the Upper Rio Negro, the myth of the Cobra-Canoe, or the "canoe of transformation," explains how humanity was formed within the great snake, establishing communities along the river. This work aims to explore connections between mythology, tradition, art, culture, identity, and photography, based on research into the myth of the journey of the Cobra-Canoe of Transformation, or as it is called in the Tukano language, Pamürimasa (the "Spirits of Transformation" or those who emerged from the river waters). The project's focus is to highlight what Indigenous people have inherited from their ancestors.

**Art is the queen of all sciences  
communicating knowledge to all the generations  
of the world.**

Leonardo da Vinci



# The world's slowest concert



## Cage Project Halberstadt

Location: Halberstadt, Germany

Established: 2001

Duration: 639 years

Artist: John Cage

Maintained by: John Cage Organ Foundation

Photo credits: © John Cage Organ Foundation (3x)

In the 1980s, the composer John Cage wrote the piece **ORGAN<sup>2</sup>/ASLSP** (As SLOW as Possible), which as the title suggested, was not intended to be performed with haste.

In Halberstadt, a special organ in an empty church is now playing Cage's score – and remarkably, it won't reach the end until the year 2640. Powered by bellows, the organ plays a single chord for months on end, only changing once every few years.

The eerie, meditative performance is designed to encourage listeners to slow down and reflect on their roles and responsibilities within long-term time.

All art is immortal.  
For emotion for the sake of emotion  
is the aim of art,  
and emotion for the sake of action  
is the aim of life.

Oscar Wilde



# The ghosts of the past – reframed



## Ghost Island

Location: Sint Maarten, Caribbean

Established: 2019

Artist: Lisandro Suriel

Photo credits: © Lisandro Suriel (3x)

Lisandro Suriel, a native of Sint Maarten, draws from the rich confluence of Atlantic and Caribbean cultures, infusing his work with the magic realism intrinsic to the Caribbean. His art delves into the spectral realms of ghost stories, superstitions, and the uncanny, exploring identity, memory, and spirit within the African Diaspora. Inspired by the Ifa tradition, where Òrun is the realm of ancestors—a place of memory, wisdom, and belonging—Suriel's work engages with magical realities rooted in a decolonial past to enrich Afro-Caribbean identities. Through storytelling and a mythical lens, he reveals the interconnectedness of all beings and the unseen forces that shape our existence.

**We are not unreasonable for fearing death...  
But we may be unreasonable if we fail sufficiently  
to fear, and so do not try to overcome,  
the ever more serious threats  
to humanity's survival...**

Samuel Scheffler,  
Lecture 3,  
Death and The Afterlife,  
2013

# Why wearing the clothing of tomorrow's people brings them closer



## Future Design

Location: Japan and worldwide

Established: early 2010s

Project leader: Tatsuyoshi Saijo

Custodian: Future Design Research Center, Kyoto University of Advanced Science

Photo credits: 1. © Reichiro Ishii; 2+3. © Tatsuyoshi Saijo, Yababa FDWS

Future Design Councils involve asking people to wear ceremonial robes that place them in the shoes of future generations when weighing the pros and cons of policies. Led by the economist Tatsuyoshi Saijo of the Research Institute for Humanity and Nature in Kyoto, this simple ritual has been shown to change how people think, fostering greater care and concern for future generations. Saijo describes such acts of temporal empathy as "futurability". "A person exhibits futurability when she or he experiences an increase in happiness as a result of deciding to, and taking action to, forgo current benefits to enrich future generations," he writes.

**The most important question we must ask ourselves is, "Are we being good ancestors?"**

**Given the rapidly changing discoveries and conditions of the times, this opens up a crucial conversation – just what will it take for our descendants to look back at our decisions today and judge us good ancestors?**

Jonas Salk in an interview with Bill Moyers, 1985

# Long before humanity, these organisms thrived on Earth



"We are fungi. We transformed Earth once, converting rocks into soils, paving the way for our common evolution. We existed alongside you across your history, but for many years we were a forgotten kingdom. In a time of entangled crisis, we spread our mycelial roots to decompose broken imaginaries, to unleash fungal futures. As we eat, we decompose your urban waste. As we expand, we heal the soils and water. As we fruit, we offer you medicine, food and bioluminescent light. As we thrive in this world, we connect your beginnings, to the underground, to futures that belong to all species"

(Melissa Ingaruca Moreno)

## Fungal Futures

Location: Peru

Established: 2024

Artist: Melissa Ingaruca Moreno

Photo credits: 1. © Pablo Gimenez; 2. CC BY-SA 3.0 by Eiturban; 3. CC-BY-SA 2.0 Carlos Alberto Zito

Fungi are one of the oldest living organisms on the planet. By learning from and working with fungi, we will find that it can become a great ally to achieve goals of nature-positive, circular and carbon neutral, and climate-resilient cities. The project "Fungal Futures" enables human-fungi collaboration physically and through mixed reality (MR) to create speculative futures of cities where all species can thrive.

**It is not your role to foresee the future,  
but to make it possible.**

Antoine de Saint Exupéry, Citadelle, 1948



# A poem carved into the streets to increase the number of Saturdays



## The Letters of Utrecht (De Letters van Utrecht)

Location: Utrecht, The Netherlands

Established: 2012

Duration: As long as there are Saturdays

Artist: Various; Maintained by: Foundation Letters of Utrecht,  
with guilds of poets and stonemasons

Photo credits: 1+2. © Dick Sijtsma; 3. © Ramses Singeling - Pergamijn

In the town of Utrecht in the Netherlands, there is a poem being written into the streets, one new letter every Saturday.

Once a week, a stonemason carves a new letter, donated by residents, before it is embedded in the ground. Every few years, another poet continues the poem. Gradually, more and more people become invested in its continuation. The waiting list is long: many want to contribute to something that outlasts us.

It is a monument to our responsibility towards future generations. For as long as there are Saturdays, the poem will continue.

**The way in which time and its horizons  
are conceived is generally connected  
with the way the society understands  
and justifies itself.**

Ernest Gellner



# Debts of care and reciprocity



## Ayni and Minka traditions (Quechua & Aymara)

Location: Andes, South America

Established: 3200–1800 BCE

Photo credits: Diego Pérez, Sociedad Peruana de Derecho Ambiental

Practised by Andean indigenous groups, the Ayni and Minka traditions are centuries-old systems of reciprocity between people and across generations.

The Ayni principle suggests that when one family or individual contributes labour, goods, or care to another, there is an obligation to reciprocate. An act of help is never closed. Minka (or Minga) is a practice of collective work, where families come together to build communal infrastructure for the future. Instead of debt as extraction, these practices promote debts of reciprocity. Labour, time, and care are the currency; returns are measured in community cohesion, fertile landscapes, and wellbeing of descendants.

**Art is one of the basic ways  
that humans express themselves  
and is therefore a candidate for inclusion  
in any message system designed  
to span ten millennia.**

Expert Judgment on Markers  
to Deter Inadvertent Human Intrusion  
into the [Nuclear] Waste Isolation Pilot Plant

# Inheritance, a beautiful and burdensome heirloom



## The Inheritance Project

Location: Germany

Established: 2016

Artist: Erich Berger and Mari Keto

Funding Kone Foundation

Photo credits: Anders Beggild

The world is returning to nuclear power, which produces waste that is toxic across hundreds of millennia – a deep-time legacy. Nuclear waste's inconceivable temporality inspired The Inheritance Project, which centres on a valuable and beautiful family heirloom that is unwearable today because of its toxicity: a necklace, brooch, and earrings made from gold, silver, and radioactive gems.

Stored in a concrete container, the jewellery must be passed between generations before it's safe; each time the holder and heir performing a measurement ritual to assess its radioactivity. Through nuclear decay, eventually it will fulfill its promise as a wearable and valuable heirloom, but how long will it take?

When we build, let us think that we build forever.  
Let it not be for present delight  
nor for present use alone.  
Let it be such work as our descendants  
will thank us for.

John Ruskin

# Cathedrals in nature



## EcoKathedraal

Location: Mildam and Heerenveen, The Netherlands

Established: 1966

Duration: Until the year 3000

Artist: Louis G le Roy (1924-2012)

Master builders: Peter Wouda (Heerenveen), Marcel Prins (Mildam)

Photo credits: Peter Wouda

In the 1960s, the artist and architect Louis Le Roy began the EcoKathedraal (Eco-cathedral) – a structure built from discarded rubble within a nature-rich garden at Mildam, near Heerenveen in the Netherlands.

Now overseen by the Stichting TIJD (Time Foundation) and "bouwmeester" (master-builder) Peter Wouda, the EcoKathedraal's construction and maintenance is ongoing: a collaboration between plants, animals, and humans that future generations can continue until at least the year 3,000. In principle, every city could host its own eco-cathedral.

**A society grows great when old men  
plant trees whose shade they know  
they shall never sit in.**

Anon



# Growing the roots of peace



## White Wood

Location: The Bin Forest, Huntly Scotland  
Established: 2015-2016  
Duration: 900 years  
Artist: Caroline Wendling  
Commissioned by: Deveron Projects

Photo credits: Ross Fraser McLean and Caroline Wendling

White Wood, in Scotland, is a living monument to peace that will develop over 300 years, using 49 oaks grown from Joseph Beuys' long-term art project "7000 Oaks" in Germany, stone from France, and Scottish soil.

The wood is made up of native trees, shrubs and wildflowers all of which display an element of white, the colour of peace. The stones were buried and will surface with time, pushed out of the ground by the oaks' roots.



**We are made wise not by the recollection  
of our past, but by the responsibility  
for our future.**

George Bernard Shaw

# Remembrance of things past



## Custodire Memorie (Keeping Memories)

Location: Bergamo, Italy

Established: 2019

Artist: Fondazione Accademia Carrara

Photo credits: Fondazione Accademia Carrara Bergamo

Introduced in Italy, Custodire Memorie (Keeping Memories) uses art to support an experimental therapy for people with Alzheimer's, and their caregivers.

With the support of museum curators and healthcare professionals, Alzheimer's patients are encouraged to view a series of paintings, then invited to select one to stimulate memory and emotions. The works thus become silent bearers of experiences, helping feelings to flow and patients to rediscover themselves. Later during museum visits, patients and their caregivers can rediscover "their" works, allowing caregivers to connect with their family members.

The strength of the thread does not reside in the fact that some one fibre runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibres.

Ludwig Wittgenstein

# A bridge between generations



## Q'eswachaka Bridge Renewal

Location: Peru

Established: 1425

Photo credits: National Institute of Culture, with the permission of UNESCO

Renewed every year, the Q'eswachaka bridge is a rope suspension bridge above the Apurimac River in the Peruvian Andes.

The Quechua-speaking communities who perform the annual renewal see it as a way to strengthen their social ties and connection to nature. Using techniques passed between generations, families gather and twist straw to form ropes that can be braided and then tied between ancient stone bases. Inscribed in UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, the tradition promotes communication between families and communities, strengthening centuries-old bonds and reaffirming cultural identity.

**Governments must apply themselves  
to restore to men that love of the future  
with which religion and the state of society  
no longer inspire them.**

Alexis de Tocqueville



# A promise to the people, growing in soil



## Der Bevölkerung

Location: Berlin, Germany

Established: 2000

Duration: Ongoing

Artist: Hans Haacke

Photo credits: Roman Mensing, Andreas Kaernbach

Since 2000, more than 500 members of Germany's Bundestag have transported up to 100kg of soil from their election district to Berlin, which they place within an artwork in the Reichstag building's northern courtyard.

In a world of political short-termism, Hans Haacke's *Der Bevölkerung* (To the population) reminds all those who see it of their democratic responsibilities. The typeface echoes the 1916 *Dem Deutsche Volke* (To the German People) on the building's western portico. A long-term, ecologically-evolving project, *Der Bevölkerung* will accumulate soil for as long as politicians meet in the building.

**The mind is good with stories  
but does not appear to be well-designed  
for the processing of time.**

Daniel Kahneman



# A novel take on the politics of climate change



## The Ministry for the Future

Published: 2020

Writer: Kim Stanley Robinson

Photo credits: Melinda Nagy, Yevgeniy

Opening with a brutal depiction of the impacts of climate change in India, Kim Stanley Robinson's influential novel tells the story of new international body established "to advocate for the world's future generations of citizens".

Called the Ministry of the Future, the organisation is "charged with defending all living creatures present and future who cannot speak for themselves, by promoting their legal standing and physical protection".

Exploring thorny questions about how far its characters might be willing go to save the future, this book of science and politics is as timely as ever.

**If we are to better the future,  
we must disturb the present.**

Catherine Booth

# A funeral for a glacier



## Not Ok

Location: Iceland  
Established: 2019

Artist: Cymene Howe and Dominic Boyer

Photo credits: Josh Okun, Dominic Boyer

In 2019, a glacier funeral took place on Ok mountain in Iceland, honouring Okjökull, the country's first major glacier to fall victim to climate change. A memorial plaque was laid.

Not Ok is the film directed by anthropologists Cymene Howe and Dominic Boyer that led to the memorial. In 2017, they collaborated with Icelandic cinematographer Ragnar Hansson to explore how Icelanders felt about losing their first glacier. It's not a typical movie about melting glaciers or ice sheets. Instead, it offers humour and humanity: "a little film about a small glacier on a low mountain – a mountain who has been observing humans for a long time and has a few things to say to us."

A more apt name for our species would be  
*Homo prospectus*, because we thrive  
by considering our prospects.

Martin Seligman



# Divining what comes next



## Ifá Divination System (Yorùbá & diaspora)

Location: Nigeria, Benin, Togo, and African diaspora  
(incl. Brazil, Cuba, Trinidad).

Established: 10,000-year-old tradition

Photo credits: Wande Abimbola

Practised by the Yorùbá people of West Africa – and the African diaspora – Ifá is a divination system that has passed from master to apprentice over centuries.

Divination is performed using sacred instruments, such as palm nuts or divining chains. The results point to specific 'Odu' – a vast body of verses, proverbs, myths, and teachings – from which the diviner draws guidance. Ifá shows how knowledge can transcend a single generation; it naturally pairs elders and youth in collaboration, and training is framed not as a personal achievement but as service to community and future descendants.

**The finest inheritance you can give to a child  
is to allow it to make its own way,  
completely on its own feet.**

Isadora Duncan

# Building the future... with digital divides



## Analog Museum of Digital Inequality

Location: Barcelona, Spain

Established: 2020

Artist: Domestic Data Streamers

Commissioned: BIT Habitat, Barcelona

Photo credits: Domestic Data Streamers

The Analog Museum of Digital Inequality is a collection of reinterpreted classical art pieces and artefacts that highlight how the digital divide disproportionately affects women, low-income and ethnic minority groups. The works challenge us to think about who is left behind when we seek to build the future. For example, a "Rosetta Stone 2.0" – with garbled tech-speak carved into the rock – points out how technological language prevents older adults accessing digital services. And a "Map of inequality" – depicted like a map from a classical atlas – shows the uneven global distribution of Internet access.



**... I am convinced that the cultural and creative sectors have an immense power to inspire societal change, promote it and convince people of its value added.**

Glenn Micallef, 26 Feb 2025

# For far future generations

What should last?

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

NAME \_\_\_\_\_



## Collective Time Capsule

Location: Created by visitors to the exhibition

Established: September 2024, 2025

Artist Angelina Kumar might work with answers

Archiving Location: Deep in a saltmine in Hallstatt/Austria

Memory of Mankind established in 2012

Artist: Martin Kunze

Photo credits: 1. © Angelina Kumar & Hanneke Verheijke; 2+3. © Martin Kunze

Helpful replies shall become part of the Memory of Mankind Project. Text on the postcards will be archived on ceramic tablets and stored deep in the oldest salt mine to be found and read hundreds of thousand years into the future.

They will also be placed on a website to encourage wider reflection and to make it more likely that there will be a long future.

In a long future there should be someone who is aware. Someone who can understand what you wrote and can answer these questions for their future generations.

# Colophon

This booklet was created by the milliongenerations foundation in collaboration with the European Commission. It is based on the exhibition Good Ancestors: Arts and Culture for Future Generations.  
[www.milliongenerations.org/index.php?title=Good\\_Ancestors\\_exhibition\\_2025](http://www.milliongenerations.org/index.php?title=Good_Ancestors_exhibition_2025)

The exhibition was originally created to support the UN Declaration on Future Generations in 2024, building on the collaboration of custodians of Long-Term Art Projects and the question "What can art do for the future?" asked on 4th June 2022 at the tenth anniversary of the Letters of Utrecht.

## First Harvest

In 2024, the First Harvest of the Good Ancestors exhibition showcased 15 art projects and cultural traditions (until Letters of Utrecht) that evoke a longer-term, multi-generational view, as well as the poster with postcards For Far Future Generations. These were first displayed at the United Nations Summit of the Future and General Assembly in New York in 2024. With adapted introduction they were shown at the European Commissions' headquarters in Brussels in April 2025 and to support the European Citizens' Panel Intergenerational Fairness in September and November 2025. A booklet about them was distributed at a stand of the European Commission at UNESCO's MONDIACULT conference in the fall of 2025.

## Second Harvest

The Second Harvest (pages 41 to 63) was curated by the European Commission, the goal was to support the co-creation and adoption of the European Intergenerational Fairness Strategy in March 2026.

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Graphic design: Avant la lettre, Hanneke Verheijke, Utrecht



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What do you want to leave behind?

DATE \_\_\_\_\_ NAME \_\_\_\_\_

What should last?

DATE \_\_\_\_\_ NAME \_\_\_\_\_