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# An Artistic Touch: Engaging a New Audience in Land Conservation

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**Organization:**
Georges River Land Trust

**Challenge:**
Growing engagement and diversifying funding

**Solution:**
Bringing artists and art to land trusts in Maine



All photos courtesy of Georges River Land Trust.

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## Organization at a glance:

Established 1987

10 staff, 13 board

Rockland, ME



*"Local Girl"*



*"Christina's World"*



*"Forest Geometries."*

# Their Story

Georges River Land Trust was founded in 1987 to care for the St. George River watershed. Today, the organization manages more than 5,623 acres, 24 preserves, and holds 56 conservation easements. The mission has matured from a sole focus on environmental protection to also supporting community needs, broadening environmental education, offering youth programming, and forming partnerships to welcome historically excluded voices into their conservation efforts.

# Preserving Art & Land

In 2017, through partnerships with Colby College and Kohler Foundation Inc., a coastal and ecologically diverse parcel, now known as Langlais Art Preserve, was acquired by GRLT. The Preserve is the 90-acre homestead of Bernard Langlais and showcases a permanent outdoor installation of site-specific sculptures. The Sculpture Path is a quarter-mile accessible trail that includes numerous wooden sculptures housed in nature. One of Bernard Langlais' works, "Local Girl" (1968), was inspired by another Maine artist, Andrew Wyeth's painting of Christina Olson titled "Christina's World" (1948).

Based on the connection between Langlais and Wyeth and the success of Langlais Art Preserve, in 2026 GRLT was uniquely positioned to receive the land, now known as Olson Field Preserve, as a donation from the Wyeth Foundation for American Art. This preservation highlights how partnerships with the arts community can open new doors and pathways for land trusts. This parcel holds historic significance to the arts community and has important ecological value as a shoreline property. A new trail was recently constructed on this preserve to help the community access and connect to this land.

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# Programming Opportunities

## Working with Living Artists

The Langlais Art Preserve hosts year-long artist engagements to poetically and visually tell the story of the land. Currently, the preserve is hosting Gina Siepel's temporary, site-specific installation "Forest Geometries." Placed on the Woodland Trail, this exhibit builds on Langlais' artistic vision and medium with a new perspective to emphasize forest succession. GRLT has found that longer partnerships with living artists have been most successful, allowing more time for deeper relationships between the land trust, artist, and community.

## High Engagement Youth Programming

The Langlais Art Preserve hosts three youth programs: Wonder Walks, Creative Nature Summer Camp, and Creative Nature Club. GRLT has created year-round programming centered on art and exploration that better connects youth in their community to place and the outdoors. The hope is to change the tone of land trust education from one of climate anxiety and strictly science to education on connection and building a personal relationship with nature for the youth. GRLT sees art as the focal point of this new programming, as it captures emotions and complexities that exist within nature and gives an outlet to explore these complexities.

# Challenges

Hosting art exhibitions or living artist workshops requires staff with more expertise and connections in the art community. GRLT has a large responsibility to repectfully represent the legacies of Langlais and Wyeth. Staff at the land trust rely on their relationships in the art community to find new funding, artists, and consultants to ensure high-quality stewardship and programming.

Additionally, GRLT has to balance stewarding the ecological significance of the property with the preservation and upkeep of the art. This can further increase tension between funding needs and staff capacity.

# Learnings for Other Land Trusts

## New Funding Potential

Blending land trusts and the arts is one example of cross-sector partnerships that can be an opportunity to diversify funding streams. GRLT has received grants from the Wyeth Foundation for American Art, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Ruth Foundation for the Arts, and other arts-focused foundations, which would not have been available funding avenues to pursue as a strictly conservation land trust. New funding streams have been vital for curating and maintaining the art on GRLT preserves and increasing staff capacity.

## New Audience Connections

In 2025, GRLT saw nearly 1,000 attendees at its community events and programs, with more than half attending programs at the Langlais Art Preserve. As Hannah Blunt, GRLT's Director of the Langlais Art Preserve, described, "our arts-integrated nature programming and artist-led outdoor experiences have expanded the land trust's offerings beyond the scientific and the recreational." Hosting art installations and living artists allows new audiences to interact with the land trust and can diversify future land trust membership.

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