As conservators and scholars working with practicing artists, do we influence the artist and, in turn, their art? Is this a positive influence, a negative one, or neither? Jason Church, Dennis Montagna, and Ron Harvey will discuss their experiences working with artists—and the roles that their interactions have played.

After a few visits with Louisiana artist Juanita Leonard, Jason Church began to notice she was removing many of her plaster and papier-mâché sculptures and replacing them with ones made from corrugated tin. When asked about this, Leonard responded that since she now knew about trying to protect the art for the future, she was doing away with any materials that wouldn't last. This is when Church realized his casual conversations about being a conservator had an impact on the artist.

For the last decade or so, Phil Webb has been creating painted concrete monuments and placing them in his local cemetery in Hoisington, Kansas. Nearly all of these are uncommissioned works that memorialize people who never received a permanent grave monument. Historian Dennis Montagna has been visiting and talking with Webb and documenting the development of his work. Recent notoriety and media attention have led Webb to repaint many of his early works, sometimes changing them in important ways.

Ronald Harvey was a consulting conservator during the early stages of the Vollis Simpson Whirligig Project in Wilson, North Carolina. Concerted discussions with Simpson about the long-term preservation of his wind-driven sculptures made it clear that movement and reflectivity were the qualities he most wanted preserved. But the project team, which included Harvey, Montagna, and others, also explored with the artist the roles that color and various materials play in his work, as well as the need to insure their longevity through long-term maintenance. Similar discussions with Phil Webb moved from his works’ evolution into a discussion of longer-lived paints and protective coatings.

All three of the aforementioned artists were interested in exploring longer-lasting, materials, mechanisms, and paint systems. But can the intervention of historians, conservators, the media, and the marketplace play too great a role in an artist’s creative process?