

Cultural Sustainability and Cultural Leadership: Camille Kirk (Sustainability Director, Getty: in conversation)

Camille Kirk was appointed in August 2023 as Getty's inaugural director of sustainability. She works with other Getty leadership to define and advance overall sustainability goals, and partners with programs and departments across the institution to develop, implement, and coordinate Getty's strategic sustainability initiatives. Previously, Camille was Director of Sustainability and Campus Sustainability Planner for the University of California, Davis, where she led the development of sustainability plans, and implemented sustainability performance assessments. Her efforts helped UC Davis achieve national and international recognition as one of the greenest universities in the world. In her UC Davis role, she also served on various external boards and steering committees to increase climate and regional water supply resiliency, and improve sustainability metrics. She holds a BA in geography from the University of Texas, Austin, and an MA in geography from University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA).

This conversation took place online on June 12 and July 1, 2025. The transcription was revised for clarity, length and structure for this publication.

LAURA JOHANNA NOLL: In your own words, what does sustainability mean for Getty?

CAMILLE KIRK: Sustainability for a cultural institution like Getty means balancing various objectives in caring for the cultural and natural heritage that's under our stewardship. For Getty, a healthy planet is fundamental to our ability to carry out our mission to preserve, learn from, and share our collective heritage.

LAURA JOHANNA NOLL: Could you elaborate on that?

CAMILLE KIRK: I'll start by speaking about a balance between conserving and sharing cultural heritage and conserving natural heritage. Getty has both art and archive collections and roughly 316 hectares of land that are part of our shared heritage and stewardship responsibility. Los Angeles is a biodiversity hotspot, and Getty is located in the Santa Monica Mountains, with both coastal sage and woody chaparral ecosystems that we're a part of. With the Palisades and Eaton fires in January 2025, we Angelenos are again learning the role of fire in the ecosystem that we live in, what it means to be part of urban wildland interface. How are we going to live *with*, not against or in spite of, the natural world that we are part of.

In the visual art world, preserving and sharing cultural heritage means that you're going to have an environmental footprint. For example, take travel: Our sector transports art objects around the world; can we do this in smarter ways? And our sector involves people travelling – we have international audiences, and even local visitors need to get to museums and galleries. Do I think the art sector should never have another "blockbuster" exhibition anywhere in the world? No! I think there's a role for them. But institutions can think in terms of exhibition "footprint budgets" where they have a blockbuster with a longer duration and several smaller exhibitions out of their own collection to balance the carbon footprint.

We've got challenges with what it means to conserve objects under our care – under contemporary conservation standards that tends to require chemicals, a fair amount of which need to be greened up. This is a work in progress across the world. People are working hard at figuring out cleaner chemistry practices for conservation. We're working on figuring out how we can balance energy demands for heating and cooling and humidification to protect art and provide visitor comfort with our desires to use less energy. At Getty, we're making investments in our infrastructure to electrify so we are able to switch to renewable energy sources more readily and so we can become more energy efficient. We're working on practices for energy conservationⁱ that don't frustrate visitors and staff, and protect our collections, but that do create wider seasonal bands so we can reduce energy use.

LAURA JOHANNA NOLL: The Getty has a particular organizational structure which likely results in a certain complexity and many of the Getty's unique characteristics when it comes to sustainability. Can you tell me more about the organizational structure of the Getty and its special features? How does Getty differ from other art institutions when it comes to integrating sustainability?

CAMILLE KIRK: Getty is an unusual institution in the visual arts world, in that we have multiple programs in addition to our museums. Our Conservation Institute conducts bench and field research on conservation science and practice and offers education and training to advance the field. Our Research Institute is an international center for the study of visual culture and has one of the world's most comprehensive art history archives and special collections in the Getty Library. Of course, we have our two museums: one at the Getty Villa along the coast and one at the Getty Center, with European art from antiquity to 1900 and global photographs to present day. Our Publications unit publishes a wide variety of books informed and inspired by the work from our conservation, research and museum programs. Our Foundation awards grants to help support scholarship, conservation, collections access, and professional training in the cultural sector. All of these programs are situated within and supported by the J. Paul Getty Trust which has administrative units such as facilities, human resources, finance – all the organizational and administrative functions that are necessary to run an institution of this complexity. In some ways, Getty is close in form to a higher education institution, and this means that sustainability gets integrated across all of these programs and functions perhaps a little differently than in a traditional museum.

LAURA JOHANNA NOLL: And what are the central themes and questions in these different areas?

CAMILLE KIRK: We're constantly asking ourselves questions around, how do we balance our different objectives? How do we ensure that we are adhering to our mission set by our founder, J. Paul Getty. How are we staying relevant in today's world? And that has a lot of dimensions. We have to ask how are we reaching our audiences? Are we inviting new audiences in? Are we finding ways to engage all ages, so that everyone feels like there's something to learn and to gain, and to be interested in and to care about what we and other museums have to offer. And then asking questions of our collections and the lands under our stewardship. What can we do to provide very tangible operational solutions and how can we interpret things for our visitors? How do we use the collections and land that we are stewards of to ask relevant questions to the contemporary concerns of the day? How do we use the lessons that these objects from the past and our land's history can tell us today about what

options we have, what kinds of solutions we have to consider, and what questions we could be asking? Sometimes asking questions is more useful than coming up with solutions, because it prompts you to be creative and to think differently. And then, how can we use the imagination, interpretation and close observation of artists to understand how to tackle contemporary and future concerns that are evolving as we are living now and into our future. That, I think, is one of the most important parts of this job: that ability to use the power of the arts and humanities to interpret and create meaning, interpret the human condition, interpret the setting in which we find ourselves, and then, with the combination of imagination and close observation, cause us to ask ourselves questions about what we see and what we experience in the world, and help us think about other ways of living in the world. That's the superpower of the arts and humanities.

LAURA JOHANNA NOLL: I would like to connect my next question to what you just said about the role of the arts in sustainability transitions. You already pointed to the idea that cultural heritage and preserved objects can help societies reflect on present-day concerns and future challenges. This raises a broader question for me: Do you think arts and culture have a specific responsibility – or perhaps even a particular capacity – to contribute to sustainability discourse and inspire societal change?

CAMILLE KIRK: Absolutely. Arts and culture have something to say about sustainability because, at root, sustainability is about humans and our ability to thrive. We have an immediately pressing problem in front of us - how will humans thrive in a future of climate change and biodiversity loss. And when you are facing challenges, you bring all skill sets to bear on figuring out how to address these challenges. We're at a different kind of scale and technical response at this moment in human history than in past moments in human history. But at root these are common concerns. And when you're dealing with contemporary concerns around, for example, artificial intelligence or climate change, you need to bring to bear all of the possible tools that you have at your disposal. We have a lot of questions to ask about insurance, real estate development, and financing. We have questions to ask around planning, permitting and policy making and regulation. We have questions that are technical and engineering questions. And I submit we also have arts and humanities questions. If we leave out arts and humanities, if we insist on seeing this as solely a technical or engineering problem, if we think that this is just a policy or regulation problem or just a finance problem, then we're missing a critical element that helps us understand ourselves as humans, and why we make the choices that we do and what those choices mean, and how a lack of imagination holds us back from good solutions. All of these things weave together, and that's why the arts and humanities have a vital role in shaping any kinds of solutions, and even in understanding the problem.

LAURA JOHANNA NOLL: You have spoken about the relevance of sustainability both in ecological terms and as a deeply human question. In that context, I am interested in the organizational dimension: Why do arts and cultural institutions need sustainability management specifically, rather than relying on general organizational management structures?

CAMILLE KIRK: Well, arts and cultural institutions are a drop in the bucket, but all drops ultimately add up to a full bucket, right? So, part of the job is to do the work to reduce our own footprint. Now, our footprint is small. If Getty completely eliminates all of its greenhouse

gas emissions and never sends another thing to the landfill, we are still a minuscule contribution to the solution. But we must try these things for a variety of reasons: So that we quit contributing. I love this idea of when you're in a hole, stop digging. Now you need to start the work of repair and improving your practices. That has a moral dimension. It's hard to tell someone else what to do if you're not doing it yourself. Many institutions have enough resources and an obligation to try things, learn lessons, and translate those lessons out.

LAURA JOHANNA NOLL: There is now broad recognition that sustainability will shape not only environmental futures, but also the future viability of cultural organizations and societies more generally. Nevertheless, I would be interested in how you engage with skepticism or resistance towards sustainability initiatives?

CAMILLE KIRK: I would make two cases: The first case I'd make is a cold hard business case. There are very good business reasons to undertake various kinds of sustainability measures. One of the tools that I learned about and started using with peers when I was in the University of California, and we're doing the same thing at Getty, is lifecycle cost analysis. If you draw a really tight circle around your costs you may feel that it doesn't make sense to invest in sustainability. But that's because you're not thinking longer term. You're not drawing the circle around your operations and maintenance costs, and you're not including all of your risk factors properly. Part of it is drawing the business case to include your longer term financial risks and frankly existential risks and think about what happens to you if you don't address them, and how much more money will you spend that you weren't planning to allocate to mopping up after disasters because you hadn't managed risk well enough.

And the second case is, if you want to have relevance, if you want people to care about art, you're going to have to make sure that they have secure conditions. And that's true for governments. Governments are going to have to increasingly reallocate finances towards coming back from disasters and managing climate migration and all the other challenges associated with climate change. If we don't get a handle on the challenges in front of us there's just going to be far less attention span for the majority of people to care about art. Private or public resources towards culture will diminish if we do not figure out how to address these core challenges in front of us, and that's part of staying relevant. We have to stay relevant and this includes dealing with the various types of challenges that we're confronting, one of which are a series of sustainability challenges.

LAURA JOHANNA NOLL: In our own research-for-action project *Culture for the Planet*, we are observing the emergence of dedicated sustainability positions in visual and performing arts organizations across the world. I would therefore be very interested to hear more about where your role sits within Getty's organizational structure and how you think sustainability governance should ideally be positioned within arts organizations?

CAMILLE KIRK: Where sustainability should be seated in the org chart is an organizational fit question, and there is no right answer. A lot of it has to do with what the institution is expecting of the role. In Getty's case, the idea was that this position was across the entirety of the organization. That it was intended to work on our operations work, on external capacity building and network building, and sharing out good practices. Getty leadership understood that as one of the five strategic priorities for our organization, sustainability needs to sit at a level where it can intersect effectively with all different realms of the organization. So, I report

directly to the Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer. This means that I am able to have business case conversations and I'm able to work across the organization because I am reporting at a senior level. It's very helpful to be able to do that.

However, I observe two things: 1. Every organization is different and organizes itself differently. 2. Leadership isn't necessarily from the top. Leadership is from leaders, and leadership can arise from a lot of different areas. It depends on how a sustainability officer views their role and builds their network and connections. I approach this work as work of deep collaboration and consultation. I don't think that dictates and fiat work very well in this kind of work. I try to show people why helping me with a sustainability challenge helps them with some other challenge they have. What are they facing? Do they have a maintenance challenge, a design challenge, or an operations challenge? And by coupling with me to advance a sustainability goal, can we also advance and accomplish goals that they have? I seek projects and programs that do that, so everyone gets to benefit from whatever resource allocation and time expenditure advances their goals as well as mine. The other thing I try to do is listen very carefully, and help people with language, with infusing ideas into their thinking. If I'm the only representative of sustainability, then when I'm not in the room sustainability's not going to get thought about. So, one of my jobs is to try to help people think about sustainability concerns as part of their risk portfolio, their set of solutions, their set of challenges, so that they're bringing it in without me always having to be present. One goal of building a culture of sustainability is inculcating why sustainability is part of everyone's risk management strategies and ways of doing business that actually improve their outcomes.

LAURA JOHANNA NOLL: In an interview with the Getty, Steven Olson, former COO and CFO of the Getty described you as a "visionary leader and organizational strategist". He said that you will "help the museum become a sustainability leader in the cultural sector". How do you plan to do this?

CAMILLE KIRK: This comes back to the three things that we have to do. First, clean up our own house operationally. Improve practices in our own operations both because that helps mitigate our risk and improve our sustainability outcomes. Second, be part of building a network when we're a leader. Part of our job is to share our knowledge, share resources in appropriate ways, so that we help bring everyone along. Sustainability and resilience are group efforts. So, in this case, being a leader is about helping everyone, so that all institutions rise. This is a big part of what attracted me to Getty: We're building networks, sharing information, providing resources and financial support, and contributing to the advancement of many different fields in the sector: conservation science, archival practice, provenance research, et cetera. All of this is part of the DNA of Getty. And I'm simply inserting sustainability into the score that's already being performed. Third, align this work with our mission. Our mission is to conserve our cultural heritage and to share it with others. So, our visitors are a big part of how we have impact and influence as leaders. We need to demonstrate to our visitors what we're doing. We need to make it possible for our visitors to be part of engaging with us when they visit us, and we need to infuse sustainability concerns into some of our interpretive content and exhibition design and public programming in appropriate ways – in appropriate exhibitions, in appropriate programming, not in everything – when it makes sense. Not everything is about sustainability. It shouldn't be. There are lots

of important challenges and questions that we need to ask as humans. Sustainability questions are some of them.

LAURA JOHANNA NOLL: You have outlined both your broader understanding of sustainability and the three strategic priorities that guide Getty's approach. I would now love to move from the conceptual level to the practical dimension. Could you give some specific examples of strategic and operational measures that you are currently planning and implementing?

CAMILLE KIRK: We're undertaking a lot of different activities: We've done decarbonization work in terms of switching out landscaping and groundskeeping equipment to all-electric. We're shifting our shuttle fleet to electric as we can. We're making significant investment in switching out our central heating infrastructure to a more energy efficient infrastructure that we can run with renewably produced electricity. We believe that's going to give us greater resilience. It's also going to mean that we are better able to keep good humidity levels for our art in our galleries in a more energy-efficient way. That's important to us in terms of that conservation ethos for stewardship of our collection. Our museum has adopted the Bizot Green Protocol and we're experimenting with implementation of that protocol in different ways. The art sector got to learn during the pandemic about use of virtual couriers and virtual couriers is something we continue to work on. We're adding the Bizot Green Protocol temperature and relative humidity bands into our loan language for lending and borrowing institutions. We're undertaking interesting practices on exhibition design, such as temporary walls that can be reused and reducing waste in exhibition design, installation, and deinstallation. We've got very well-built reusable cases that we've used for traveling art pieces - some cases we've used for 40 years. We've shifted our waste management practices to incorporate collection of our organic waste separately so that we can compost and increase our recycling rate. We've been working towards more reusables. We are incorporating green building goals into capital projects, and sustainability criteria into procurement processes.

We're trying different things, and we are acknowledging that some things are probably not the ultimate solution. This is why we're encouraging people to be patient and to give us feedback and to share what's working and not working so that we can make tune ups and adjustments. And all of that is in service of this process improvement mindset, which I think is hugely important in being a leader in sustainability in any sector: Dispelling this idea that you should perfect something before you launch it, because a perfect program launch is inherently incompatible with sustainability work.

LAURA JOHANNA NOLL: You mentioned various initial measures, best practices, and major successes. And it doesn't sound as if much went wrong, even though you're not striving for perfection. Could you nevertheless describe a few challenges and setbacks? What did go wrong, and which insights and learnings can you share so that others can benefit from them and leapfrog?

CAMILLE KIRK: People who work at museums tend to be smart and used to achieving. There is a perfectionist streak. So, it is important to help people confront that and feel comfortable in trying things without expectations of it working. Change management is the heart of any

of this work on sustainability. Helping people grapple with change is a big part of the job. And here is one instance where things didn't go well at first.

When I started this role, I got a lot of questions from colleagues during my listening tour about our recycling practices: "Is Getty really recycling?" "Does Getty's custodial staff really keep recyclables separate from landfilled trash?" And so forth. In addition, we were not separately collecting organic waste, which is now legally required in California. So, working with our custodial team, we changed out our waste management system. We used to have daily desk side trash collection by our custodial staff, and this meant that we couldn't pull apart organic waste from landfill waste. To be able to put in composting organic waste collection, we were going to have to reallocate and rebalance resources, and that meant that we couldn't do desk side pickup. So we did a pilot project. I'm a huge believer in: Do a pilot project, learn lessons before you go to any next level of scale. We piloted in our administration building, which I think is often a good idea: have administration try something out before they require it of anybody else. We took away the desk side trash bins and you were supposed to walk your trash to the central pantry bins when you created it. It didn't take long, probably not even 24 hours, before we started getting a lot of feedback: "What do you expect me to do with my trash? This is ridiculous. Without a bin, how am I supposed to get my trash to the pantry to sort it?" And we realized: This is a very bad idea. So we restored the desk-side trash cans, but we still required colleagues to be responsible for emptying their own desk trash cans in the central bins. This was part of the shift towards reallocating custodial resources, being able to have this organics collection and have the central pickups frequently throughout the day. And, one of my efforts was to figure out how to message the way in which we can embrace this change, why it is necessary and what the benefits will be. We worked hard on improving the signage and the waste bins.

This is a tangible instance of we tried and we went too far. This is part of piloting. We broke a few too many things, and now we had to fix some of it, and acknowledge and respect that we had an unintended negative and unnecessary consequence.

LAURA JOHANNA NOLL: What I find very compelling is that this kind of transparency about failures or learnings creates psychological safety within organizations. It encourages people to experiment, pilot and learn – instead of avoiding action because they are afraid of making mistakes. Now, let's move on to another aspect: What tensions or points of friction do you see between sustainability agendas and arts institutions such as the Getty? Are there contradictions, trade-offs, or perhaps even legitimate criticisms that cultural organizations and their stakeholders need to grapple with?

CAMILLE KIRK: There are several tensions, not just at Getty, but across the sector – for any kind of museum, performing art, and sports and entertainment.

First, there is a lot of travel involved: travel of the involved parties, of the art and of the visitors. So, the arts and culture sector is very intersectional with the tourism sector. Both have concerns around authenticity and questions about their footprint, and this is a very intense set of challenges. But they offer opportunities to ask questions of: How can we improve things? There's an inherent tension. It's one that we need to acknowledge and be upfront about. It's not one we should shy away from. It's not one we should be opaque about, but one that offers us some interesting opportunity. And I don't think we want no

tourism or traveling. I don't think we want to not share, or to lock ourselves down. That's not helpful. And it doesn't really embrace the ingenious and creative spirit of humans, and the very root desire of humans to interact with each other. We're a social species. We want to know. We're curious. I think it would be awful if we did not want to learn about each other around the world. I submit that as one very important part of our humanity. And when you look at human history, we've been traveling around to look at each other, talk to each other, interact with each other, trade with each other, and learn from each other since time immemorial. That is a human thing to do.

Then, there is this tension around preservation of the planet and preservation of cultural objects, which are often put in opposition to each other. When something is set up as a conflict, it's a great time to ask questions around: Why is this being posed as a conflict? What are the conflict points? What would it look like to try to overcome those conflict points? Can you? And if not, how do you manage the trade-offs? How do you balance the competing objectives? So, when I see a moment of tension or something being pitted as a conflict I want to know: Why are you saying that's a conflict? Why is it a conflict?

Another tension has to do with the cycle of the art world. In the spectrum from art fairs, private collectors and exhibiting institutions there's a lot of questions and potential tensions around this notion of temporality, constant change, and this constant movement of art and people. Asking ourselves questions of: Do we like what we have? And if we do, how can we reduce the environmental footprint? Or if we don't exactly like what we have: How can we evolve in ways that still respect needs of artists, of collectors, of collecting institutions, of galleries? It's a whole ecosystem. How do we work within that ecosystem to interrogate those tensions, and ask ourselves what we want? And there will be different answers from different groups. So, there will be tensions, and then to put your finger right in that tension and say: Why? What is happening here?

LAURA JOHANNA NOLL: Since cultural policy plays such an important role in shaping institutional priorities, I would like to connect this discussion to the Mondiacult 2025 conference and the UNESCO debates around culture and sustainable development. They set out the global agenda for culture and commit to its implementation, with key themes such as culture and climate action or culture and education. Connecting to this, what role do you think should politics and policymaking play in the field of sustainability in arts and culture?

CAMILLE KIRK: I think that politics and policymaking inherently influence sustainability goals and implementation actions in the arts and cultural sector.

First, politics and policy are part of the water we swim in as humans. They have a role in sustainability and the cultural sector, in part, because this is an industrial or economic sector that is regulated and subject to subnational, national, and international law. So, we are always going to have policy influencing the arts and culture. Second, there's the international aim with the *United Nations Sustainable Development Goals* agenda. Even though it may not be popular to observe this, the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals agenda is still the only thing that all Member nations in the United Nations agreed upon. Implementation is a whole different thing, but they agreed on the 17 goals and the sub targets within it. That's really big. It indicates that people do understand that if you don't have a healthy planet, you cannot have a justly served and functioning human population. And if you don't have justice and

equity for humans, you're not going to have a healthy planet because people can't take care of our planet if they aren't cared for themselves. So this is a very intense set of questions popping up around allocation decisions. How do we make these choices imaginatively? What are we doing as our current selves for our future selves and our future generations? It comes back to this intersecting stew of skills and realms that we live in – policy, politics, law, finance, insurance, science and craft, arts, humanities, social sciences – coming together to help us understand. We can either choose to ignore the questions that are being posed, and they will then come back and bite us, or we can choose to address them.

LAURA JOHANNA NOLL: And what role should policymaking play in the field of sustainability for arts and cultural organizations?

CAMILLE KIRK: Policy is very important. When made well, policy is a roadmap that people create together understanding the different – sometimes competing – objectives, stakeholders, or missions. One job of excellent policy is to show how different needs and objectives can actually come together. There will always be instances where one objective is in some degree of confrontation with another objective, and you have to figure out ways to navigate through those differences. But my observation is: Policy that is performance based rather than prescriptive offers room for innovation, flexibility, discovery, and for really embracing the context in which an organization or institution finds itself so that it can best achieve the performance goal of why the policy is created. Really good policy empowers different stakeholders to come together and mutually benefit from the intersection of their most important objectives. When policy is thoughtfully crafted, everyone ends up coming out better together. And good policy-craft an art form. Lots of people fancy themselves policy makers, and we have a lot of bad policy on the books.

Policy also gives a clear sense of the strategic directions for organizations, and in the case of *Unesco's World Conference* and the *UN Sustainable Development Goals*, these are globally oriented but with room for a local specificity in the implementation. I think sustainability and culture have a very natural togetherness because they are both centered in humanity and a human focus. So, in considering how to implement the UN sustainable development goals, the cultural sector has such an important role to play because it is a translator, and offers this element of interpretation, meaning creation, imagination, inspiration that we can bring to bear on challenges of the day. We have to have technical, policy-based and political solutions. And cultural solutions are just as important. Sometimes, they're even more important because there is that critical role of culture to inspire and to reflect.

Traditionally, we've had art that's reflected our cultural or human challenges of how do we get along with each other and work towards social justice? How do we get along with our planet and work towards environmental health? How do we address unfolding technologies that we've created, but that we don't always understand the implications of? I'm thinking particularly of artificial intelligence. How do we grapple with that? The arts are grappling with all of these very big human challenges because they have a very critical role and function in human society.

LAURA JOHANNA NOLL: It says on Getty's sustainability website that part of your role is to «define targeted goals and performance metrics». From your perspective, what role do

performance measurement, monitoring and controlling play in sustainability work in arts organizations? And what role should cultural policy play in shaping these processes?

CAMILLE KIRK: Performance measurement and deciding what metrics make sense to measure is absolutely crucial. It is key to understand what metrics will give you a sense of where you can have impact. And that requires a lot of input from people who are at the vanguard of research and helping us understand where the forefront of knowledge is moving to as well as people who are reflecting on where we've come from, so that we can understand what progress looks like and if we are actually progressing. Defining the set of metrics is super critical. Then, setting yourself up to collect the data for the metrics. You have to figure out if you have the system in place to collect the data, analyze the data, and then there's a fair amount of craft in figuring out how you interpret your results and the way in which you explain them.

One of the things that I've been really delighted to see over my time in sustainability is an increasing effort to use not just data analytics, but fantastic data visualization tools. I think that this is an area where you see the role that culture, design, an artistic perspective can bring to bear in shedding new understanding and new light on information. So, you can collect metrics, put them in a dull table, and you may make nothing of that. When you use clever data visualization techniques, you can sometimes see new patterns. There are, for example, charts called *Sankey diagrams* that show flows, and these can be incredibly revealing as to the magnitude of something that you're measuring. We've seen an increasing attention to and skill with data visualization that's helping us ask and answer important questions. It also helps with interpreting things that can be too abstract or technical for a lay public. I think data visualization can make information very tangible, understandable and give people new insights into what's happening, which is so important. If you are going to ask people to help make change with you, you need to communicate clearly with them about: What are the challenges that we're facing? What does the data tell us? And how do you know what the data tells us? We have limited resources. Performance assessment and excellent data analytics and data visualization are key to helping people understand how to direct their attention.

LAURA JOHANNA NOLL: I imagine that data visualization is also an important persuasive and governance tool – both internally, when building organizational support for sustainability initiatives, and externally, when communicating with audiences, funders or policymakers. It plays a crucial role in cultural participation and public engagement, by revealing patterns, stimulating reflection, and making complex sustainability issues tangible and relatable in ways that purely verbal communication often cannot. What other skills besides data technology and data visualization do you consider necessary to lead a sustainability department or initiative?

CAMILLE KIRK: You need skills in change management. Sustainability is a change management exercise, as are many human governance problems. You have to be sensitive and understand why are people making decisions: What are the imperatives driving them forward? What are the resistances? There's a lot of interesting social science research into human behavior, such as loss being more impactful than gain in certain instances. Decision-support tools, like life cycle cost analysis, are examples of the kinds of management skills you

need to be at least familiar with. It's good to have at least some fluency with financial and business concepts. Leadership training is important.

One thing that is always important to realize: Leaders don't have to be at the top of the organization. Leadership comes at every level of an organization. And that's where someone takes initiative, moves something through and motivates other people to make change. This requires understanding change management skills and persuasive skills. Sympathy and empathy are also really important skills, as well as a process improvement mindset and project management skills. A broad generalist education is helpful: You need the sciences, the humanities and a grounding in philosophy and history. You need to understand basic systems and have numeracy, math literacy, and master writing and argumentation. You will find yourself needing to make business cases. So, understanding a basic business case approach and how to run some math for that is important. One part of sustainability is making sure that from a financial perspective you can keep going.

In the US, we talk about the three E's of sustainability: There's obviously the environment. There's equity for people. And there's economics. Because if you drive yourself out of business that's not particularly sustainable. Even as a nonprofit, you have to be able to pay your bills and move your work forward. Increasingly, we understand that there is a fourth E of sustainability, which is education, and that is where the arts and humanities have an amazing role to play: in helping people to learn something in new ways when they're approaching it through the performing or visual arts, or through the humanities, a great piece of literature, an amazing poem that surprises you and causes you to see things in a different way.

LAURA JOHANNA NOLL: That's really fascinating. I recently attended a conference in Bornholm, Denmark, where someone argued that craftsmanship resolves dualisms – for example between thinking and doing, or between tradition and innovation. In many ways, sustainability work also requires the ability to move between different worlds and forms of knowledge: between data and empathy, technical expertise and communication, operational thinking and cultural reflection. You have to understand people as well as ecological systems, and navigate questions that intersect with politics, economics, science, and the arts. In that sense, sustainability also appears to be a practice of connecting and integrating things that are often treated separately.

CAMILLE KIRK: I agree with you completely. Part of the appeal for me is that dual nature. And in some ways, it feels very old school, almost like Claude Lévi-Strauss. These very binary things, but they are bridging together, and they're creating new things. And, really, this is the training of a geographer - that analytic, yet synthetic, systems thinking approach. I draw on my training as a geographer constantly in my career. I joke that geography is the "OG" professional sustainability certification.

LAURA JOHANNA NOLL: In my view, sustainability debates are often unnecessarily polarized and framed in overly simplistic ways. There is often a tension between highly idealistic sustainability narratives and equally dismissive reactions against them. At the same time, sustainability is still frequently reduced to purely ecological questions, while social and economic dimensions receive far less attention. For me, sustainability is certainly about the environment, but it is equally about people, governance and long-term economic viability. I think you articulated this very convincingly when you described sustainability not only as a

moral responsibility, but also as a business case and ultimately as a question about humanity's future. As the term sustainability has become so politically and ideologically charged, I sometimes find myself preferring the notion of future viability instead.

CAMILLE KIRK: I do strongly feel that is very unhelpful to take a hardline approach. I think we should always be interrogating ourselves as to why are we developing the way we are? Is it growth for the sake of growth? Or is it growth because we're maturing or improving something? We have new knowledge. We have new capability. We have new generations who want to have a place in the world. We cannot just keep adding; at some point, occasionally, we do have to clean out our metaphorical closet. We do have to prune, and we have to say that was great; we liked doing that at one time, but now we're going to stop that and start doing this other thing. Sustainability efforts, along with many other management efforts, often offer us an opportunity to ask strategy questions. That is absolutely fundamental. It doesn't matter whether you're coming from a capitalist, communist or a degrowth donut economics perspective. Any kind of economic system is ultimately about resource allocation and how you're choosing to allocate those resources.

So how do we do allocate resources in a more harmonious way with the planet? What can we learn from nature? Some of the most amazing engineering innovations have come from close observation of nature, as has some of the most amazing art. Artists have closely observed. We can learn a lot from just paying attention to our surroundings and then bringing that back in with a human inflection and human innovation. So, I very much agree that it's not helpful to take a hardline stance. Look at different approaches and take what you can from the different approaches that helps move the work forward. And I would say to people who are questioning why anyone needs sustainability: Well, we're living on this planet. It's currently the only home we have. So usually, we try to take care of where we live. That to me is the root of what we're trying to do here: take care of our planet, so we can have joyful, healthy, and inspiring lives for our current and our future selves.

LAURA JOHANNA NOLL: I would like to conclude the interview with the question: Sustainability is one of the top priorities for the Getty. What is your vision for the Getty in 10 years?

CAMILLE KIRK: We are a known and proven leader in the intersection between art and sustainability. That we have continued to make progress on our decarbonization journey in smart ways that are also replicable by others. We make more sustainable design choices in our exhibitions, and we explore sustainability questions through our collections, learning from the past as we go into our future. We are part of building a broader network globally across the sector to share what we're learning so that we can all move faster on this journey. And do that in ways that also respect that all institutions need to be mindful of resource allocations. We understand that sustainability has to serve the mission not be the mission. And it will be hard to fulfill our mission as cultural institutions of stewarding the world's cultural heritage and sharing it with the public, if climate change and the biodiversity crisis increasingly threaten our existence on this planet.

ⁱ *In March 2026, Getty and several other Los Angeles visual art institutions announced a collective climate action commitment; more information is available at <https://www.getty.edu/projects/committing-to-climate-action/>*