

Call for Applications: Artist Fellowship as part of the research project “Powering Wealth: How Rich Families Shape the Energy Transition in Germany and Mexico c. 1870 - 2025”

About the research project

The current attempt to significantly reduce the world's use of hydrocarbons and to ramp up the energy supply from renewable sources is critical for avoiding climate collapse. Since energy poverty means poverty and having access to energy is a precondition for being wealthy (for individuals as much as for societies), the current steps towards a renewable energy transition is also the re-distributional event of our lifetime. It risks further entrenching existing inequalities but may also produce new material winners and losers. This combination of climatic necessity and re-distributional effects already now create enormous political and social predicaments and therefore must be urgently understood (and addressed).

Against this background, the international research project Powering Wealth examines how wealthy families influence the energy transition in Germany and Mexico—two countries with a high concentration of personal wealth and energy-driven economic development. It examines the relationship between dynastic wealth and energy transitions in the late 19th century, around the 1950s and today. The project is a cooperation between political economists and sociologists from Freie Universität Berlin and El Colegio de México and is implemented in cooperation with the Global Public Policy Institute. The project is funded by VolkswagenStiftung. It combines different research methods with a particular focus on the analysis of wills (testaments) to reconstruct family investment decisions over a long historical period.

While these decisions are often framed as purely economic, rational decisions, there are deep social and political forces at play. The testaments reveal the succession, but they also reflect how the testators conceive of themselves, their family members, society, and the world to come. Based on these conceptions, investment and hereditary decisions determine who gets what, when and why – Harold D. Laswell's famous definition of politics. To capture not only the empirical facts, but also the dramatic potential of these decisions as well as their political impact, we aim to collaborate with artists. We are convinced that the arts are well placed to complement scientific inquiry to uncover how individual experiences reflect structural conditions. We also believe that they are well suited to convey the emotional, sensory, or corporeal responses to extreme wealth, wealthy families and their roles in society.

We are happy to share a longer project description upon request. In case of interest please write to Theres Rolle (theres.rolle@fu-berlin.de).

What we are looking for

We search for an artist who is interested in collaborating with us on the question of wealth and energy. We will make available the interview and archival data that we work with on which the artists are expected to draw. Beyond that, the artists are entirely free to develop their artistic work. There will be a similar call for Mexico-based artists; the fellowship includes the possibility for an exchange between the Germany- and Mexico-based artists.

The details

The fellowship has an overall budget of €48.000 (incl. all taxes and social security contributions). In case of an exchange with the Mexican artist, there is an additional €3.500 for travel costs. The research project runs from April 2025 to April 2029. Within that timeframe, the length of the collaboration is flexible and should be outlined by the artist in their application. We expect a final work by December 2028 (or earlier). Given that the testaments and interview material is in German, excellent German language skills are required. We believe that the collaboration is particularly suitable for individual artists with a practice in the visual arts, media arts, or literary arts. However, if your practice is in another art form and you have an idea that works within the given conditions, please do apply!

How to apply and selection process

For your application, please send a short dossier containing the following information:

- Your artistic vita/ biography
- A concept note (max. 1-2 pages) outlining your idea for the collaboration, including how your practice relates to the topics of the project and what aspects of the project you would like to explore with your work; how you picture the collaboration with the research team and (potentially) with the Mexican artist; and the related artistic output. You can also submit a format other than writing, if that is more suitable in practice. It should be of equivalent length and contain the same information.
- A project note (max. 1 page) outlining the timeframe and budget of the project (up to €48.000 incl. all taxes and social security contributions).

to Theres Rolle (theres.rolle@fu-berlin.de). The due date is 1 December 2025. Short-listed candidates will be invited to present their idea in an online meeting in January 2026. The final decision is expected by mid-February 2026.

