beyond exhibitions

How to design and deliver compelling exhibitions in the future?

Sanam Samanian

reliable narrators resonate.

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investigation

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VISUALS

ABSTRACT

Over the last two decades, as the contemporary artworld grew to a planetary size—more galleries, more fairs, more art-selling websites, bigger museums, new biennials, and digital platforms—it seems that, along with it, a new cultural figure emerged: the international curator. Moreover, the practice of curation has metastasized into unconventional spaces and formats. Exhibitions are no longer confined to museums. They are no longer focused on art and artifacts but are often held at unlikely venues (physical and digital) and have grown to include other by-products of a culture such as architecture, design, and content. But what is the future of Curatorial Practice, and how would the international, independent curators of the future have to design and deliver compelling exhibitions that would connect to—and resonate with—a global audience?

The following Major Research Project (MRP), examines the trajectory of Curatorial Practice as well as the role of curators, and their influence, as creators of exhibitions, on human development. It will analyze the trends, patterns, and signals of change in the contemporary artworld, foresighting the future of the practice and the role of curators in directing its development.

The examined theory in this MRP is as follow: curators and their role have evolved to be major influencers in the global artworld. Moving forward, their future is hinged on how they tell stories about contemporary culture. It is a departure from their role in the past as merely 'organizers' of physical exhibitions where they collected the art and artifacts, placing them in museums. In the near future, the exhibitions must move away from having Curatorial Statements. Instead, they would benefit from connecting with their audience through a Curatorial Narrative, telling the story of the development of the content. These cultural figures, curators, need to understand the development of contemporary content from an intimate perspective and tell the story of its progress through the literary device of Reliable Narrator. This strategy, a subtle shift, will transform the design and delivery of the content for an exhibition. Narratives will also resonate with the future audience, presenting and documenting the current times, telling the stories of contemporary culture in the social, global context.

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TERMINOLOGY

The following definitions have been taken from
Oxford English Dictionary in 2019.

Contemporary/ Belonging to or occurring in the
present.

Exhibition/ A public display of content and works
of art or items of interest, held in an art gallery or
museum or at a trade fair.

Artworld/ The system comprises everyone involved
in producing, commissioning, presenting, preserving,
promoting, chronicling, criticizing, and selling art.

Curatorial Practice/ The act and profession of
curating; in contemporary art, the title "curator"
identifies a person who selects and often interprets
works of art. In addition to selecting works, the
curator is often responsible for writing labels, catalog
essays, and other content supporting exhibitions.

Independent Curator/ Curators who do not work as
an employee of a specific institution or venue.

Critical Curation/ Curatorial work that imposes
criticism onto a subject and/or area.

Content/ The data, items, substance and similar
things that are held or included in something else.

Culture/ The arts and other manifestations of human
intellectual achievement regarded collectively.

Narrative/ A spoken or written account of connected
events; a story.

Reliable Narrator/ A literary device. A reliable
narrator is a speaker who has very close values
as the author of the novel or poem of which they
are narrating. The fictional truth of the reliable
narrator is typically related to the readers. They
should demonstrate a wide span of knowledge of the
situations and/or the characters in the author's work.

Foresighting/ The ability to predict or the action
of predicting what will happen or be needed in the
future.

Self Image/ The idea one has of one's abilities,
appearance, and personality.

Social Media/ Digital websites and applications
that enable users to create and share content or to
participate in social networking. A few examples
include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.

Art Installation (Installation)/ A genre of three-
dimensional work of art that consists of site - specific
pieces - designed to transform the perception of a
space.

Immersive Experience/ An illusory environment
that completely surrounds e person such that they
feel that they are inside it and part of it. The term
is associated with technology environments that
command the senses such as virtual reality and
mixed reality.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)/ The theory and
development of computer systems able to perform
tasks that normally require human intelligence, such
as visual perception, speech recognition, decision-
making, and translation between languages.

Recycled Art/ Creative work that's made from
discarded materials that once had another purpose.

Digital Currency (Cryporcurrency)/ A type of
currency available in digital form. It exhibits
properties similar to physical currencies, but can
allow for instantaneous transactions and borderless
transfer-of-ownership.

RELEVANCE

This MRP, Beyond Exhibition, at its best, scratches the surface of what needs to happen for Curatorial Practice to have a more focused, deliberate strategy in designing and delivering compelling exhibitions in the future. However, it is a start. With the advancement of technology, contemporary exhibitions have left the spaces of museums and galleries, finding new venues. And, as a result, the strategies for how designing and delivering curated content, today, is more critical than it has ever been in the past.

As a practicing curator and a frequent visitor of exhibitions—physical and digital—through this MRP, I aim to understand and offer strategic directions for independent curators in navigating the future of Curatorial Practice, and in doing so, illustrate how to design and deliver exhibitions, connecting with an audience and communicating the content with them. This study scans the past and history of Curatorial Practice. It observes the current trends to be able to arrive at the best possible strategies, influencing an audience with the most compelling exhibitions in the next twenty years. It also further analyzes the space and opportunities for innovation in that context.

The Strategic Foresight and Innovation program at OCAD University granted me an opportunity to explore the Curatorial Practice through conducting a Major Research Project (MRP), understanding its trajectory, navigating it strategically, and arriving at its future—prepared. In doing so, I hope to learn about the possibilities and opportunities that are embedded in this practice, influencing our global culture for the better and passing on the insights to those who are interested in designing and delivering well-curated content for their audience.

For the purposes of this MRP, the terms 'effective, compelling, or influential' refer to those exhibitions that clearly communicate the content—measured through the audience's understanding and how close it is to the intention of the curator(s).

PRELUDE

In 1962 Gerhard Richter, celebrated German artist, began to make portraits from found photographs (DIETMAR, 1996). In addition to the ones from newspapers and magazines, Richter used snapshots from old family albums as the basis for paintings (DIETMAR, 1996). He had escaped to West Germany ahead of the Berlin Wall's construction as a political refugee (DIETMAR, 1996). Amongst his minimal belongings, he had taken a family album (DIETMAR, 1996).

Richter's use of these private photographs heralded, from the late 1970s, a body of portraits connected with his inner circle of family and close friends (DIETMAR, 1996). Such intimate subjects and personal themes seemed, at first, to stand in stark contrast to the impersonal nature of his early abstract, deconstructive expressionism paintings (DIETMAR, 1996). The use of photographs may have been emotional, but he would erase and detach any meaning or story from them. Richter would paint them, in black-and-white, onto large canvases (DIETMAR, 1996), deliberately blurring aspects of the paintings to convey how he remembered—or had forgotten—his family members (DIETMAR, 1996). The blurring would add a layer of intentional ambiguity, disconnecting Richter from the reality, offering an emotional distance (GARNICK, 2015). Titled Family Paintings, the erasing of the personal story in this body of work has been cited as an effort "to maintain tight control over his narrative" (DIETMAR, 1996). By obscuring the identities of the people depicted and questioning the relationships between them, Richter's Family Paintings are void of a story—personally removed, detached, but meaningful.

Later, in a 2011 documentary titled Gerhard Richter Painting, filmmaker Corinna Belz records this revered German artist over a year. Though he talks a bit about his life and history, the film isn't a primer about his career, but his personal relationship to his work. As part of the documentary, Richter is preparing for an exhibition with a focus on his portrait-based pieces. Curated by Paul Moonhouse at London's National Portrait Gallery, it opened in February 2009 for four months, showcasing Richter's compelling but unconventional approach to portraiture.

In the documentary, Richter and the curatorial team consider including the original photographs in his family album as part of the exhibition, using them as references to narrate a personal story about the work. He, however, struggles with the idea of attaching any meaning to them "I should just throw them away...it may be better to forget"(GERHARD RICHTER PAINTING DOCUMENTARY). But towards the end of the film, as they get closer to the opening, there is a moment, captured on film, when Richter recalls his parents. Looking at the photos, he speaks (with a reserved-yet-transparent emotional manner) about loss, referring to his family in the images as "frozen in time" (GERHARD RICHTER PAINTING DOCUMENTARY). Silent, but contemplative, he looks away from the camera, staring at the wall of the National Portrait Gallery, still holding his parents' photograph.

As the film wraps up, the exhibition reveals some of Richter's black-and-white family photos curated on the wall as part of the exhibition. Rooted in a personal narrative, the inclusion of these family photos, after decades of detachment, is a signal for change—the return of intentional storytelling in Curatorial Practice.

INTRODUCTION

How to design and deliver an influential exhibition in the future?

A Major Research Project (MRP), Beyond Exhibitions, aims to understand and offer strategic directions for independent, international curators, navigating the future of Curatorial Practice. In doing so, it makes recommendations for how to design and deliver compelling exhibitions. The criteria for the success of these efforts are measured through the reception of the content, asking if it resonated with the audience.

This study scans the past and history of Curatorial Practice, observing the current trends to be able to arrive at the best possible strategies for the future. It also further analyzes the space and opportunities for innovation in that context.

I'm not an academic but have been involved with Curatorial Practice since graduating from architecture school in 2008—the final year during which I curated an exhibition, showcasing our work abroad as international students. Having had frequented galleries, museums, and similar cultural venues since childhood, I found curating and designing the content of an exhibit to be exciting and intuitive. To this date, for me, there has never been a place more like home than a well-curated exhibition.

After practicing curation for some time, the Strategic Foresight and Innovation program at OCAD University granted me an opportunity to view the practice in a new light. I was given the tools to understand the future of any given topic, and navigate its practice strategically (with awareness), eventually arriving at its future—prepared. Aside from intuition, this graduate program offered 'intentions.' It equipped me (and others) with an understanding of how to move forward, how to navigate the rapid changes that were taking place in any field, and how to prepare strategically and intentionally for the future. When it came time to select a topic for my MRP, I decided to take the opportunity and focus my research on the future of Curatorial Practice, and in doing so, understand the role of curators in cultivating culture.

Having had curated for nearly a decade, and observed exhibitions for three, I had a theory that was worth exploring: *curators, as creators of exhibitions, must gradually evolve to become storytellers in contemporary culture.* In my own work, I had witnessed the impact of telling stories. The audience often connects with the format of a story. Narratives resonate.

Curators have historically assumed the role of an 'outsider' and 'organizer.' But, in a data-driven world where Social Media has removed most barriers, to resonate and connect with an audience, I thought, it is time we pause and re-examine the role of curators in contemporary culture. Are they the storytellers, and if yes, what kind of narrators are they? And so, this MRP attempts to respond to a central question:

Research Question: When designing and delivering exhibitions in the future, to connect and resonate with a global audience, what is the role of an international curator?

My theory, at the beginning of this MRP, was simple but significant: curators are storytellers of the future. But what kind of narrators are they? Can we trust the stories they tell? In the book Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics by Shlosmith Rimmon-Kenan, the main characteristic of various narrators are examined. Amongst them, a Reliable Narrator is cited to be identified by "his or her proximity in values to the implied author" (RIMMON-KENAN, 2003). Rimmon-Kennan states that "the truth of the narrative is typically related to the audience via this Reliable Narrator, demonstrating a breadth of knowledge of situations and characters. The personal involvement of a Reliable Narrator does not typically impede a truthful account of the story, and so determining reliability should be based in part on the narrator's ability to distance him/herself from personal relations with other characters to provide a more impartial account." (RIMMON-KENAN, 2003). Therefore, on the path to the future of Curatorial Practice, to resonate with an audience, would narratives be the right vehicles, and Reliable Narrators the most suitable drivers?

This research project, Beyond Exhibitions, will address these issues. You, as a reader of this presentation, will need the following information:

Arena / While exhibitions come in many formats that cater to different needs and motivations, this MRP will focus on 'curated exhibitions' that are designed and delivered by 'independent, international curators' in museums or similar cultural venues and institutions globally.

Audience / This MRP is written mainly for international, independent curators of any subject, and those who will acquire their expertise in designing and delivering physical and/or digital exhibitions in the future. It is not specific to any geographical context and culture but it is conducted for those who pratice in contemporary artworld.

Horizon / An intermidate horizon of 20 years was selected. It is imperative that all strategic foresight initiaves presented in this document account for the pace and nature of the artworld and its ecosystem while allowing for an accurate and believale application of rapidly-evolving exhibitions.

The gathered and analyzed information, during the research period of this MRP, are presented in three major chapters: Past, Present, Future. The research begins by investigating the 'influence of narratives', 'reliable narrators' and 'role of curators' in the past through literature reviews. Observational Field Notes will provide data in the second chapter to understand the current landscape in the artworld and changing-signals in contemporary art. Subsequently, the findings of the first two chapters will be used as data for the foresighting in the final chapter, understanding the evolution of the practice and position curators strategically for the future. The research, through these theree chapters, will test the following: Do curators of the future need to leverage Reliable Narrator as a tool in order to design and deliver compelling exhibitions, and resonate with the audience?

Past
- The Influence of Narratives & Reliable Narrators
- The Trajectory of Curatorial Practice
- The Role of Independent Curators in Curatorial Practice

Present
- Scanning the Contemporary Curatorial Practice
- Examining a Contemporary Curatorial Narrative

Future
- Trends in Contemporary Curatorial Practice
- Possible Scenarios for the Future of Curatorial Practice
- Time-Machine

It is important to note that the moral 'reliability' of curators are not the subject of this research. This MRP proposes the exhibitions to be designed through a 'narrative' and examines the literary device of Reliable Narrator as a useful tool to connect and communicate the content of an exhibition with a global audience. Written in plain prose, this document is (on theme) narrative documentation of the conducted research. It is important to note that although non-linear narrative structures are not only significant but also intriguing to explore, for the purposes of this study, and to reduce the complexity of the academic process, the research has refrained from investigating the alternative structures of narrative at this point. Non-linear stories intersect with our understanding of "time," and albeit fascinating, it is reserved for the future. The research remains open and interested in continuing the exploration further, incorporating the perception of "time" and, as a result, non-linear narrative structures and their role in the Curatorial Practice.

investigations

METHODOLOGY

This document is the story of a qualitative Major Research Project (MRP). In social sciences, including the arts, Qualitative Methods are used to answer questions about experience, meaning, and perspective (HAMMARBERG, 2016, P. 498-501). The factual data may result in a more definitive conclusion in research, but for a study in the arts, Beyond Exhibitions attempts at understanding the role of independent curators in the future of their qualitative practice; it was, therefore, imperative that the research method used for the study be qualitative.

The principal, wicked question at the centre of this study 'how to design and exhibit compelling content in the future?' brought with it more questions. To foresight the future of Curatorial Practice, I had to investigate its past and present. Thus, this research will begin in history, building up the content in phases to reach a conclusion, and addressing the research question. The theory of *curators-as-reliable-narrators* needed to be examined. Have curators always been storytellers in the past? Are they telling stories now?

To understand the past/present, and arrive in the future, the MRP is divided into three respective sections. Each employs a distinct method to conduct the research; each answers a central question. The insights of each section are used to arrive at the final conclusion. Moreover, the presentation of the findings seemed to be an opportunity to test the theory as well. As a result, this document is a curated narrative of the research process, leveraging Reliable Narrator as a literary device, telling you, the audience, the story of the research. The presented three chapters in this document and the methodology for their study are as follow:

Past - Literature Review

In the first chapter, the research has been conducted through Literature Reviews. The role of narratives in human history and the role of Reliable Narrator as a literary device are described in this chapter. The MRP, then, delves into documented accounts of how curators have practiced their craft in the past to understand the evolution of their methods. Subsequently, this chapter scans the history of Curatorial Practice and the role of curators in its trajectory using a variety of texts, books, articles, and other academic sources. The presented chapter analyzes the central theory based on these reviews, conducted about the past, re-telling the story of its findings to, first and foremost, address:

what is the influence of narratives in human history?
...and, have curators been storytellers in the past?

Present - Autoethnography / Narrative Analysis

In this chapter, I usher the research to the present time. Contemporary Curatorial Practice is scanned and analyzed through Autoethnography, which is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe—and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience (YURTOĞLU, 2018, P. 241-264). This approach challenges canonical ways of doing research, treating the research as a political, socially-just, and socially-conscious act (YURTOĞLU, 2018, P. 241-264). The researcher, for this method, uses tenets of Autobiography and Ethnography to conduct observational research. Thus, as a method, Autoethnography is both process and product (YURTOĞLU, 2018, P. 241-264).

This portion of the research selects a sample of contemporary exhibitions to observe, including the 57th Venice Biennale of Art, a contemporary art group exhibition titled Possible Worlds in Berlin's KunstRaum in summer 2017, and an interactive group exhibition in New York's New Museum. The observational field notes from these visits are documented through Autoethnography, illustrating the current landscape of Contemporary Curatorial Practice. Furthermore, the research includes the story of how a solo exhibition was curated at Aaran Gallery in Tehran through a Curatorial Narrative. It practically tests the theory of using a Narrative as a strategic tool to connect and resonate with an audience. The accounts of this exhibition as well as its process of curation is also documented through Autoethnography.

At this juncture in the research, and to design the Curatorial Narrative for the aforementioned exhibition in Tehran, the documented field notes were put through a Qualitative Research Methodology: Narrative Analysis. Selected based on its relevance, Narrative Analysis collects experiential data. It aims to organize them to create a narrative with a plot that unifies the collected information—through common themes, insights, and observations (CANDININ, 2000). This particular method emerged as a discipline from within the broader field of qualitative research in the early 20th century (RIESSMAN, 2002). Narrative Analysis uses documented field texts (such as stories, autobiography, journals, field notes, letters, conversations, photos, and other life experiences) as the units of analysis to research. It understands the way people create meaning (CLANDININ, 2000). It has been employed as a tool for review in the fields of cognitive science, organizational studies, knowledge theory, psychology, sociology, and education studies, among others (CLANDININ, 2000). It challenges the philosophy behind quantitative/grounded data-gathering and questions the idea of "objective" data (CLANDININ, 2000).

Based on its recommended method, and to arrive at a Curatorial Narrative, I developed a secondary question in this chapter:

How do we tell our stories in Conteamporary Culture?

The above-mentioned question relates back to the Principal Question of this MRP but also attempts at clarifying how the audience of an exhibit tells and receives their stories in contemporary culture. As recommended for Narrative Analysis, the raw data, field notes compiled during the visits, which were informed by observation and used to produce a narrative (COFFEY, 2013). During this chapter, the MRP analyzes the collected data through Autoethnography in the form of field notes, over the span three months (June 2017 - August 2017) during which, as an independent curator, I have investigated the above question by visiting significant global contemporary exhibitions, and conducting a curatorial project. The data is then "interpreted to look for patterns, themes, and regularities as well as contrasts, paradoxes, and irregularities" (COFFEY, 2013). The analysis in this chapter provides data for a Curatorial Narrative, leading the development and execution of a solo exhibition in Tehran, and later; as a result, an installation in Toronto's Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO).

Future - Horizon Scanning/Scenario Planning /Time Machine

In this chapter, the Future of Curatorial Practice is foresighted through Horizon Scanning of the contemporary artworld. Horizon Scanning is a technique for detecting early signs of potentially significant developments (HINES, 2019). It also identifies their implications and values through a systematic examination of trends (HINES, 2019). The method explores novel and unexpected issues as well as persistent problems and trends, including matters at the margins of current thinking that challenge past assumptions (HINES, 2019). It can provide the background to develop strategies for anticipating future developments and thereby gain lead time (HINES, 2019). It can also be a way to assess trends to feed into a scenario development process (HINES, 2019). The insights from the previous two chapters of this MRP will be used to understand the 'signals for change' and, therefore, focus on the related current trends in the contemporary artworld. They will be then used to plan four possible, future-oriented scenarios.

Based on one of these scenarios, a narrative-based contemporary art installation/exhibition as a Time Machine is designed for Toronto's 2018 Nuit Blanche—a major, city-wide contemporary arts event in Canada's Toronto. Time Machine in foresight practice is a form of experiential futures where "designing and staging interventions exploit the continuum of human experience in order to enable a different and deeper engagement through discussions and reactions about one or more futures, that has traditionally been possible through textual and statistical means of representing scenarios" (CANDY, 2010). The impact of this Time Machine

as well as its curatorial method is examined, concluding the findings and recommending strategic paths for independent, international curators in the future of Curatorial Practice.

It is important to note that to understand the future of Curatorial Practice in a global context, this study has intentionally eliminated the involvement of any particular governing body, and will not analyze the financial aspects of exhibitions.
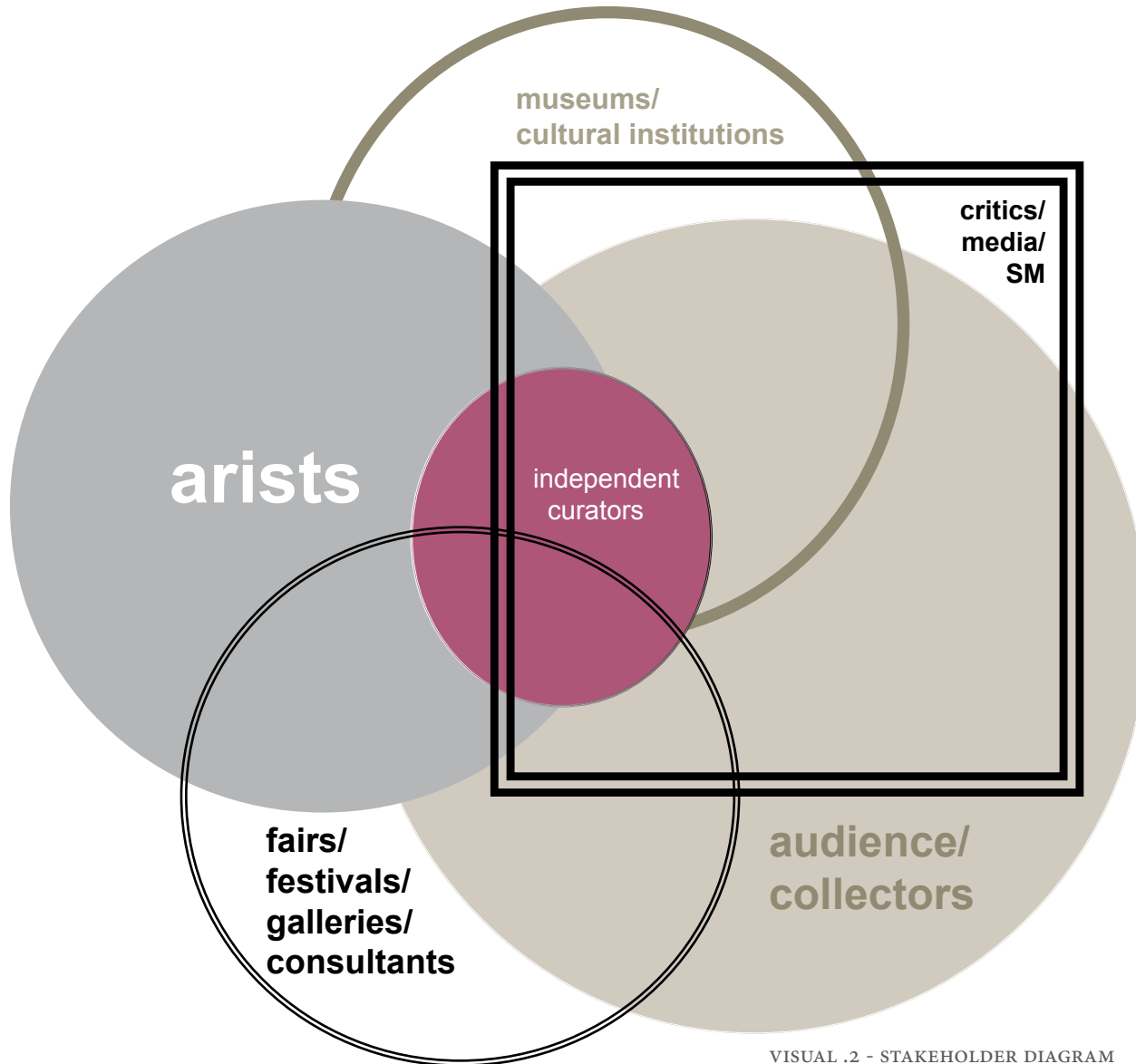
The information gathered during this MRP is interpreted by the curator-author of this document, and told mainly through a "first person narrator", examining the central theory. And, as a result, the impression that the presentation of the document leaves on the audience [you] is the intention behind its efforts. You are the audience for its exhibition. I will, unlike most academic research, in the end, simply conclude the story from my perspective, as a curator.

How independent curators can design and deliver compelling exhibitions in the future?

VISUAL .1 - INTERWOVE, INSTALLATION
AGA KHAN MUSEUM, TORONTO, 2019
ARTIST: HAJAR MORADI

stakeholders

museums/
cultural institutions

critics/
media/
SM

arists

independent
curators

fairs/
festivals/
galleries/
consultants

audience/
collectors

VISUAL .2 - STAKEHOLDER DIAGRAM

My interest in telling stories began at an early age. I didn't start reading books because they were good for me. They must have been, but I mainly read them to understand how to tell stories. They, books, were my only source of investigation. I didn't discriminate. My grandparents' home library was stacked with the classics, yet had one-off gems and a generous collection of poetry. The room was also cluttered with the daily newspapers and the usual literary magazines. My father reads mostly non fiction; he also has, over the years, accumulated a random collection of "stories that resonate with him." Those perplexed by their existence and the existence of others—philosophers and psychologists—were amongst the authors that resonated with my uncle (one of the most complex and introverted people I have ever known), and my mother and her sisters read magical realism, mythology, and absurd plays. My family expressed their thoughts by referencing these stories, discussed the merits of each, and argued consistently about their themes and concepts—I was growing.

PAST

In this chapter of the MRP, I will investigate and address the below three items through Literature Review:

- The Influence of Narratives & Reliable Narrators
- The Trajectory of Curatorial Practice
- The Role of Independent Curators in Curatorial Practice

NARRATIVES & RELIABLE NARRATORS

The earliest pertinent evidence known to identify who coined the phrase "History is a Fable Agreed Upon" appears in a 1724 essay about historiography titled "L'Origine des Fables" ("Of the Origin of Fables") by Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle (GARSON, 2016). Later, prominent figures such as the French philosopher Claude Adrien Helvétius and Voltaire echoed it, ascribing the adage to Fontenelle (GARSON, 2016). Many years later, Napoléon Bonaparte, the historical figure in the French Revolution, used an instance of the saying, but he disclaimed credit. Then, the transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson also used it in a situation, but he credited Bonaparte (GARSON, 2016). And so, the resonance continues. Fables, as stories, inform history. The trajectory of human existence is told through narratives.

"Human beings have always been myth-makers. We are meaning-seeking creatures. Another peculiar characteristic of the human mind is its ability to have ideas and experiences that we cannot explain rationally. We have imagination, a faculty that enables us to think of something that is not immediately present, and that, when we first conceived, it was no objective existence. The imagination is the faculty that produces religion and mythology"(ARMSTRONG, 1996, P. 1). The origin of storytelling can be traced to the phenomenon of 'imitation' as something deeply rooted in human nature (NAUGLE, 1999). Imitation is natural to human beings from childhood, and, as experience shows, it is normal for them to delight in works of imitation even if what is imitated is painful (NAUGLE, 1999). Moreover, from an Aristotelian perspective, storytelling, as an imitative and joy-producing art, is one of the most significant, soul-shaping forces to prevail upon humanity (NAUGLE, 1999). From etching drawings in stones to gathering religious stories in what is globally accepted as "holy" books, human beings are storytellers—homo narrans—as we were in the caves—so much so that our lives are formed and informed by the stories, myths, and folktales we tell ourselves and to each other, generation after generation (NAUGLE, 1999).

The role of narratives and stories in shaping consciousness and influencing action has been discussed since time immemorial (SMITH, 2012). Moreover, a recent study in Nature Communications cites storytelling as a powerful means of fostering social cooperation and teaching social norms (SMITH, 2012).

In antiquity era, Plato, having had completed his discourse about the kinds of stories that would inspire honour in the guardians of his ideal state, expresses, in The Republic, that stories which imparted a fear of death in future civil servants were to be rigorously reconsidered (NAUGLE, 1999). Plato argues that the kinds of stories that the future guardians of his ideal commonwealth would encounter in their education would be determinative for life (NAUGLE, 1999). In his view, as meaningful arrangements of reality-shaping characters, plots, and ideas—narratives—would be extremely influential both "cognitively and morally" (NAUGLE, 1999). Because of their power to mold consciousness and conduct, Plato argued that "the content of the guardians' early training had to be carefully planned and supervised" (NAUGLE, 1999). This Athenian philosopher's recognition of the remarkable power of stories and the consequent need for pedagogical supervision has been referenced by a contemporary child psychologist, Bruno Bettelheim (NAUGLE, 1999). "Plato—who may have understood better what forms the mind of man than do some of our contemporaries who want their children exposed only to 'real' people and everyday events—knew intellectual experiences make for true humanity" (NAUGLE, 1999). He suggested that "the future citizens of his ideal world would begin their literary education with the telling of myths, rather than with mere facts or so-called rational teachings" (NAUGLE, 1999).

Narratives have had historical influences. In 330 BC, Alexander the Great, who was, then, the leader of Macedonia was perpetually at war with its neighbours, above all Persia (PUTCHNER, 2018). After his father's assassination, Alexander ascends the throne and quickly exceeds all expectations (PUTCHNER, 2018). Not only did he secure the safety of his kingdom, but he also defeats the entire [then] Persian Empire, conquering a vast realm that stretched from Egypt to northern India (PUTCHNER, 2018). According to the historian, Alexander possessed an additional weapon: Homer's Iliad (PUTCHNER, 2018). He had learned to read and write by studying this text as a young man, and thanks to his teacher, the philosopher Aristotle, he had done so with unusual intensity (PUTCHNER, 2018). When he embarked on his conquests, Homer's story of an earlier Greek expedition to Asia Minor served as a blueprint, and he stopped at Troy, even though the city had no military significance, merely to re-enact scenes from Iliad. For the entire duration of his conquest, he would sleep alongside his copy (PUTCHNER, 2018).

The contemporary philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre argues persuasively for "the recovery of a narrative-based understanding of human existence" (NAUGLE, 1999). In his celebrated After Virtue (1981), he suggests that "...a morally-ordered human life is possible only to the extent that it is conceived, unified, and evaluated as a whole" (NAUGLE, 1999). Hence, he seeks to recover a concept of an integrated human existence grounded in the integrity of a narrative that links birth, life, and death, beginning, middle, and end, into a singular, coherent story rooted in the community (NAUGLE, 1999). MacIntyre notes that "It is natural to think of the self in the narrative mode, and that all human conversations and actions are best understood as enacted narratives. In other words, what human beings think, say, and do emerge out of the basic stories that inform their lives. Narrative, not free-floatingindependent action, is the most fundamental category." (NAUGLE, 1999). In other words, overarching stories are critical in making sense of the world in the context of one's own life and social system (NAUGLE, 1999). As MacIntyre puts it, "...there is no way to give us an understanding of any society, including our own, except through the stock of stories" (NAUGLE, 1999). Child psychologist Bruno Bettelheim, further argues that "fairy tales are the crucial means by which children fashion and refashion their worlds, and this is true largely because such tales are essentially concerned with basic worldview questions and answers" (NAUGLE, 1999).

Moreover, the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche perceives that the "feverish and uncanny excitement" of postmodern culture—its incessant pace, its quest for exotic traditions, its passion for knowledge—must be interpreted as nothing other than "a hunger for stories" (NAUGLE, 1999). Yet, today, the present condition of the arts and the makeup of our global culture are indicators of the absence of any coherent, life-sustaining narrative (NAUGLE, 1999).

According to Dr. Jean-Marc Rickli (an Assistant Professor at King's College London) and Anja Kasperson (Former Head of Geopolitics and International Security) on World Economic Forum "...the creation of strategic narratives is at the core of modern strategic communication strategies in business, politics and even in warfare" (RICKLY, KASTPERSON, 2016). The battle of narratives has also become the bedrock of international politics, and social media a powerful tool to fight this battle (RICKLY, KASTPERSON, 2016). The unique characteristic of social media is that it empowers and enables individuals to engage in ways unseen before (RICKLY, KASTPERSON, 2016). Propaganda or so-called "psy-ops" is not a new phenomenon in warfare to shape opinions and influence outcomes (RICKLY, KASTPERSON, 2016). However, the ease with which social media and digital manipulation strategies are being used on the battlefield make policymakers, military leaders, and intelligence agencies struggling to keep pace and adapt (RICKLY, KASTPERSON, 2016).

The influence between the Iliad and Alexander went both ways. Having drawn inspiration from the epic, Alexander gave back to Homer by turning Greek into the universal language of a vast region, thus laying the infrastructure for turning the Iliad into world literature (PUTCHNER, 2018). Alexander's successors built the great libraries of Alexandria and of Pergamum, preserving Homer for the future (PUTCHNER, 2018).

In a data-driven world, Rickly and Kasperson argue that "the transmission of information has become ubiquitous" (RICKLY, KASTPERSON, 2016). Unlike traditional media, "social media improves the reach, frequency, permanence and immediacy" (RICKLY, KASTPERSON, 2016). Social media allows the interactive communication between people without spatial limits or time constraints and "offers the opportunity to transfer the content of any messages under any form (vocal, visual, written) to anyone on the planet" (RICKLY, KASTPERSON, 2016). Social media has become "an amplifier of ideas, a creator of meaning, and a generator of conflicts as well" (RICKLY, KASTPERSON, 2016). They also state that the "new developments in technology such as advanced machine intelligence and learning will make these issues even more salient in the future" (RICKLY, KASTPERSON, 2016).

Stories, of any kind, are often told through the voice of a narrator, giving his/her point of view, by using omniscient, limited omniscient, or first-person (MURPHY, 2012, P. 41.76-87). The purpose of the narrator is to give facts and details, being reliable or not (MURPHY, 2012, P. 41.76-87). Unreliable and dependable narration is widely debated within literary scholarship. In an article by Terence Murphy titled Defining the Reliable Narrator: The marked status of first-person fiction, the author notes that "...significantly more attention has been paid to trying to figure out how an impression of narratorial unreliability is constructed than has been paid to working out how and why a narrator might be believed to be reliable" (MURPHY, 2012, P. 41.76-87). He also refers to Wayne Booth's seminal book The Rhetoric of Fiction (1961), which contains Booth's discussion of narratorial reliability and unreliability (MURPHY, 2012, P. 41.76-87). Here, Booth suggests that Nick Carraway, the first-person narrator of F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby (1922), is an excellent example of the use of Reliable Narrator (MURPHY, 2012, P. 41.76-87). On this basis, Murphy offers a brief discussion of the key critical debates around the concepts of reliability and unreliability, and also of the relative scope for perceived un/reliability of first-person narration in contrast to third-person narration, which is usually considered more distant and objective (MURPHY, 2012, P. 41.76-87). Picking up the example of Nick Carraway, Murphy then suggests that there are five 'determinants' of reliable narration in first-person fiction, and argues that unreliability is created through departure from or absence of those determinants (MURPHY, 2012, P. 41.76-87). He presents these five determinants as a model that can be used as a critical tool to discuss the relative reliability of any first-person narrator (MURPHY, 2012, P. 41.76-87).

Murphy's Five Determinants of the correct use of Reliable Narrator, as a literary device, include:

1)   Familiarity - Narration from a place of security and familiarity. Murphy points out that Carraway narrates from "back home" (FITZGERALD 1990 [1922]: 167), which, Murphy suggests, is testament to Nick's maturity and freedom (MURPHY, 2012, P. 41.76-87).

2)   Accessible - Use of the 'middle' style of standard English (as according to classical rhetoric), neither colloquial and marked by representation of accent and dialect, nor poetic, ornate, sophisticated and opaque. Nick's language is accessible to all (MURPHY, 2012, P. 41.76-87).

3)   Perspective - Observer-narrator status. Nick Carraway is an example of a narrator who is not the main character in the story, but instead tells the story of that main character. Nick's own role in the plot is limited (MURPHY, 2012, P. 41.76-87)

4)   Credibility - Nick Carraway has been through the trials of the First World War, which has tested and developed his moral beliefs, and which earns him respect (MURPHY, 2012, P. 41.76-87).

5)   Analytical - Retrospective re-evaluation or re-interpretation of others . Murphy contrasts plot structures which centre upon a hero's journey, or upon a new self-realization on the part of the first-person narrator, with plot structures which centre upon the observer-narrator's re-evaluation of another character. In The Great Gatsby, Murphy argues, the climax of the plot is Nick's re-interpretation and new understanding of Gatsby, which replaces Nick's prior impressions (MURPHY, 2012, P. 41.76-87).

Murphy's discussion of each of the five determinants exposes some complexities and caveats within the model. Yet, what is relevant to this MRP is that Reliable Narrator, as a device, must be rooted in the above criteria. The above criteria will be used to evaluate case studies, and leveraged to communicate with an audience through narratives for the purposes of this study.

NSIGHT/

As evidenced in human evolution, narratives are effective and powerful tools. They are, and have been, frequently utilized in variety of forms and contexts, documenting the past and shaping the future. The most effective form of narrating stories, in literature, is to tell the story through the use of Reliable Narrator. This literary device has the potential to bridge the gap between the art and the audience.

CURATORS & CURATORIAL PRACTICE

An exploration of Curatorial Practice reveals a short-history, continually shifting—dependent on both "its immediate setting and the broader economic, political, social and intellectual context" (KENNEDY, 2012). What it meant to be a curator in a small local authority museum in the 1980s was very different from what was expected in a national museum in the 1920s (WILKINSON, 2001). But who is a curator, what do they do and how do we recognize them?

According to Merriam Webster Dictionary and Wikipedia, "...a curator (from Latin: cura, meaning "to take care") is a manager or overseer." Traditionally, a curator or keeper of a cultural heritage institution (e.g., gallery, museum, library, or archive) is "a content specialist charged with an institution's collections and involved with the interpretation of heritage material" (BURCAW, 1997). A traditional curator's concern involves tangible objects of some sort—artwork, collectibles, historic items, or scientific collections (Burcaw, 1997).

More recently, new kinds of curators have started to emerge, namely, curators of digital data, and biocurators (SCIME, 2017). The injection of technology and the impact of social media on every aspect of society has seen the emergence of "content curators" (SCIME, 2017). They are people who can disentangle the science and logic of a particular technology and apply it to real-world situations and the society, whether it is for social change, commercial advantage, or other purposes (SCIME, 2017).

The following section of the research offers an analysis of the history and evolution of the Curatorial Practice through Literature Review.

Written by award-winning art critic David Balzer, Curationism, consciously targets a public audience. The book aims to introduce 'curating' through its evolution. It cites the practice to have transformed from 'a calling' to 'a profession' within the artworld postwar WWII (BALZER, 2015). Most importantly, the author discusses the current status of curating, referring to it as "... the defining cultural and social activity of the first decade or so of the twenty-first century for a curated experience is used to market and sell everything from a lunchtime snack to a lifestyle" (BALZER, 2015, P. 2-3). In Curationism, David Balzer, further, traces the historical development of the curator, claiming that

since the mid-1990s, "...we are living in the curationist moment in which not only museums and exhibitions are curated, but also businesses, concerts, Instagram accounts, and everything down to our grocery shopping. As a result, our everyday lives become a curated experience, and it is only through curating that the importance and value of an object or experience can be transmitted" (BALZER, 2015, P. 2-3). Balzer renders the influence of curators in a significant light for that "these days the practice has leaked into the areas that are not commonly associated with curation" (BALZER, 2015, P. 2-3).

The book is divided into two unequal sections: 'Value' (big) and 'Work' (small). The latter is about the labour of curatorial activities and the economy of the practice, which are irrelevant to this MRP. However, the first section clearly and effectively traces the rise of curators as "bestowers of value in the artworld" (BALZER, 2015, P. 40). It elegantly showcases the struggles for "the control of value"—between various stakeholders such as critics, dealers, artists, and curators—along the way (BALZER, 2015, P. 127). It also focuses on the spread of 'curationism' into the 'real' world and the problems of celebrity, social elitism, and labour relations (BALZER, 2015, P. 99). Balzer confirms that "...the term 'curator' began to be used in an art context in the eighteenth century, usually describing a collector of curious and unique objects intended for private purposes" (BALZER, 2015, P. 33). The use of curator in a professional context became common as museums like the Louvre were established and attempted to display their material wealth (BALZER, 2015) chronologically. The curator, then, was seen as a caretaker of objects, cataloging, and collecting for the next generations (BALZER, 2015). Balzer points out that in this period, the position of the curator was a passive one as "they were expected to answer to big institutions or private collectors" (BALZER, 2015, P. 80).

To further understand the history of Curatorial Practice, I began reading more about curators in A Brief History of Curating, gathered by Hans Ulrich Obrist (world-renowned curator). It is a book of interviews, conducted by Obrist, with eleven pioneer curators. The interview format is leveraged as a tool of storytelling about the 'act of curating.' The carefully orchestrated conversations are held mostly with those who began their careers in the 1960s and 1970s (some now deceased).

In A Brief History of Curating, the conversations revolve around entertaining anecdotes. Pontus Hulten describes bringing a "Mondrian to the gallery in a taxicab"(OBRIST, 2018, P. 32); Jean Leering recounts jumping from studying architecture and doing military service to becoming Director of the Van Abbemuseum (OBRIST, 2018, P. 66). These stories are compelling in not only illustrating the progression of Curatorial Practice in the past few decades but also exhibiting curators as vivid storytellers (OBRIST, 2018, P. 234). However, while the stories are extraordinary, the interviews show that little is changed. Walter Zanini describes how it is "normal" for museum officials to work collaboratively with artists, something that happens routinely today (OBRIST,

2018, p. 148); and Lucy Lippard described protests at MoMA over "neglect of women artists" (among other things), a situation which definitely persists (OBRIST, 2018, p. 196). The book offered a better understanding of the past and present of this practice. It also solidified curators to be gifted storytellers in conversations whether or not they use that ability in their work remained unanswered, but the book signals of a growing practice with each curator inventing their unique method (OBRIST, 2018, p. 7).

In another book, Theory of the Avant-Garde (1984), Peter Bürger cites contemporary exhibition format to be "a deciding factor for the development of the artwork" (BÜRGER, 1984, p. 52), and in doing so examines the impact of Curatorial Practice on the arts and the social fabric. He exemplifies his theory with case studies like Marcel Duchamp's His Twine, underlining the fact that artists develop their work based on the "reception and the format of the exhibition" (BÜRGER, 1984, p. 52). As part of First Papers of Surrealism exhibition, which opened on October 14, 1942, at the Whitelaw Reid Mansion in midtown Manhattan, Duchamp's piece was "both historic and peculiar" (BÜRGER, 1984, p. 56). As heralded by Newsweek magazine, First Papers of Surrealism was the "biggest all-surrealist show ever seen in the United States"(BÜRGER, 1984, p. 66). It announced the arrival of Surrealism's most celebrated artists, many of whom had left Europe to avoid the war (BÜRGER, 1984, p. 66). Curated by André Breton, Marcel Duchamp created a site-specific, interactive gigantic web made of twine, between paintings and artworks called His Twine that made visitors uncertain of the real significance but changed the way art was perceived (BÜRGER, 1984, p. 51). The book further refers to Installation Art in the 1950s-1960s (such as Yves Klein's Le Vide (1958) or Allan Kaprow's Happenings and Environments) as pivotal points where exhibition spaces morphed into a site for "the production of art" (BÜRGER, 1984, p. 99). They were more theatrical with a live, direct audience, observing the art as it was taking place (BÜRGER, 1984, p. 99). According to Bürger, it is in this era that museums, such as Moderna Museet in Stockholm or Van Abbe Museum in Eindhoven, begin to "understand and promote the figure of the 'exhibition organizer' as opposed to the former 'museum employee' to attract and retain their audience" (BÜRGER, 1984). This new position of "producer of the contemporary art exhibitions," together with "innovative exhibition design" and the presence of artists and architects as producers, transformed the museum from "a storehouse into a site for contemporary art" (BÜRGER, 1984, p. 36).

The book, Theory of the Avant-Garde, also argues that since the 1960s, the role of curators has become more and more prominent and influential—even authorial—position (BÜRGER, 1984). Curating has gone through diversification of areas, mainly working with institutional formats such as biennials, or museums within the artworld (OPREA, 2017). It is in this context that the figure of the contemporary curator starts to rise, parallel to

the format of the international, traveling exhibitions, and a new discourse on contemporary art (OPREA, 2017). As the practice grew in this decade, contemporary curators have started to position themselves independent from museums and similar institutions (OPREA, 2017). They were no longer only the keepers of the collections (OPREA, 2017). The late 1960s brings forward the importance of curators as 'influential figures' with exhibitions adding "curated by _____" to their titles, naming curators such as Harald Szeemann, Seth Siegelaub, and Lucy Lippard among others as the thought leaders behind the presented content (OPREA, 2017). These exhibitions, created by these influential figures, stood as an entity (OPREA, 2017). They had themes, concepts, and content (OPREA, 2017). They acquired new artistic productions created especially for these exhibitions (OPREA, 2017). This era, to me, appears to be the time where curators begin to assume authorial roles in creating exhibitions. They depart from the role of organizers and mediators to storytellers. And, they begin acquiring artwork as references for presenting their thoughts on a given subject or theme

According to Balzer, in Curationism, the change towards a more active and self-determined role did not take place until the late nineteenth century when avant-garde art movements became more prominent (BALZER, 2015, P. 57). With an increasing number of artists challenging ideological and commercial concepts, the artworld needed an entity that "could give meaning and sense to new, abstract forms of art" (BALZER, 2015, P. 59). It was during the 1960-70s that the curator became seen as a connoisseur: "...curators no longer tended the ground, but secured, organized and landscaped exhibitions" (BALZER, 2015, P. 60). According to Balzer, the curator has since emerged to be seen as "imparters of value," using the artist's work and the museum's space to "create and author" elaborate exhibitions for an audience (BALZER, 2015, P. 62). As a result, curators are no longer passive cataloguers but are powerful mouthpieces of big institutions (BALZER, 2015, P. 63).

The Deutsches Museum pioneered the foundation of storytelling in museums (TRINKOFF, 2015). During the 1930s, this museum demonstrated the notion of storytelling through its working exhibits (TRINKOFF, 2015). Today, storytelling is used to further engage and connect the viewer to the history and memories of an object (TRINKOFF, 2015). Museums are shifting away from solely using labels to communicate this history (TRINKOFF, 2015).

Herald Szeemann's exhibitions in the 60s are considered the first significant survey of conceptual art, establishing the idea of the autonomous curator-creator-mediator (SMITH, 2005). Later, in 1989, Martha Rosler propelled the practice forward by initiating a curatorial project titled If You Lived Here at Dia Art Foundation in New York, which continued until 1991 (SMITH, 2005). For two years, Rosler developed the content and exhibited it to an audience (SMITH, 2005). The project addressed the living situation, urban planning, and Utopian visions mostly in connection to the local context of New York (OBRIST, 2018). It involved various perspectives from architects,

planners, homeless people, squatters, activist groups, film producers, and schoolchildren (OBRIST, 2018). The produced body of work was displayed alongside other artifacts, opening up the discourse towards individuals and communities who might have been excluded in the past (OBRIST, 2018).

The physical space of the exhibition became the arena for debate; the discussion which used to be marginalized was not happening elsewhere, and there was no division between the artifacts and the debate itself (OBRIST, 2018).

The working process involved diverse groups of people: artists, activist groups, homeless people, architects, urban planners, and journalists, many of them interested in the questions raised by the project and the exhibition program went beyond the usual pattern of an art gallery (OBRIST, 2018). There was a combination of various media on display: photographs, videos, newspapers, posters, manifestos, prints, pictures on canvas, and architectural models, including temporary offices and library space (OBRIST, 2018). Thus, If You Lived Here solidified the exhibition to be a "curator's medium" (OBRIST, 2018).

This rise in the importance and the influence of the curator has had an impact on understandings of the profession. In 2011 The Oxford English Dictionary added the verb 'to curate' to the dictionary; this transformation of curator into a verb illustrates how the activity of curating has invaded everyday life (SMITH, 2005). The phrase that frames our understanding of "contemporary art" after 2000 is "art in an age of globalism" (SMITH, 2005). Critic and art theoretician Miško Šuvaković defines this concept as "art that is produced inside a 'planetary' process of networking on a social, political, economic, cultural and artistic level" (SMITH, 2005). And so, in the era of global art, the role of the curator carries an unparalleled weight and responsibility, having had transformed from an educational role to an influential one (SMITH, 2005). But, as cultural influencers, do curators use narratives as vehicles to reach their audience? What is the relationship between Curatorial Practice and Storytelling (or the use of narratives)?

"In art, liberated from the constraints of reason and logic, we conceive and combine new formats that enrich our lives, and which we believe tell us something important (ARMSTRONG, 2016, P. 9-10). In mythology, too, we entertain a hypothesis, bring it to life, employing rituals, act upon it, contemplate its impact upon our lives, and discover that we have achieved new insights into the distributing puzzle of our world (ARMSTRONG, 2016, P. 9-10). A myth or a narrative, therefore, is influential due to its resonance not because it gives us factual information" (ARMSTRONG, 2016, P. 9-10).

I continued the research by reviewing Issues in Curating Contemporary Art and Performance—a book of essays, gathered by Judith Rugg. The text refers to the most pertinent question in the growing discussion on curating to be "the criteria in choosing how to present content" (RUGG, 2012, P. 8). Over the years, institutions have claimed the authority to consecrate some artifacts as works of art and relegate others to the dustbin of history (RUGG, 2012). However, recently, this nearly magical power has shifted significantly towards another agent in the artworld: the curator (RUGG, 2012, P. 8). The essays in Issues in Curating Contemporary Art and Performance speak mainly to the growing debate on the role and importance of 'curating' as a profession. In her introduction, Rugg firmly states that "the book aims to initiate new paradigms and critical thinking about this increasingly expanding field" (RUGG, 2012, P. 10). This ambitious aim is concomitant with an unambiguously confident concept of curating, which editors approach as a "...form of critical intervention into ways of comprehending contemporary culture" (RUGG, 2012, P. 59). The collection of essays sets off with an erudite summary of issues and developments in the history of curating. In one, author Paul O'Neill proposes to talk about "curatorial turn," referring analogously to the "linguistic turn in philosophy or the pictorial turn in cultural studies" (RUGG, 2012, P. 14). He locates the rise of the importance of the curator—what he calls "...the ascendancy of the curatorial gesture" —in the 1990s, with such prominent figures as Harald Szeeman and Jan Hoet coming to the fore (RUGG, 2012, P. 21).

One of the most relevant issues raised in the volume addresses the influence exhibiting can have on "conceptions of art" (RUGG, 2012, P. 114). In her fascinating contribution, Susanne Buchan traces the shifting meanings of artwork concerning the so-called "low art of animation film" (RUGG, 2012, P. 132). She points to the fact that after getting acquired by curators and being exhibited in an art gallery, "the perception of these works radically changes, which heretofore functioned within a relatively little known circuit of animation film festivals" (RUGG, 2012, P. 137). Buchan adds that "it is remarkable how an artifact which was so far neglected by art museums changes its meaning after being chosen by a curator to feature in an art exhibition" (RUGG, 2012, P. 140). The book further showcases the importance of the curator's role to "act against the institutions, subverting the canons and undermining the patterns of exhibition and acquisition policies" (RUGG, 2012, P. 114). In another essay, by Sophia Phoca, the notion of "curators as independent authors of their work" is discussed: "if we consider the shift from curator-as-mediator to curator-as-auteurs, exhibitions become stylized extensions of branded curatorial identities—physical manifestations of subjective curator self-presentation" (RUGG, 2012, P. 47).

As these sources indicate, the history of curatorial practice, in particular, during the 1960s, roaming European curators like Harald Szeemann and Germano Celant, set the terms and foundation for the practice in postmodern artworld (DAVIDA, 2019). Szeemann invented

the modern-day Großausstellung ("great exhibition"), in which the artworks revolved around a central concept, and the content was assembled into new and often surprising interrelationships (DAVIDA, 2019). Celant made art accessible for an audience through Arte Povera (literally Poor Art) movement in Italy during a time when artists were taking a radical stance and attacking the values of established institutions (DAVIDA, 2019).

The renowned French artist Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968) paved the way for what is today known as 'conceptual art' (TATE.ORG.UK). In conceptual art is art, the idea (or concept) behind the work is more important than the finished art object (TATE.ORG.UK). It emerged as an art movement in the 1960s, and the term usually refers to art made from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s (TATE.ORG.UK WEBSITE). Language is a central concern for the first wave of conceptual artists of the 1960s and early 1970s (FLYNT, 1963). The British philosopher and theorist of conceptual art Peter Osborne suggests that among the many factors that influenced the gravitation toward language-based art, a central role for conceptualism came from the turn to linguistic theories of meaning in both Anglo-American analytic philosophy, and structuralist, post-structuralist philosophies during the middle of the twentieth century (FLYNT, 1963). Osborne has also referred to contemporary art as 'post-conceptual' in a public lecture on July 9, 2010 (FLYNT, 1963). It is, however, a claim made at the level of an ontology of the work of art (rather than at the descriptive level of style or movement).

Today, contemporary artists have taken up many of the concerns of the conceptual art movement, while they may or may not term themselves 'conceptual artists' (FLYNT, 1963). Ideas such as anti-commodification, social and/or political critique, and ideas/information as medium continue to be aspects of contemporary art, especially among artists medium continues to be aspects of contemporary art and curatorial practice, especially among artists working with installation art, performance, and digital-based art (FLYNT, 1963).

In the philosophy of art, an interpretation is an explanation of the meaning of the work of art. It refers to the attribution of 'meaning' to work (LAVENDER, 1997). A point on which people often disagree is whether the artist's or author's intention is relevant to the interpretation of the work. In the Anglo-American analytic philosophy of art, views about interpretation branch into two major camps: intentionalism and anti-intentionalism (LAVENDER, 1997). Varying approaches to interpretation, debated in aesthetic and literary criticism since the very beginnings of philosophy, speak about the artist's (author's) intentionality, the viewer's interpretation, and/or the artwork (text) itself (LAVENDER, 1997).

The anti-intentionalist maintains that linguistic and literary conventions entirely determine a work's meaning, thereby rejecting the relevance of the author's intention (LAVENDER, 1997).

The work has autonomy, finding its meaning in the interpretation of the audience (LAVENDER, 1997). Intentionalism, however, holds that interpreters concerned with the author's intention, for a work's meaning is informed and affected by such intention (LAVENDER, 1997). Following World War II, for many years, German artists and curators avoided any references to the war in their work (GARNICK, 2015). The nation as a whole struggled to recover from the physical and psychological damage that it had created, and the people of Germany were not ready to face the reality of their involvement in the war (GARNICK, 2015). The artworld left the interpretation to the audience, adopting a detachment, and employing an ani-intentionalist approach (LAVENDER, 1997).

Anti-intentionalism gradually went out of favor at the end of the 20th century. Still, it has seen a revival in the so-called value-maximizing theory, which recommends that the interpreter seek value-maximizing interpretations constrained by convention and, according to a different version of the theory, by the relevant contextual factors at the time of the work's production (LAVENDER, 1997).

Every morning when I read the news, I often, and with billowing concern, think about the role of intentional storytelling in the age of information. I find it to be challenging-yet-critical as we find ourselves bombarded with bits of disjointed information, devoid of the sense-making context that only deft storytelling can impart.

According to Julia Chaitin in an essay titled Narratives and Storytelling, "storytelling contains the social and cultural activity of sharing stories, sometimes with improvisation, theatrics, or embellishment" (CHAITIN, 2003). Every culture has its own stories or narratives, which "are shared as a means of entertainment, education, cultural preservation or instilling moral values" (CHAITIN, 2003).

Contemporary storytelling has a broad purview. In addition to its traditional forms (fairytales, folktales, mythology, legends, fables, etc.), it has extended itself to representing history, personal narrative, and political commentary, evolving cultural norms (CHAITIN, 2003). However, in the Contemporary Art scene, stories have become relatively obsolete (CHAITIN, 2003). They are considered as being "indicative and representative of an indulgent and decorative approach" (CHAITIN, 2003). Yet, what has in the past been seen as a remnant of the Victorian era is experiencing "a slow revival over the last few decades as artists once again begin to explore the role of narratives in presenting their work" (CHAITIN, 2003).

In a 2018 interview by Straits Times, Singapore Philatelic Museum curator Mishelle Lim discusses her role as being "a storyteller" (HO, 2018). Her testament is loudly echoed by other curators in the same article (HO, 2018). The interviews showcase these featured curators' thoughts on their

profession, illustrating that they each work to exhibit in different countries and have different concentrations. Still, the common thread that binds them together is the clear realization that the most effective way to communicate and connect with an audience is through narratives.

Anti-intentionalism gradually went out of favor at the end of the 20th century. Still, it has seen a revival in the so-called value-maximizing theory, which recommends that the interpreter seek value-maximizing interpretations constrained by convention and, according to a different version of the theory, by the relevant contextual factors at the time of the work's production (LAVENDER, 1997).

Four years prior, in 2014, StoryBook, an exhibition held in the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art (MMOCAO.ORG, WEBSITE, 2019), explored how stories are communicated in contemporary art (MMOCAO.ORG, WEBSITE, 2019). To illustrate the diversity of narrative methods, the exhibition drew upon works from MMoCA's permanent collection by such artists as Robert Barnes, Richard Bosman, Roger Brown, Warrington Colescott, Todd Hido, and Erik Weisenburger, among others (MMOCAO. ORG, WEBSITE, 2019). It showcased that, similar to contemporary novel and related literary forms, contemporary art has sustained, challenged, and expanded traditional narrative structures (MMOCAO.ORG, WEBSITE, 2019). The curatorial statement read: "From the beginning of human society, telling stories has been fundamental to cultures worldwide. It has essentially defined the history of art, dating back to Paleolithic cave paintings. However, with the emergence of Modernism in the late nineteenth century, a premium was placed on diminishing, even eliminating narrative content. During much of the twentieth century, it was set aside for an emphasis on more abstract, formal, and conceptual concerns. Yet, the narrative remained an option for artists and curators, especially in contemporary art after 1980, when personal, political, and social issues were increasingly approached through storytelling, often in documentary or confessional formats" (MMOCAO.ORG, WEBSITE, 2019).

In Ways of Curating, Obrists recalls working with Philippe Parreno, who had, at the time, explored the notion of "Time and Exhibition" in an essay titled Fracture Temps, meaning: Post-man Time. In the essay, Parreno had pointed out that "visual arts ordinarily does not dictate the time a visitor must stand in front of it, but what is critical is the depth and quality of the experience" (OBRIST, 2018, P. 28). The collaboration between Obrist and Perreno, through years of conversations and writing, resulted in a time-based group exhibition in 2007. They intentionally shift a variable, allotting the artists "time" as well as "space" at the Manchester Opera House (SMITH, 2005). It opened up the profession from being confined to physical spaces, allowing it to leak into other realms such as time,

and eventually the digital sphere. Obrist is one of the most revered curators of his time, gathering stories about his practice (SMITH, 2005). In a book titled Talking Contemporary Curating, Terry Smith ask Obrist about his book A Brief History of Curating, citing him as someone who "deeply respects his predecessors and is clearly ambitious to add to this history through his Curatorial Practice and telling its story" (SMITH, 2005).

London-based curator Lucia Pietroiusti, founder and curator of General Ecology (an ongoing project at London's Serpentine Galleries), explores questions of ecology, interspecies relationships, and plant intelligence (BROWN, 2019). Next year, in celebration of its 50th anniversary and, thanks in part to Pietroiusti, the Serpentine Galleries will dedicate the entire year to ecological concerns with the institution as a whole pledging to reduce its carbon emissions (BROWN, 2019). Beyond the Serpentine, Pietroiusti may be best known as the curator behind this year's Golden Lion-winning Lithuanian pavilion at the Venice Biennale, Sun & Sea (Marina). This moving opera, created by Rugilė Barzdžiukaitė, Vaiva Grainytė, and Lina Lapelytė, featured beach-goers singing about daily life in the age of Climate Change with nuance and without an alarmist tone (BROWN, 2019), leaving swathes of visitors in a moment of total vulnerability; some in tears (BROWN, 2019). This compelling, award-winning exhibition with an ecologically focused content cites metaphors and narratives to be "effective tools" in making an impact and communicating with an audience (BROWN, 2019).

Art critic, Julia Halperin, referred to Pietroiusti's Venice Biennale's exhibition as a "revelation" and "a delightful performance to watch" (HALPERIN, 2019). At the two-storey Lithuanian Pavilion, a warehouse in Venice, viewers on the balcony looked down at a sandy tableau, where performers of all ages and sizes splay out on towels under beach umbrellas, scrolling through their iPhones and thumbing through magazines (HALPERIN, 2019). The sounds of seagulls and ice cream trucks echoed in the distance (HALPERIN, 2019). One by one, the vacationers sang about a world very similar to our own, full of minor inconveniences (HALPERIN, 2019). Unlike most works about Climate Change, which attempt to scare you into action but often simply paralyze you with the vastness of the problem, this narrative-based performance made an impact by telling the story of the mundane when "nothing is happening, and only after sitting there for a while the audience realized that this is how the world actually ends" (HALPERIN, 2019). It was a story about "nothingness" and a contemporary narrative "unfolding easily, softly—like a pop song on the very last day on Earth" (HALPERIN, 2019).

In the past few years, in Canada, scholarly curators have been cultural agents in exhibiting Indigenous-focused content and leading discussions that work towards decolonizing practices, challenging the disciplines of art history and museum studies to revise the dominant colonial knowledge (FRASIER, 2018). Two Toronto-based curators—Gaëtane Verna and Andrea Fatona—in

particular, have referred to the "heritage of colonialism and racism in Canada and its deep entrenchment within museums and artistic institutions" (Frasier, 2018). Lately, galleries and museums are making more space for First Peoples' arts and culture and inviting Indigenous people to lead the way (EVERETTE-GREEN, 2017).

During 2016 Nuit Blanche, Ojibwa artist Rebecca Belmore spent the night painting the floor of the Art Gallery of Ontario's Walker Court in red clay (EVERETTE-GREEN, 2017). Curated by Wanda Nanibush, AGO's curator of Canadian and Indigenous Art, hundreds of people milled around while Belmore symbolically reclaimed Indigenous land under the AGO (EVERETTE-GREEN, 2017). This performative installation poetically narrated the change happening between Indigenous peoples and Canada's art galleries and museums, which are making more space for Indigenous cultures and the native peoples (EVERETTE-GREEN, 2017). Wanda Nanibush's thoughtful work in exhibiting this contemporary installation not only solidified the importance of narratives in Contemporary Curatorial Practice, but it also reminded the audience that 'storytelling' has been historically and traditionally used as "an effective method of communication by the indigenous peoples" (EVERETTE-GREEN, 2017). First Nations, Inuit, and Metis cultures have long passed on knowledge from generation to generation through oral traditions, including 'storytelling' (EVERETTE-GREEN, 2017). A traditional method—used to teach about cultural beliefs, values, customs, rituals, history, practices, relationships, and ways of life —First Nations' storytelling' is a foundation for holistic learning, relationship building, and experiential learning (EVERETTE-GREEN, 2017).

INSIGHT/

The trajectory of Curatorial Practice exhibits a fast-changing, evolving profession. Curators, over the past few decades, have experimented with the format of exhibitions, and therefore, have allowed for flexibility and growth in the field. Anti-intentionalism, gone towards the end of 20th century, is experiencing a revival. Leveraging innovation, some have disrupted conventions and in doing so transformed the role (and the responsibility) of a curator into a global influence. Exhibitions have become a curator's medium with them being the creators and authors of the content, acquiring artwork or other types of material to connect with an audience about a concept or a thought. The emergence of technology has allowed for new kinds of curators where the digital content is acquired, organized and presented. Contemporary Art has become more and more abstract, however in order to communicate with their audience, curators have begun utilizing storytelling. They write about their **practice**, and their acquired artwork and often refer to themselves as "storytellers".

ANALYIS OF THE PAST

People are storytellers (CHAITIN, 2013). They forge narratives about their experiences and the meanings that these experiences have for their lives (CHAITIN, 2013). All cultures and societies also possess their own stories or narratives about their past and their present, and sometimes about their view of the future (CHAITIN, 2013). The history of human development and Curatorial Practice indicates that storytelling has not only been critical in communicating messages (in any format), but it is also becoming a tool, increasingly, for the curators to organize and exhibit content around the world. As referenced in this chapter, narratives have been frequently used to document the events, and pass it on to the next generation where they influence an audience, and thus, the events in their (relative) future. Plato spoke of the significance of stories, Alexander was influenced by Homer, and Nietzsche cited postmodern culture to have a 'hunger for stories'.

Over the years, emotional turmoil, caused by wars, has distanced the artworld from telling stories. It has been not only emotionally challenging, but also suppressive enough that most authors (including artists and curators) have left the concepts to be interpreted by the audience, especially in the years following world wars. The emergence of technology in contemporary art has turned it into a more-global-then-local, has demanded a universal tool that reaches a wide range of audience, communicate with them in an accessible manner. The more abstract the art pieces get, the more critical the method of relating to the audience becomes in the future.

Anti-intentionalism, neglected towards the end of the 20th century, is experiencing a revival. Curators more and more refer to themselves as 'storytellers' in interviews. Innovative, some have disrupted conventions and transformed the role (and the responsibility) of a curator into global influence. Exhibitions have become a curator's medium, with them being the creators and authors of the content, acquiring artwork, or other types of material to connect with an audience about a concept or a thought.

As evidenced in human evolution, narratives are compelling and persuasive tools. They are and have been, frequently utilized in a variety of formats and contexts, documenting the past and shaping the future. The most common form of narrating stories, in literature, is to tell the story through the voice of a Reliable Narrator. This literary device has the potential to bridge the gap between art and the audience. There are five criteria for this literary device: familiarity with the content, use of accessible language, employing an observer perspective, analytical framework, and credibility. These criteria will tell the examination of the current trajectory of curatorial practice as well as the curation of an exhibition and two installations, practicing and testing this theory.

In summer of 2017, as I was conducting research for my MRP proposal, I decided to scan the contemporary Curatorial Practice, visiting a sample of exhibitions. I had reviewed a number of scholarly sources about the history of the practice, its past and trajectory. But what was happening currently had to be yet discovered. The changes needed to be examined. I aimed to observe in-person and take notes by visiting what I could consider the "most present" exhibitions, those that had no choice by being relevant. The selection had to vary in size, context, and intent. The field notes taken during these visits have then been analyzed against the central theory of this MRP in two major curatorial work exhibited in Tehran and Toronto in 2018. Here's a few accounts of curatorial exhibitions at the present time.

PRESENT

In this chapter of the MRP, I will investigate the below three items through Autoethnography and Narrative Analysis:

- Scanning the Contemporary Curatorial Practice
- Examining a Contemporary Curatorial Narrative

In the previous chapter, I searched for the impact of narratives and storytelling on human development, and Curatorial Practice. I also identified what constitutes a Reliable Narrator as a device in literature. But to foresight the future of the Practice, it is critical to understand its present as well as its past.

In this chapter Autoethnography is utilized to identify how contemporary exhibitions are curated. Observational data is gathered as Field Notes, collected over three months (June 2017 - August 2017) during which, as an independent curator, I have investigated Contemporary Curatorial Practice and its resonance with the audience. The gathered notes and thoughts during this period are documented through Autoethnography which is "an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience" (YURTOǦU, 2018).

This portion of the research includes the accounts of visits to the Venice Biennale of Art, a contemporary art group exhibition titled Possible Worlds in Berlin's KunstRaum in summer 2017 as well as accounts of an interactive group exhibition in New York's New Museum by My Barbarian collective titled: The Audience is Always Right. This chapter, furthermore, analyzes the Field Notes from an experimental approach in a narrative-based curatorial project in Tehran. It also further describes the resonance of this theory through a commissioned contemporary installation at Toronto's Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO).

Following are the written notes and their analysis gathered during the research period:

NOTES FROM 57TH VENICE BIENNALE OF ART

Venice, June 2017: This is where conversation happens—at the Venice Biennale. The exhibitions set the tone for the next two years. Art Critics, Arts Media and most prominent figures in the arts are either invited to this event or amongst the visitors. The coverage (in both media and social media) is extensive, and more importantly most of those who practice art and architecture either visit the Biennale or follow its trends. Gallerist, consultants, and those in charge of artfairs frequent the exhibitions, and collectors look to them to invest.

This year, the entire city-wide exhibition includes the national pavilions in the public Giardini organized by various countries, along with Christine Marcel's specially curated show Viva Arte Viva, which runs across both the Giardini's central pavilion and the ancient industrial buildings of the Arsenale. There are also a number of satellite exhibitions throughout Venice which will be open for the entire duration and often beyond.

Curatorial direction and execution of 57th Venice Biennale at the Central Pavilion and Arsenale acknowledges the current global crisis through the lens of art and with a story. There is a narrative here that is focused on the 'practice of art'. In the Arsenale, the opening statement is accompanied by a digital clock, counting down the time, linearly, that we, as species, have left to respond to Climate Change. This is a future-forward response. In 2015, the curator, Okwui Enwezor, had also touched on Climate Change, but also Colonialism and the Refugee Crisis in the Mediterranean; it was more of a historic, political manifesto. There was even readings from Marx's Das Kapital.

The curator, in 2017, Christine Marcel, is proposing a different vision: to put artists and artistic practice at the center—as a solution. It's not political but holds art and its practice responsible for change, a tool for awareness in human development. For Christine Marcle, the chief curator of the Pompidou Center in Paris, the 57th Biennale is "an exclamation, a passionate outcry for art and the state of the artist. [This exhibition] is a Biennale designed with artists, by artists and for artists"(DONADIO, 2017).

I am familiar with Christine Marcel and her curatorial work. She had, since 2000, helped oversee contemporary art acquisitions for the Pompidou Centre (DONADIO, 2017). She is the fourth woman in the Biennale's 122-year history to curate the international exhibition (DONADIO, 2017). Her curated show, Viva Arte Viva has a beginning and an end. It opens with a methodological question: "What does it mean to be an artist today?"

Inside, it showcases 120 artists, 103 of whom are participating in the Biennale for the first time. And, the Biennale's award (Golden Lion) for lifetime achievement is given to the pioneering feminist performance artist Carolee Schneemann whose work—including her bacchanalian 1964 video, Meat Joy—has pushed forward the very existence of performance in artistic practice, speaking to the importance of feminal expressions and existential stories (DONADIO, 2017). Marcel's Biennale is received well by the visitors. It comes in an intense year for the artworld, after the Whitney Biennial caught up in debates around race, and the fast-growing Documenta (divided for the first time between Athens and its native Kassel, Germany), featuring its share of "more-than-usual female artists" (DONADIO, 2017). The thoughtful showcase, at Viva Arte Viva, take the audience, first, to the tangible, the basic. It begins with traditional artistic practices, weaving wool, thread and yarn. Notable amongst these exhibtions is 83-year-old Sheila Hicks' massive multicoloured pile of giant cloth boulders, which rounds off the show in a vivid, dramatic fabric flourish, alongside the suffocatingly fibre-bound dangling forms of her late fellow American Judith Scott.

The Central Pavilion and Arsenale are focused not only on the urgency of action amid the various global crisis, but also citing the artworld responsible, asking the young generation of artists to learn from the wisdom of the older ones, understanding what the role and responsibility of the artist may be amid any crisis. There is a strong narrative, telling the story of the artistic practice as a response to human condition. Christine Marcel goes back to the past to tell the story of artistic practice, bring out what is sustainable to showcase what can be learned from the stories, inviting all to apply the learnings in the future to combat Climate Change responsibly.

Aside from Arsenale, there are 29 national pavilions in the Giardini (Italian for garden). The atmosphere is naturally beautiful, and the pavilions (once designed and made by architects of each respective country) look distinct and specific to the history and significance of each culture. Some, including Canadian Pavilion, are no longer suitable and are in the process of renovation.

Giardini and its country-specific pavilions, curated by a selected team from its respective nation, have also focused their shows on "artistic practice". They generate debate about the very idea of national pavilions. Some, have refrained from including any curatorial statements, but as a result, the visitors seem to be confused about their content and relevance. There are a few that stand out, each of which make unforgettable—albeit sometimes uncomfortable—viewing.

The French Pavilion, for example, has gone as far as soundproofing itself and having musicians jam inside. It brings art back to its 'process of making'. The United States Pavilion features Mark Bradford and his feelings about the state of his homeland as he has scattered litter in front of the American pavilion. He has and only allowed entry through a side door that is partially blocked by a giant hanging unstretched painting made from daubed-over immigration forms. Inside, the pavilion's elegant interior has been further subverted by writhing, coiling tarry excrescences, along with an ominous looming, looping abstract sculpture and paintings resembling ruined, richly textured layers of torn fly posters. The British Pavilion is also given a good seeing-to by Phyllida Barlow's wonderfully rough, bombastic sculptures made from the lowliest builder's yard materials, recycled. These slabby, blobby, claggy anti-monuments puncture any sense of pomposity or national pride. More pristine but equally overwhelming is Anne Imhof's darkly disquieting performance installation in the German Pavilion, which won her the Golden Lion award. The experience of walking across a raised-glass false floor while faintly menacing young people and four Doberman dogs prowl below your feet or ascend to your level (and sometimes climb up the walls) have made this the most talked-about (and queued-for) entry.

Amongst the satellite exhibitions, the Taiwan's pavilion is housed in a former 17th century prison adjacent to the Bridge of Sighs where veteran performance artist Tehching Hsieh is showing meticulously compiled photographs and documentation of his often-gruelling live works. These include two of his One Year Performances made between 1980-2, one of which involved him clocking into a mechanical worker's clock every hour on the hour (and being photographed at the same time) for an entire year, while in the other Hsieh tested the limits of human existence even further by living for an entire year outdoors in New York without taking shelter of any kind.

In a 16th century warehouse back in the Arsenale complex, Lisa Reihana is representing New Zealand with a dramatic high-tech video panorama which uses a piece of 19th-century Pacific Savages wallpaper as the starting point to depict true and imagined scenarios including the first meeting of the Polynesian peoples with Europeans and the death of Captain Cook. And, Damien Hirst is showing at two enormous venues. The Palazzo Grassi and the the Dogana are filled with nearly 200 intricately fabricated precious objects which plunder every civilization imaginable, ranging from a headless, 60-foot-high colossus to a tiny gold nugget the size of a fingernail.

INSIGHT/

The highly curated exhibitions, at macro and micro scales, during the 2017 Venice Biennale are telling future-forward stories with an attention to sustainable practices in the art, making of the art, and analyzing of the art. The content is often performance-based and immersive with artists either working on-site or displaying their process on-site by means of video installations or other elements. The Biennale as a whole is effective as evidenced by its wide coverage in media as well as its social media presence. The curatorial directions are relevant to the environmental, social and political conversations in the global discourse. The exhibitions, whether hosted at the Arsenale and Giardini or held at unlikely venues, presenting a layered way of storytelling: they are a subliminally-exhibited narratives of narratives, looking back at the sustainable practices of art-making as the new value in the arts ecosystem for the future. Their use of technology is limited, consciously trying to not have it as the focus of any exhibition. The statements are written in "third person" perspectives. And, what seems to be a trend is the use of juxtaposing past with present, as well as the use of performance to create an 'event' that would not be experienced through the Internet. This technique in exhibiting content draws the audience to the place of exhibition. It is evident that an audience needs context to be able to connect with the exhibitions. Those that have refrained from including any form of narrative (visual or textual) fall into an interpretative space, and although inspire discussions, their indent is lost on the audience. The clarity of the exhibition is hinged on the clarity of its intent, and therefore, the context is critical. Moreover, artists themselves have leveraged storytelling in their work to be able to communicate their intentions, thoughts and ideas. Their stories are depicted through performances, video content, sculptures, paintings, sound installations, and other formats rather than plain text. But the presence of narrative as a tool of communication is evident throughout this significant art biennale.

NOTES FROM POSSIBLE WORLD EXHIBITION

AT KUNSTRAUM WASCHHAUS POTSDAM MUSEUM

Berlin, June 2017: Berlin, to me, is one of the most visited hubs in contemporary art. Over the last 20 years, since the fall of the Berlin Wall, a considerable number of artists from all genres have flocked to this city (CICHANOWICZ, 2017). Today, many of them still call Berlin home (CICHANOWICZ, 2017). From low living-costs to a thriving counter-cultural scene and a strategic geographic location, it's the perfect environment for artists to innovate and experiment (CICHANOWICZ, 2017). Berlin is home to hundreds of galleries and art museums that boast unparalleled collections (CICHANOWICZ, 2017). For the ambitious artist, this city is overflowing with opportunities for installations and exhibitions that could help put their work on the map (CICHANOWICZ, 2017). In fact, it is often the case that artists first gain notoriety in Berlin before moving to other cities like Los Angeles, New York, or London (CICHANOWICZ, 2017). According To Lily Cichanowicz, a freelance art writer in Berlin: "With an atmosphere buzzing with creative energy, no serious member of the contemporary artworld can stay away from Berlin for long. It's become an important stop on the art circuit, acting as a junction between east and west. Indeed, according to Berlin-based art consultant and founder of Berlin Art Guide, Rufina Valsky, virtually every art professional passes through this city to conduct business or scope out talent. In fact, many successful artists and professionals have two home bases, with one setup in Berlin and another in cities like New York or London, demonstrating that the former is considered to be on par with the latter two." (CICHANOWICZ, 2017).

Curated by Nicoletta Torcelli, at Kunstraum Waschhaus Postdam museum, Possible Worlds has no curatorial statement. It is a series of artwork by artists from Iran. I happen to know most of them personally and their work professionally. In fact, I have curated one of the sculpture pieces in the show by Hoda Zarbaf as part of her second solo exhibition. But even to me who is familiar with the artists' work, the exhibition, Possible Worlds, is not clear. It puts forward no reason for its exhibition as a whole. The only reason the pieces are placed together is that the artists are from the same country—one that due to its politics is often isolated. Iran, in the past decade, has not shown many contemporary artists' work because of the sanctions that are imposed on it. Some pieces are interesting, but there is no information that contextualizes the work, other than a photocopied handout distributed amongst visitors. The handout contains each work's titles and placement on the map as well as a brief, general description about each. There is no story that connects the pieces together. The curatoriall statement reads:

We live in a world of contradictions and ambivalence. Nothing is impossible, but not everything is possible. This apparent paradox offers art ample space. The Potsdam exhibition concentrates on current creations by artists who live in Iran. A number of them have been presenting their work worldwide for years now; others are still unknown. 12 positions – 12 POSSIBLE WORLDS. The images, sketches, videos and installations are expressions of personal experience, collective memories, conceptual questions and shared living environments. The programmatic title POSSIBLE WORLDS primarily makes reference to art's ability to create parallel worlds next to the actual one: metaphoric worlds, utopias and dystopian models and scenarios. Often subversive strategies play a role here. The presented works are surreal and ironic, refined and sensual, emblematic and symbolic as well as poetic and political.

The visitors seem interested, but perplexed. They often ask questions from those of us who are in the museum. To them, we seem to understand Iran which demonstrates the lack of information and direction for the exhibition. The descriptions are authored by the curator and through her perspective and how she sees the pieces in relation to Iran, but they lack familiarity. Moreover, the media and social media coverage of the exhibition is minimal. Even after scanning the internet and journals and social media channels, two years later, it is difficult to find any substantial discussions about this exhibition.

INSIGHT/

Berlin is a hub for contemporary art. One of the curated exhibition at Berlin's prominent Potsdam Museum is a collection of latest works (paintings, sculptures, and installations) by Iranian contemporary artists. The exhibition is merely showcasing the work of artists from this politically-isolated country. The visitors are curious and interested, but often ask the artists and other Iranians (who are present at the museum) about Iran, the show and its pieces which is an evidence to the need for context and intent and, therefore, a story. The curator has written the description of each piece from a 'third person' perspective, yet there is a lack of familiarity with Iran, its culture and its contemporary art that creates a disconnect with the audience. The accounts of why these pieces have been selected and their relevance are missing. The exhibition is only socially and politically **conscious** through exhibiting works of contemporary artists from an isolated country. There is no technological or environmental awareness in the presented work.

NOTES FROM THE AUDIENCE IS ALWAYS RIGHT

AT NEW MUSEUM BY MY BARBARIAN

New York, August 2017: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, founded in 1977 by Marcia Tucker, is a museum in New York City on Manhattan's Lower East Side. It is among the few contemporary art museums worldwide exclusively devoted to presenting contemporary art from around the world (EXHIBITIONS, 2016). "The New Museum was established by an independent curator Marcia Tucker in 1977. It is dedicated to introducing new art and new ideas, by artists who have not yet received significant exposure or recognition. Ever since it was founded, the museum has taken on the mission to challenge the stiff institutionalization of an art museum. It continues to bring new ideas into the artworld and to connect with the public." (EXHIBITIONS, 2016).

In 2017, I visited New Museum and their featured installation piece by My Barbarian collective (NEWMUSEUM.ORG, WEBSITE, 2019). Working at the intersection of theater, visual arts, and critical practice, the collective My Barbarian (Malik Gaines, Jade Gordon, and Alexandro Segade) uses performance to theatricalize social problems and imagine ways of being together (NEWMUSEUM.ORG, WEBSITE, 2019). Their exhibited piece at New Museum, The Audience is Always Right, is organized as part of the Department of Education and Public Engagement (NEWMUSEUM.ORG, WESBITE, 2019). It is interactive and includes a series of workshops, performances, and public programs (NEWMUSEUM.ORG, WEBSITE, 2019). The performances and workshops bring together performers and artists from different backgrounds and cultural sites—including choreographers, actors, musicians, and visual artists from Europe, the Middle East, and the Americas—to collectively consider current social and political situations near and far (NEWMUSEUM.ORG, WESBITE, 2019).

For The Audience is Always Right, the collective have curated an archive of ephemera and props, a sixty-minute single-channel video, and a large-scale mural that nods to strategies in response to current political and social climates. Each section is described, generally, and connected to the current social and political discourse. The statements are written in "third person" perspectives.

New York is very politically-charged, amid Donald Trump's presidency and since 2015 when I curated an installation at Governor's Island Art Fair. The current exhibitions have strong political undertones, and this exhibition by my My Barbarian, at the New Museum is no different. The curatorial direction of it is composed of five techniques—Estrangement, Indistinction, Suspension of Beliefs, Mandate to Participate, and Inspirational Critique—historic theatrical models that attempted to create social change, including Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed, Rainer Werner Fassbinder's anti-theater, and Julian Beck and Judith Malina's Living Theatre. The project addresses these and other methods, often buried or overlooked, of critical and revolutionary theater post 1960s while situating its own enactment in (and against) the seemingly anti-revolutionary contemporary moment (NEWMUSEUM.ORG). The exhibition is curated by Johanna Burton, Keith Haring Director and Curator of Education and Public Engagement; Travis Chamberlain, Associate Curator of Performance and Manager of Public Programs; and Sara O'Keeffe, Assistant Curator. The exhibition, for me, occupied a space between memory and rehearsal, joke and laugh, and commentary and critique. It is the theater that happens after an experience but before action is taken. It is a rehearsal. It exhibits an intentional narrative-in-making about contemporary times. In Andrea K. Scott's review, in New Yorker, the show is referred to as "the future in the hands of young artists at the New Museum" (SCOTT, 2017). It was received positively by critics and reflected relatively well on Social Media (SCOTT, 2017).

INSIGHT/

New York and its New Museum have acquired an interactive, immersive, and performance-based installation that reflects the social/political issues and conflicts of contemporary global culture. The Curatorial Statements are not written in the 'fist person' or reliable

narrator format, but they are written in accessible language and a voice that is intimate. The audience is impressed, discussing the issues as they leave the museum. The performative, theatrical format of the exhibition has put the audience amid a live story, reflecting back our contemporary culture and connecting intimately. The clarity of the pieces stem from familiarity of artists and curators with the central issues of the exhibition. Technology is used as a tool for exhibition; it's not a focus. And there is no rhetoric about environmental issues in this exhibition.

NOTES FROM CURATING "IMAGE-MAKING MACHINES" AT AARAN GALLERY

Tehran, August 2017: Tehran is familiar. I have returned to this metropolitan city to curate a sculpture series by a Canadian-Iranian arist Hoda Zarbaf at Aaran Contemporary gallery - by invitation. The exhibition will address a central question: "how we tell our stories in contemporary culture?" It is Zarbaf's third solo exhibition. I had previously curated her first solo exhibition in Toronto at Walnut Contemporary in 2015, and her second solo exhibition at Tehran's Aaran Gallery. The second show, last year, in 2016, was a series of 12 sculptures titled Floral Compositions: Travelers of Time. It opened with a letter written by the artist to her curator, describing why she decided to go back to her hometown and make new work. The rest of the curatorial work consisted of the sculptures simply getting arranged around the gallery with their titles in bold font next to them. The curation of it was simple. I flew to Tehran a week before the opening and arranged for everything to be completed in a timely manner.

After visiting Biennale, New Museum and Berlin's Potsdam, together with Hoda Zarbaf, I have a different plan for her third solo show. I want to experiment with curating the show with a narrative and from the perspective of a reliable narrator, and more importantly I wanted to explore "how do we tell our stories in contemporary culture?"

In the first chapter of this MRP, I had learned about Terence Murphy's "Five Determinants of Reliability of a Narrator" which were: 1) Narration from a place of security and familiarity 2) Use of accessible language 3) Observer-narrator status 4) Ethical maturity and a conventional moral stance in the voice 5) Retrospective re-evaluation or re-interpretation of another character.

By now, I have worked closely and intimately with Zarbaf for three years. We had even successfully completed a room-scale installation at New York's Governor's Island Art Fair in 2015 which meant we had to travel to New York from Toronto and spend weeks together, making the installation and overcome challenges that would credit me with not

only familiarity with her work, but also with the position of an observer. We also had spent three months (summer 2017) traveling together and visiting Biennale, Potsdam Museum (where she was exhibiting one of her sculptures from her second solo, and New Museum in New York). And again, Tehran is familiar. It is the capital city of Iran, where I was born, where I understand the culture intimately, and where ethics and conventional moral stance is required to work in the arts. Therefore, I would qualify to assume the role of a Reliable Narrator in the story of this upcoming exhibition.

We had discussed the concept of the exhibition to be focused on "how we tell our stories". Therefore, aside from taking notes with regards to how curators choose to exhibit the artwork in the past three months, I had taken notes about how we tell our stories through Social Media to our audience—as a curator and as as an artist. The following are the notes accumulated in Summer 2017 with regards to "how we tell our stories in contemporary culture":

DAY 1. Venice is filled with tourists and their phones; not only around the city but even at the Biennale the visitors are constantly taking pictures and videos. And when scrolling through media and social media content pertaining to Biennale, it is noticeable that projecting our activities throughout the day is part of our contemporary culture. Instagaram Stories are a common used vehicles. Tweets and Facebook posts are also commonly used.

DAY 2. The more I observe myself, Hoda and others as well as our collective interactions (particularly via social media), I realize that there are stages for how we craft our stories and image.

DAY 3. At the Biennale, one of the common questions revolve around what #hashtags to use at each exhibition. It seems that being at the Biennale is more important than the content of the Biennale's exhibitions.

DAY 5. I catch myself thinking constantly about what to produce and put on social media these days. "stories" which are a new feature on Instagram have offered a platform for the promotion of more content. And it seems to have taken over most people's time not only here in Venice, but around the world. I can follow the content of my friends in Tehran, Toronto, London, New York, Berlin, etc. The production of these "stories" is an experience that people of my generation are going through in contemporary culture.

DAY 7. In Berlin, and at Potsdam, people are also occupied with their Social Media presence. The exhibition at Potsdam doesn't have a predetermined #hashtag, but #possibleworlds is commonly used amongst the visitors and the participants. They ask about each other's Social Media handles and follow one another. It is the way people connect.

DAY 10. The more I observe Hoda and her interactions with others (and via social media), I realize that there are stages for how she crafts her story through "self image".

DAY 12. In Tehran, Hoda dresses up to work and make the sculptures. Her "image of making the sculptures" in her own imagination matters to her. This is a social activity. It seems that people craft their "self image" and tell their story via Social Media in contemporary culture. There is control in how they are perceived by others. As an artist, she uses vehicles such as sculptures, articles, social media to tell her story, and she is occupied by how her peers appear on Social Media.

DAY 15. I catch myself thinking constantly about what to produce and put on Social Media these days. "stories" which are a new feature on Instagram have offered a platform for the promotion of more content. And it seems to have taken over most people's time not only here in Tehran, but around the world. The production of these "stories" is an experience that people of my generation are going through in contemporary culture.

DAY 18. We have decided to have the sculpture series to be a social commentary about how in contemporary culture we make and promote our "self image", and as a result our story.

DAY 21. One of the sculptures is proving to be very difficult. We had to take it apart and put it back together to be able to put run-down clothes on it. The day has been challenging, but the process was broadcasted live on Instagram, and it seems that having an audience motivated us to complete the task. What we believe to be our "self image" is a motivation tool. And the reception of the stories have increased.

DAY 25. A trip to Tehran's Grand Bazaar put me in a great mood. There is no place like it in the world. It is lively. People are alive and active in a bazaar, trying to sell/buy items that "would make their lives better". The smell of spices in combination with a light breeze is so delightful that I have a difficult time finding words to describe the experience. The trip was promoted on Social Media. It is well-received by our audience.

DAY 29. It seems that although the use of technology has taken over our lives, there are some benefits in creating and projecting "self image". Knowing that there are people out there paying constant attention to our daily activities make the struggles worth our while.

DAY 31. The process of promoting a "self image" is a cycle. It is machine-like. As if the process is a production, manufactured by each individual. It begins and end, and repeats.

DAY 35. Each sculpture could be speaking to a particular stage of the cycle, together they narrate the process of making a "self image".

DAY 40. The sculptures are planned, together they would complete the machine-like cyle of the experience of making and projecting "self Image". We have determined the title of the show: We Are Image-making Machines.

DAY 42. The act of making and projecting "self image" is not new, but technology has made it to be into a fast-paced, manufactured, yet hodgepodge production. We transform—even decode—ourselves into data with hopes to seek who we are through the gaze of an audience.

DAY 46. The process of manufacturing "self image" seems to come in stages: performance, production, display, gaze, reflection and pleasure. Each sculpture will focus on a particular stage and reveals its visceral, yet absurd experience.

DAY 50. The making and projecting of "self image" is an attempt at the distinction between the self as "I", the subjective knower, and the self as "Me", the object that is known.

DAY 52. We have spent the day at Aaran Gallery where we determined the overall direction of the exhibition. They will be placed in a machine-like format, each piece representing a stage in the cycle and together they will represent "how we tell our stories in contemporary culture."
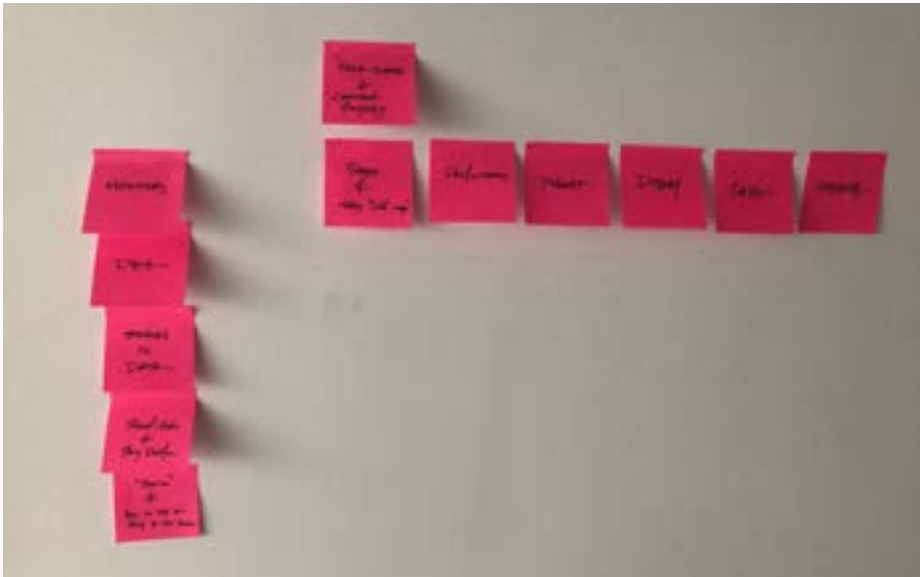
DAY 55. I have witnessed intimately not only the process of making this sculpture series, but also how we as artist and curator craft and project our "self image" and thus our story.

DAY 60. It seems that the production of "self image" and the desire to tell our stories to others is as old as time, but how we do it is specific to the tools in access at any given time.

DAY 62. In his Sophist, Plato speaks of two kinds of image-making. The first is a faithful reproduction, attempted to copy precisely the original. The second is intentionally distorted to make the copy appear as it would be perceived by viewers. The latter—simulacrum—is a perversion of reality, exaggerating specific information, and used metaphorically by Zarbaf as an image-making technique, transmitting her reality into sculptural animations. In a few, she further echoes these distortions in another image, deeming the "image" itself to be merely a representation (PLATO).

DAY 66. Michel Foucault defines 'techniques of the self' or 'arts of existence' as those voluntary practices in which we seek to transform ourselves, in our singular being, and to turn our lives into an oeuvre that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria. He further described traditional notions of the performer as being restrictive—a controlled way of organizing data (FOUCAULT).

DAY 70. Yesterday, I returned to Toronto to conduct a Narrative Analysis of my field notes and then to curate the exhibition through a narrative based on the conducted analysis.

After gathering the data, the most common element was that the visited exhibitions had unanimously reflected socio-political issues and conflicts of contemporary times. So, an effective exhibition had be relevant, and reflect its time. It also needed to have a clear statement or narrative.

I figured that our collective involvement in Social Media was a social issue of our contemporary time. The constant presence on Social Media emerged to be a common theme, yet a distaste for technology was also evident amongst those who practice contemporary art. Therefore, the exhibition needed to be a commentary and not a criticism of this new-age phenomena.

My Field Notes interchangeably mentioned "stories" and "narratives" and "self image" and "data". Instagram Stories were cited as a contemporary tool for telling personal stories in our global culture. And, those in the arts were no exception. They were, too, utilizing Instagram as a vehicle to project their daily activities, personal interactions and the process of making new art to their audience. This telling of their story granted individuals a distinct pleasure. People were following one another to witness each other's stories. They were not only interested in others, but the process of making and projecting their own story or image seemed to have given them pleasure and satisfaction.

What was important to bring forward, in the exhibition, were the various stages of how one would go about telling his/her story in contemporary culture. And, although the presence on various Social Media channels seemed small, it was a common precedent for how we tell our stories.

The stages required for making a story and presenting it to an audience (also known as followers) were identified as: performance, production, display, gaze and pleasure. As a result, each sculptural installation had to be a representation of one of these stages, and together, they would complete the cycle, machine-like. And, the experience of the exhibition had to reflect this machine-like cycle.

In order to respond to "how do we tell our stories in contemporary culture?", I had observed and documented the events around me, scanned a sample of "present" exhibitions globally, and have analyzed the notes based on themes, concepts and ideas. It was time to write the narrative. The language had to be accessible, but I didn't want to risk it and tell the story from the "first person" perspective yet. The effectiveness of that way of storytelling was still not evident. At this point in the MRP, I wanted to test the theory and see if we can curate an exhibition through the vehicle of a narrative. It was important that this narrative be accessible and clear. It also had to resonate with the audience of the exhibition. The outcome of this exhibition would determine the next steps. And, more importantly, at this stage, this exhibition had to be about the process of "how we tell our stories in contemporary culture."

After synthesizing the field notes, I wrote what I called a "Curatorial Narrative" (on the following pages) in Toronto and passed it to Aaran Gallery in Tehran. They used this narrative as the curatorial intention and direction of the exhibition and placed the sculptural installations in the space accordingly. For these reasons and more, I aimed to write it in the most clear, honest and accessible manner; it had to be clear enough that the exhibition would be represented in my absence.

WE ARE IMAGE MAKING MACHINES

reflection is pleasure.

In a data-driven era, when monitors behave as frequent portals between virtual and physical, *self image* is readily practiced. And akin to the industrial revolution, humans have leveraged the tools at-hand, particularly social media, to transition this innate practice from an intricate, lifelong craft to a fast-paced, manufactured, yet hodgepodge production. **We are image-making machines**. We transform—even decode— ourselves into data, transmitting them to others in hopes to tell them our stories and seek who we are through their gaze.

A contemporary series of sculptural installations, the exhibition Image-making Machines by Hoda Zarbaf at Aaran Contemporary gallery in Tehran, is a commentary on the process—as well as the stages—of manufacturing self image: performance, production, display, gaze, reflection and pleasure. Each piece focuses on a particular stage and reveals its visceral, yet absurd experience.

The practice of *self image* may be as old as time, but its methodology is specific to the tools in access. Michel Foucault defines 'techniques of the self' or 'arts of existence' as those voluntary practices in which we seek to transform ourselves, in our singular being, and to turn our lives into an oeuvre that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria. He further described traditional notions of the performer as being restrictive—a controlled way of organizing data.

Succinctly, identity is a mask for self, relating to the world and stemming from a relative perception of a set of reflections. As a result, practice of *self image* is an attempt at the distinction between the self as "I", the subjective knower, and the self as "Me", the object that is known. Through the gaze of others, and their reflections, we measure our reality and take pleasure in perceiving ourselves. Moreover, our perceptual system, naturally, is constructed so that we experience reality. The brain's translation from perception into a model of reality is automatic, demanding practice to become aware of its processes. This awareness includes the errors and distortions that our perceptual system routinely imposes on our experience: illusions.

For this series, Zarbaf, true to her technique, brings recycled, collected materials together and creates a series of hyper-real, multi-dimensional sculptural machines made up of abandoned furniture, domestic objects, and soft materials; however, in this body of work, she further juxtaposes them with embedded monitors, curious visuals, and collected images, offering a glimpse to her understanding of *self image as a practice*. The used-found materials and objects are silent reminders of the fleeting nature of time—a rather nostalgic yearning for the past—while the monitors attempt at capturing and projecting desultory visual data, a contemporary currency. These monitors, integrated carefully and seamlessly, display absurd, even mundane content that play in loops—void of purpose and objective.

In his Sophist, Plato speaks of two kinds of image-making. The first is a faithful reproduction, attempted to copy precisely the original. The second is intentionally distorted to make the copy appear as it would be perceived by viewers. The latter—simulacrum—is a perversion of reality, exaggerating specific information, and used metaphorically by Zarbaf as an image-making technique, transmitting her reality into sculptural animations. In a few, she further echoes these distortions in another image, deeming the "image" itself to be merely a representation.

In *Still Life: A Three-way Representation*, **performance** is depicted. Repeating a collection of objects and elements in three separate formats, the installation references a large, classic-like painting hung and framed in a light box behind a sculptural collage of the same elements visualized in the frame, and a video projection that portrays the use of photoshop in making the hung image. Sliding back and forth in generations, it exposes a timeworn cyclical attempt at order and anarchy—kindred to a phoenix—making the image, destroying it and re-inventing it anew.

Next, comprised of five distinct sculptures, *Banana State of Being: A Social Imagery* is a comical ode to the superficiality and absurdity of current **production** of *Self Image* post performance. Each sculpture represents an aspect—assumed label—that one projects to relate to others in the social context. In unity, the five sculptures showcase a controlled, but cursory version of a person. What connects them, the commonalities and social values, are symbolized by "bananas": absurd fables agreed upon.

Further, displaying the forgone active life of a human as well as its passive replacement—the digital identity—*Avatar: A Passive-Aggressive Act* references a historic ritual by the roman church. Even today, the church continues to **display** the bodies of their incorrupt, and therefore holy, saints in large glass cases for the belief that if the corpse does not decompose it is sacred. In the place of a saint, the installation displays a seemingly ordinary human in a large glass case. Crunched in the passive child-pose and outfitted in everyday clothes, the only distinguished feature of the lifelike stoic sculpture is a bright, blue wig—which is depicted and shown in a digital, looped video as the only lively, active part of the sculpture.

Zarbaf brings the attentions to the **gaze** in *About Stillness: An Unusual Approach to Voyeurism* by embedding a looped video of a pair of seductive eyes into a vintage, domestic chair featuring human hair falling at the back. It's a resting place as if the invited gaze would offer a long-awaited refuge to the pursuit of reflection. This minimal sculpture is followed by a video installation of two confronting, semi-symmetrical projections in a room. Featuring the artist herself, *Front Camera/Back Camera* exhibits a rather agonizing, reflective dialogue between the self as "I", the subjective knower, and the self as "Me", the object that is known. It is a narration of an internal conversation by those who have been conditioned with the presence of camera lenses as a constant gaze. The installation reveals the state of "self" reflection versed by the gaze of the "other". And at last, **pleasure** arrives and leads the machine-like cycle back to performance. Staged in an elusive, yet solitary setting, this final piece exposes the domestic and personal act of gazing at "self" informed by reflections. *Vanity: A Daily Confrontatio*n frames the habit of looking in the mirror and praising the "self" in a delusional, performative, yet intimate moment; the two sides represent the "self" and "self reflection" in a state of discovery and pleasure.

LEFT/RIGHT:
VISUAL .4 & VISUAL .5 -
WE ARE IMAGE-MAKING MACHINES SCULPTURE
EXHINITION, 2018
AARAN GALLERY, TEHRAN
ARTIST: HODA ZARBAF
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SAJEDEH ELHAMI
& DANIAL SEYEDIN

Aaran Galley received the Curatorial Narrative, and placed the sculptures accordingly. An excerpt of the narrative was placed on the wall as the Curatorial Statement; and it appeared in the exhibition's catalogue. Tehran-based arts publications featured parts of this narratives directly as part of their editorials (GALLERYINFO.IR, 2019), crediting the curator, of course. The Social Media posts demonstrated an understanding of the sculptures that was clear, but informed by this story. The exhibition started a conversation about how we shape and tell our stories through Social Media (GALLERYINFO.IR, 2019). And most importantly, the exhibition led to an invitation by Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) in Toronto for a "performative" Curatorial Installation with Hoda Zarbaf's sculptures as part of the opening event for Yayoi Kusama's Infinity Mirrors exhibition.

The invitation affirmed the impact of the work that we did in Tehran (GALLERYINFO.IR, 2019). The Curatorial Installation, Soft Souls at the AGO, juxtaposed two of Zarbaf's contemporary sculptures in the religious galleries of AGO to continue her "image-making" story. The "performance" stage of We are Image-making Machines juxtaposed a selection of objects and elements in three separate format, referencing a classic painting behind a sculptural collage. And so, for the installation at the AGO, I continued that thought and placed two of Zarbaf's sculptures (with rather liberated, sexual presence) in front of religious, classic paintings and sculptures in their permanent galleries. The photographs of this installations are included on the following pages of this document.

INSIGHT/

Image-making Machines exhibition followed by a curatorial installation (Soft Souls at the AGO) were an effort and experiment in curating in Contemporary Curatorial Practice. Informed by visiting three major global exhibitions, the curatorial direction was a response to the use of Social Media, questioning "how do we tell our stories?". In the format of sculptural installations framed by a Curatorial Narrative, the answer to that question is layered; we tell our stories to an audience, we tell stories that are relevant, we tell them through the tools and vehicles that are available to us at any given time, and we take pleasure in not only telling them but receiving them. The exhibition leveraged sculptural installations and juxtaposition of content to address the central question.

ANALYIS OF THE PRESENT

In this chapter, I had conducted Observational Research. I scanned a sample of exhibitions in contemporary art. The findings indicate that those exhibitions that have stories resonate and communicate with an audience. Moreover, in a world where curators often need to conduct their work from a distance, the use of narratives (to describe the intent of the exhibition) makes the process to be more efficient. It communicates the exhibition (as a whole) to those who will be installing it in a gallery or a museum in their absence. The 'signals for change' in Contemporary Curatorial Practice is a shift from visual exhibitions to immersive, performance-based, live exhibitions where marking-of-art is taking place. Also, juxtaposition of newly-developed content with historic ones is a new method in visually telling a story. This performative aspect of exhibitions draws the audience into an 'event' that may not get repeated or be found on the Internet. The latter is a particular motivation for an audience to participate in an exhibition.

Moreover, what is common amongst not only these visited-exhibitions is the attempt in storytelling. Narratives—as researched in the first chapter of this MRP—have always been influential in the evolution of humanity. And, it seems that it is the same in the artworld as well. Curating 'We Are Image-making Machines' through the use of a narrative (and Reliable Narrator device) helped with the success of its execution (as evidenced in the photographs), and the audience reception of the work. It also led to a commissioned installation for the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO). The acquisition of the work from a reputable museum is an indication of the exhibition's resonance and the clarity of its intent.

The content of "We are Image-making Machines" also examined how we tell our stories in contemporary culture. The findings speak to the presence of storytelling (visual and textual) in everyday life, and therefore, its commonality amongst the audience.

LEFT/RIGHT:
VISUAL .7 & VISUAL .8
SOFT SOULS AT AGO
INSTALLATION, 2018
AGO, TORONTO
ARTIST: HODA ZARBAF
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MEHRAD AHARI

LEFT/RIGHT:
VISUAL .9 & VISUAL .10
SOFT SOULS AT AGO
INSTALLATION, 2018
AGO, TORONTO
ARTIST: HODA ZARBAF
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MEHRAD AHARI

I often envisioned an exhibition, in the future, where I would showcase the beauty of Iran—my home country—through the paintings of my uncle: Siavash Mazloumipour. I had curated a solo exhibition of his work in Toronto at the beginning of my career. And, he may be the reason I chose the path that I have chosen. But during the research phase of this MRP, I lost him to Leukemia. On the last day of winter in 2019, early in the morning in Tehran, he quietly passed away in his son's arms. He was 65, a trained architect and a masterful watercolourist who left a revered body of work, poetically illustrating the scenic culture and landscape of Iran—the place he loved most. Growing up, I watched him build his artistic practice from the ground up by not caring too much about it. Instead, he wanted to paint the world as a beautiful place. I watched him looking at what was in front of him through a light-filled perspective, making people feel, showing them the light and also carry that mission through his work. There was no separation between his life and practice. His outlook was poetic; he lived a poetic life; he died poetically, and in between, he created poetic work. I hope to be able to curate exhibitions in the future the way he painted in the past. He will be missed and remembered dearly.

FUTURE

In this chapter of the MRP, I will investigate the below three items through Horizon Scanning, Scenario Planning, and a Time Machine:

- Trends in Contemporary Curatorial Practice
- Possible Scenarios for the Future of Curatorial Practice
- Time-Machine

In the previous two chapters, this MRP, Beyond Exhibitions, had looked to the past to understand the historical influence of narratives not only in the trajectory of Curatorial Practice, but also in the evolution of human civilizations. In the first chapter, we identified the Stakeholders (on Page 15 of this document), and we concluded that storytelling is a powerful tool in documenting the events of any given time period. I also concluded that Curatorial Practice is a relatively young field with curators inventing their methodologies as they grow. In the second chapter, as part of the research, I had conducted an unconventional Horizon Scanning by visiting 57th Venice Biennale as well as two major exhibitions in Berlin and New York to be able to identify the trends in contemporary Curatorial Practice.

In this chapter, Horizon Scanning is conducted on the Internet to identify th emerging trends in Contemporary Curatorial Practice. Horizon Scanning is environmental scanning that is focused on generating actionable intelligence and foresight over the 'foresight horizon' (SCANNING THE HORIZON, WEBSITE, 2019). It is a technique for detecting early signs of potentially important developments through a systematic examination of trends, patterns, opportunities and their values (SCANNING THE HORIZON, WEBSITE, 2019). This method explores novel and unexpected issues as well as persistent problems and trends, including matters at the margins of current thinking that challenge past assumptions (SCANNING THE HORIZON, WEBSITE, 2019). STEEP (Social-Technological-Environmental-Economic-Political factors) is used in most foresight projects, and is a popular framework for simple scanning and external environment analysis, both for shorter- and longer-range, and local and global issues (SCANNING THE HORIZON, WEBSITE, 2019). These trends provides the insights to develop extreme scenarios for anticipating future developments and thereby gain lead time (SCANNING THE HORIZON, WEBSITE, 2019). And through these developed scenarios four possible futures of Curatorial Practice will be foresighted with a focus on the role of curators in the next 20 years. Moreover, in this chapter, based on one of these scenarios a major contemporary art installation is curated in Toronto a Time Machine. In foresighting practice, Time Machine is a form of experiential futures where "designing and staging interventions that exploit the continuum of human experience in order to enable a different and deeper engagement in though and discussion about one o more futures, that has traditionally been possible through textual and statistical means of representing scenarios, (CANDY, 2010). The impact of this Time Machine and its curation is analyzed with the document concluding its findings and outlining strategic paths for independent curators to practice their craft in the future and delivering compelling exhibitions for their audience. The findings will then, hopefully, identify how to design and deliver compelling exhibitions in the future.

Trends in Contemporary Art

SOCIAL – THE IMMERSIVE EXHIBITIONS

In May of 2018, at Adobe's 99U Conference in New York, artist-turned-entrepreneur Vince Kadlubek spoke about the potential for creativity to transform reality (LESSER, 2018). At present, he said, we need something more to satiate the human desire for what he calls "mind-blowing experiences." And artists can lead the way (LESSER, 2018). Kadlubek is the CEO of Meow Wolf, an artist collective and production company that creates large-scale, interactive, multimedia installations (LESSER, 2018). This momentum speaks to the broad appetite for experiential art at present—from immersive exhibitions, like those of Yayoi Kusama, to Instagram-friendly "museums," like the Museum of Ice Cream—particularly among experience-hungry, selfie-loving millennials (LESSER, 2018). As part of his talk, Kadlubek proposed that 10 years from now, particularly with the proliferation of augmented reality, we'll be able to access alternative realities that are akin to high-tech "Choose Your Own Adventure" novels (LESSER, 2018). "I think that [the] Museum of Ice Cream, and immersive theater are all just precursors to what is about to really pop-off for everyone," Kadlubek said. "I don't even know if it's art anymore. There's a whole way of being that's going to be shifting soon." (LESSER, 2018).

Maturity: This is a mature trend that is practiced internationally, and is widely adopted by artists and curators for attracting an audience in contemporary art.

Signals: From popular escape rooms to the buzz around interactive art exhibitions such as Meow Wolf's debut, Natura Obscura at Museum of Outdoor Art in Denver, to food/performance mashups by The Catamounts and Savory Cuisines, "immersive" is everywhere (OSTROW, 2019). Around the world, creatives and makers are launching so-called immersive experiences with varying degrees of seriousness and artistry (OSTROW, 2019). If it's interactive, participatory or experiential, digitally enhanced, augmented or virtual reality, it's likely billed as "immersive" (OSTROW, 2019).

According to Lonnie Hanzon, world-renowned artist, "We are now in the experience economy," he told attendees at the inaugural Denver Immersive Summit at the University of Colorado. "People want to buy experiences, not things" (OSTROW, 2019). In November 2015, after two years closed for extensive renovations, the Smithsonian's Renwick Gallery marked its reopening with an immersive exhibition called Wonder (SCHWAB, 2016). Moreover, over the last few years, a number of immersive exhibitions have drawn huge crowds, in large part thanks to their social-media potential (SCHWAB, 2016). In 2012, Rain Room debuted in London at the Barbican Center, offering visitors the chance to walk through a space filled with falling water while miraculously staying dry (SCHWAB, 2016). The show prompted unprecedented lines during a later run at New York's Museum of Modern Art and, later at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art where it was completely sold out (SCHWAB, 2016).

Implications: The increase in immersive experiences has caused the museums and galleries to become places for superficial, self-promotion via social media by the audience. Exhibitions like Wonder—which drew more visitors in six weeks than the Renwick had previously hosted in one year—are on the rise, as institutions seek to capitalize on the promotional power of Social Media (SCHWAB, 2016). The in-demand, immersive exhibitions has steered the focus of arts institutions from acquiring meaningful bodies of work to those pieces that would draw the audience to their spaces for the content of their Social Media. Increasingly, shows feature big, bold, spectacular works that translate into showy Instagram pictures or Snap stories, allowing art to wow people who might otherwise rarely set foot inside museums (SCHWAB, 2016). But the trend toward accessibility has its critics, who wonder whether the sensationalist works being exhibited are worthy of all the attention, not to mention whether the smartphone photography is getting in the way of people looking and thinking about the art in front of them (SCHWAB, 2016). For example, Art Gallery of Ontario, had a 30-second limitation for experiencing Yayoi Kusama's Infinity Mirror exhibition in 2018—enough time to enter the installation spaces, taking photographs and leaving without proper time to immerse and reflect on the experience. According to Art Ciritic, Katharine Schwab, in The Atlantic, "these exhibitions are often more akin to stadium concerts than museum shows, starting with the lines that precede them. They overwhelm the senses, offer a communal experience as opposed to a personal one, and provide fantastic photo opportunities while making friends jealous" (SCHWAB, 2016).

Related Trends:

- Virtual Reality/Augmented Reality
- Digital Exhibitions
- The arrival of Artificial Intelligence (AI)
- Digital Currencies
- Destination Art Fair

Values:

Art has become an experience; it has departed from merely 'visual' to 'sensory and experiential'. Criticis are in favour of substance over Showy Instagrammable exhibitions.

Trends in Contemporary Art

TECHNOLOGICAL - THE ARRIVAL OF AI

In the essay Art in the Time of the Artificial, Frieder Nake, a pioneer of computer-generated art, questioned the authenticity of this particular art (ADHIKARI, 2018). We still appear to be asking the same questions today; the image itself is often outweighed by the process that constructs it (ADHIKARI, 2018). On 25th October 2018 an AI-generated painting, Portrait of Edmond Belamy, sold for $432,500 at Christie's—a global arts auction (MILLINGTON, 2018). It was expected to sell for $7,000 to $10,000 (MILLINGTON, 2018). The portrait was created by Paris-based collective Obvious, using algorithms and code (MILLINGTON, 2018). It is the first artwork made entirely by Artificial Intelligence (AI) to go up for sale at a major art auction. This is a trend just taking off (MILLINGTON, 2018).

Maturity: This is an emerging trend in the arts.

Signals: Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools are already starting to automate what used to be time-consuming manual processes (LEE, 2019). According to a recent article titled AI Is Blurring the Definition of Artist by Ahmed Elgammal in American Scientist journal "with Artificial Intelligence (AI) becoming incorporated into more aspects of our daily lives, from writing to driving, it's only natural that artists would also start to experiment with it" (ELGAMMAL, 2019). Generated-images using AI technology have been circulating relatively wide since Google's pattern-finding software DeepDream roared onto the scene in 2015 (SCHNEIDER, 2018). Moreover, companies that make industry-standard creative tools like Adobe and Celsys have been adding AI features to their digital art software in recent years in the hopes that it would speed up workflows by eliminating drudge work, and give artists more time to experiment (SCHNEIDER, 2018). From machine learning tools that help find specific video frames faster, to features that colour in entire works of line art with just a button, AI is being incorporated in subtle, but surprisingly impactful ways (SCHNEIDER, 2018).

One of the most prominent contemporary artists, Ed Atkins new body of work at Serpentine Galleries in London uses High Definition video and text, "exploiting and subverting the conventions of moving image and literature" (ED ATKINS, 2019). Centred around an augmented and appended version of the new multi-screen video work, Ribbons, Atkins's exhibition, transformed the Serpentine Sackler Gallery into a submersive environment of syncopated sounds, bodies and spaces (ED ATKINS, 2019). This is his largest solo exhibition in a UK public institution to date (EED ATKINS, 2019). He uses a computer-generated avatar to create an immersive experience (ED ATKINS, 2019). "Sounds from a suite of synchronised projections positioned throughout the Gallery led the visitor through the space, with glimpses of song, swells of orchestra, murmuring voices and waves of sub-bass. Ribbons is part musical, part horror, and part melodrama; Bach's Erbarme Dich and Randy Newman's I think it's going to rain today are two of the songs featured. Naked, lonely and misanthropic, the palpable melancholy of Atkins's Computer Generated avatar hero is 'rendered' as HD graphic, troll, voyeur and, perhaps, artist" (ED ATKINS, 2019). The experience of the physical body in Atkins's show was to be contrasted with and complemented by the durational performance being undertaken by Marina Abramović, whose exhibition ran concurrently at the Serpentine Gallery (ED ATKINS, 2019).

Implications: In a moment when the information we consume and our patterns of digital behaviour are largely influenced by algorithmic processes, AI art still confound us due to the algorithmic-image-as-aesthetic-object taking us beyond the capacity of AI as a functional tool, turning it into a medium itself (ADHIKARI, 2018). However, at this moment, they are simply tools like a camera is for a photographer. AI art does not pose an immediate threat to the livelihoods of human artists (GASKIN, 2018). Human artists using AI own their work—as long as it's created using open source algorithms and training sets, or those they've created themselves (GASKIN, 2018). But the rise of AI art has far broader long-term implications for the art market (GASKIN, 2018). Artists whose work simply looks new (like Piet Mondrian's did), or can be described rather than felt, may see interest in their practice decline, and collectors of such works may see them lose value, the same way merely realistic images are no longer all that compelling in the age of photography, Photoshop, and digital illustration (GASKIN, 2018).

Related Trends:

- Immersive Exhibitions
- Digital Exhibitions
- Digital Currencies
- Destination Art Fair

Values:

The human authorship in 'creativity' remains to be valuable. The AI-generated pieces confound the critics and most buyers due to the fact that they question their authorship.

Trends in Contemporary Art

ENVIRONMENTAL - RECYCLED ART

We all produce trash, and amid th era of Climate Change, Recycled Art is creative work made from discarded materials that once had another purpose (FALCON, 2018). This includes anything from old plastic toys and vehicle tires to scraps of cloth and building supplies (FALCON, 2018). Artists who make Recycled Art take those materials and make them into something new (FALCON, 2018).

Maturity: The idea of reusing old materials to make art isn't new. The early 20th century was pivotal in the development of Recycled Art (FALCON, 2018). Around 1912, artist Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) invented a process called collage, where he pasted together bits of paper, photos, newsprints and small objects to form a new image (FALCON, 2018). Picasso also made sculptures from bits of wood and other scavenged materials (FALCON, 2018). A few years later, artist Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) used found objects to create art (FALCON, 2018).

Signals: Although there is no definitive start date for the Recycled Art movement, its rise can be traced back to the 1960s/1970s and the counter culture's attack on consumerism and unsustainable business and manufacturing processes (FALCON, 2018). Recycled Art held a mirror up to the country's wasteful behaviors and shed light on the importance of recycling (FALCON, 2018). The work of William Carlos Williams, Marcel Duchamp, John Cage, and Merce Cunningham offer recycled art innovations that contest waste (FALCON, 2018). Artistic practices, including the quotidian, found objects, chance, and happenings, highlight the twentieth-century's growing concern about over-consumption and production (MEARS, 2018). In the recent years, waste has made a presence in contemporary Chinese art, either incorporated into installation artworks, as the content of photographs or paintings, or featured in documentary films (WANG, 2018). This artistic trend simultaneously reflects and warns of the rapid accumulation of waste

brought about by China's embrace of global consumerism and urban-focused development (WANG, 2018). Xu Bing, a leading contemporary Chinese artist, completed a large installation piece entitled Phoenix Project in 2010 (WANG, 2018). It consists of two gargantuan sculptures of the legendary phoenix, one 100-feet long and the other 90-feet long (WANG, 2018). The romantic connotations of this creature, however, are contrasted with the hard reality that contributed to their creation, since the two mythical birds are made entirely of building waste and tools that Xu collected from construction sites, which are ubiquitous in contemporary China with its endless process of urban development (WANG, 2018).

Implications: In 2016, The Guardian praised the work of Hoda Zarbaf (whom I curated her solo exhibitions), recognizing her practice of recycling textiles and found objects "Zarbaf involving found and recycled textiles and well-used doll parts, deal with sex, pleasure, life making, and dream chasing in more intimate—and, indeed, more directly individual—yet no less vivid terms. The artist cheerily volunteered to an observer that, of course, all three pieces were too erotic to be exhibited in Tehran, where she will be showing later this year. Rather than bemoan the absurdity of such antediluvian censorship, she appeared happy to exploit it as an impetus to dive into different themes." (GEIST, 2016). However, when I took the sculptures to Art Gallery of Ontario, the conservateurs of the museum expressed their concerned for "Recycled Art" as these artworks may have wools or insects in them that would interfere with their permanent collection. Moreover, these pieces are generally difficult to maintain and clean for not only museums but for collectors. And as a result, they are not highly valued economically and they are often not exhibited at major institutions or museums where their historic collection is sensitive. However, considering sustainable practices are encouraged, artists and curators are finding methods to create more pieces that would be in the Recycled Art category. They are fundamentally a response to Consumerism and the idea of 'recycling', and therefore, popular amongst the audience. Instiutions are finding ways to exhibit these pieces without contaminating their sensitive collections through installations and temporary shows.

Related Trends:

- Digital Exhibitions
- Sustainable Practice in the Arts

Values:

Sustainable practices in the arts have become important, starting with revisiting historic best practices that would impose less harm to the environment as well as recycling materials to imagine new pieces and experiences in contemporary art.

Trends in Contemporary Art

ECONOMICAL - DIGITAL CURRENCIES

2018 has brought both highs and lows to the art market. Auction records were broken, confidence levels wavered, paintings were shredded, and Social Media continued to change the artist's role in the industry (ELHANANI, 2018). One of the most notable changes was the increase in vibrant conversation around Blockchain which is being introduced to broaden the market's transparency, track ownership and provenance, and provide an infrastructure for the tokenization of fractional artwork sales (ELHANANI, 2018). While there are many unanswered questions related to regulations, standardizations, and governance, there is clearly a heightened interest by various stakeholders and multiple startups aiming to introduce these new technologies (ELHANANI, 2018).

Maturity: This is an emerging trend in the arts.

Signals: The art industry's growing interest in Blockchain is made evident by its presence in the media (ELHANANI, 2018). There is a noticeable increase in art and Blockchain-related news, and a number of conferences (ELHANANI, 2018). In the past few years, there has been discussions on this technology in various pulications and conferences (ELHANANI, 2018). 2018's Ethereal Summit, a global conference about blockchain technology, placed emphasis on the art world, even concluding the event with a live auction (ELHANANI, 2018). 2018 was also the year in which Christie's, one of the world's leading auction houses, held its first-ever Art+Tech Summit, dedicated to "Exploring Blockchain" (ELHANANI, 2018). In the same year, Blockchain platform Maecenas partnered with London gallery Dadiani Fine Art to offer fractional stakes in Andy Warhol's 14 Small Electric Chairs (1980) (ELHANANI, 2018). And, 31.5% of Warhol's work went up for sale in cryptocurrencies, including Bitcoin and Ethereum (ELHANANI, 2018). Moreover, the total dollar value of the cryptocurrency share of the work was $5.6 million (ELHANANI, 2018).

Moreover, in December 2017, the nascent market for what might be called cryptoart appeared to reach a new level when the hitherto-unknown Distributed Gallery announced the auction of "Ready Made Token"—a unique unit of a cryptocurrency that the gallery said was created by Richard Prince using technology from Ethereum, the network responsible for Ether (REYBURN, 2018).This online gallery describes itself as the first to specialize in "Blockchain-based artwork and exhibitions" (REYBURN, 2018). It invited bids for the work, starting at one Ether, equivalent to about $650 at the time (REYBURN, 2018).

Implications: There are pros and cons as a result of this trend. Digital Currencies (and the technology behind them: Blockchain) provide transparency, consensus, safety, copyright security, access to the arts market (MICHALSKA, 2018). There are alignments in value. The synergy between cryptocurrency and art is hard to ignore. Art—like Bitcoin, Ethereum or Ripple—is a fluctuating asset; its value is subject to the ebb and flow of capricious market conditions (STEVENSON, 2018). The hope for art aficionados and Bitcoin buffs is for their investments to appreciate in value (STEVENSON ,2018). Moreover, contemporary art investors demand a contemporary form of exchange (STEVENSON, 2018); and therefore, Digital Currencies may be the art world's auspicious ally (STEVENSON, 2018). In reality, however, the majority of the art market is still lagging behind in terms of adaptation (CULTURE TRACK, 2019). This is partly due to the relative small size of online art market and "the asymmetrical structure of the art market, with the majority of value and most of the highest value transactions conducted via a small number of companies and virtually all offline" (CULTURE TRACK, 2019). More importantly, Blockchain is a system that many consumers still have difficulty understanding. Because Blockchain is still considered to be emerging, with most of its users coming from the worlds of tech and finance— two industries that have long struggled with a lack of diversity—the Blockchain community tends to be more homogenous (CULTURE TRACK, 2019). And as of July 2018, 91.2% of Bitcoin community engagement comes from men (CULTURE TRACK, 2019).

Related Trends:

- Digital Exhibitions
- Sustainable Practice in the Arts
- Destination Art Fairs

Values:

There is a demand in transparency, access and security (with Intellectual Property) that is a new shift in values in contemporary art. There is also discussions about diversity and inclusivity that are born out of this trend.

Trends in Contemporary Art

POLITICAL - FEMALE-CENTRIC EXHIBITIONS

While some artists are ambivalent about being viewed through the lens of gender, the all-women's group show, which fell out of favor in the '80s and '90s, is flourishing again (SHEETS, 2016). Galleries and museums are featuring women-themed exhibitions, a surge curators and gallerists say is "shining a light on neglected artists, resuscitating some careers and raising the commercial potential of others" (SHEETS, 2016). These shows are "playing catch-up after centuries of women's marginality and invisibility" (SHEETS, 2016).

Maturity: This is an emerging trend post #metoo movement.

Signals: Despite the few-decades-old Feminist Art movement, the statistics still paint a depressing picture of gender disparity in the contemporary art world (BALDWIN, 2018). According to the National Museum of Women in the Arts, even though 51% of visual artists working today are women, just 5% of artwork featured in major U.S. museums is made by them; only 25-35% of women artists have gallery representation; and women working across arts professions make an average of $20,000 less per year than men (BALDWIN, 2018). In recent years, in an effort to help correct for these long-standing disparities, many art institutions—even those with histories of disproportionately representing men—have hosted all-women's art shows. In the midst of the cultural reckoning spurred by the #metoo movement, such shows have taken on new significance (BALDWIN, 2018).

In 2017, SHE INSPIRES, a group exhibition at the Untitled Space, highlighted over 60 contemporary female artists (RONNER, 2017). It aimed to showcase not simply what these women look like, but more importantly what they've done (RONNER, 2017). Through sculpture, painting, photography, and mixed media, the exhibit educated as well as inspired (RONNER, 2017). In 2018, museums and galleries across the UK staged exhibitions on historic and

contemporary female artists, with events that celebrated 100 years since British women won the right to vote (POLONSKY, 2019). Tate Modern, in its major extension made a point of dedicating half of the new gallery space to women artists, increasing the percentage on display across the museum from 17% to 36%. And in 2020, the National Gallery will stage its first solo exhibition on a historic female artist—the 17th-century Italian baroque painter Artemisia Gentileschi (POLONSKY, 2019). This summer, the The New York Studio School, a renowned art school formed in Greenwich Village in 1963, hosted its first-ever all-women's alumni show titled: X Marks the Spot: Women of the Studio School (POLONSKY, 2019). This exhibit featured the work of 90 female and female-identifying artists affiliated with the institution (BALDWIN, 2018). Moreover, Champagne Life was the first Saatchi Gallery show entirely devoted to women artists in London (POLONSKY, 2019). The list goes on. There is a politically-charged focus on having women-populated exhibitions. However, whether all-women's shows are an effective long-term strategy for achieving gender equity in the art world at large remains a subject of heated debate (BALDWIN, 2018).

Implications: The revered Art Critic of The Guardian, Adrian Searle, in a review about Champagne Life has pointed to the most important implication of exhibiting art for political reasons: "...here are 14 artists in Champagne Life and nothing much unites them, except for the fact they are women. There is no theme, no common purpose or subject, no material connection" (POLONSKY, 2019). He adds: "Far too few women artists have museum and gallery representation, but a show like this asks us to do nothing more than 'celebrate' some very different artists. Curatorially, it's weak. Champagne Life is as flat as the bubbly when the party is over." (POLONSKY, 2019). At a panel discussion that accompanied the Studio School exhibit, some artists and curators argued that "gender-based shows encourage tokenism and relegate women to the sidelines" while others argued that "after centuries of art shows that featured only men, all-women shows are a necessary corrective"(BALDWIN, 2018).

Related Trends:

- Digital Exhibitions
- Sustainable Practice in the Arts

Values:

There is a political motivation in exhibiting work by the female artists and curators in the global arts ecosystem. However, there is also an evident criticism about how we exhibit the work of women in the contemporary and future era. It is evident that exhibitions that are merely motivated by a political agenda are not received well. There needs to be a meaningful intention behind their presentation and story.

Scenario Planning for the Future of Art

INSIGHTS & VISIONS

In the previous section, STEEP trends as well as their implications and values, in the contemporary arts practice, were identified. The implications of these trends identified opportunities and challenges in contemporary art. In this section, leveraging these trends (and the the values that stem from them) will inform four (4) Curatorially-focused scenarios generated for the year 2040—previously determined as the horizon for this MRP. Commonly used by planners, policy-makers and researchers of various disciplines, scenario development is a methodology for forecasting future events (SCANNING THE HORIZON, 2019). It relies on analysis of the current trends, the creation of informed assumptions about the future, a comparison of their possible impacts, and the likely responses of various actors (SCANNING THE HORIZON, 2019) who are the identified Stakeholders (on Page 15 of this document). These scenarios are anticipatory for how the future world will have evolved to arrive at 2040.

CONTINUATION SCENARIO: IMMERSIVE EXHIBITIONS

In the world of 2040, the exhibitions have continued to become entirely immersive. The audience expects to enter into an experience through various technological advancements and newly-developed devices. They frequent museums to immerse in what they consider to be beautiful, and attention-grabbing installations. The exhibitions have even become accessible digitally through Virtual and Augment Reality. Sensory, in every aspect, the exhibitions of 2040 offer experiences, but they are also feeding into promotions via numerous Social Media channels. Museums, galleries and other cultural institutions generate revenue by selling tickets to these once-in-a-lifetime immersive experiences. They acquire artists that are skilled at creating and installing immersive exhibitions. Curators have shifted their focus from content and substance to collaborating with institutions and exhibition spaces that accommodate these complex, yet trendy exhibitions suited for Social Media promotions. And the audience travels to and lines-up outside of these institutions to be able to experience these exhibitions and also proves their presence at them via their Social Media channels.

COLLAPSE SCENARIO: AI-GENERATED DIGITAL EXHIBITIONS

In the world of 2040, the exhibitions have all become not only digital, but generated by Artificial Intelligence (AI). Complex algorithms create beautiful visual work: images, films, 3D-printed sculptures, musical symphonies, etc. Humans consume art; they no longer create it. They are mostly considered to be the audience. Central AI institutions create the AI-generated pieces which are in high demand. They are sold in auctions by way of cryptocurrencies. Collectors/Investors spend a considerable amount of wealth for the acquistion of artwork that is generated by Artificial Intelligence, hoping that they would appreciate more in value as this is considered to be a significant movement in the art, and the "first-of" this type of work may be highly valuable in the future. Those who are able to modify AI and/or direct AI are considered artists. Curators work with them to generate and develop new work and exhibit them at unlikely venues.

DISCIPLINE: POLITICALLY-CORRECT EXHIBITIONS

In the world of 2040, the exhibitions are mandated to be "politically correct". Various exhibiting institutions (galleries and museums) do not allow for exhibitions that showcase work that is in opposition of what is considered to be "politically correct". Every year, regulatory bodies carefully review proposals, questioning the merit of those artists and curators who are considered to be creating work that is politically irrelevant and/or in opposition of the accepted social and political codes of conduct. Curators are not permitted to work with the "questionable" artists. They are also audited for the content that they exhibit. And, as a result, the audience is only presented with what is accepted and normalized. These regulatory bodies also audit the digital sphere to find and question any content that may oppose what is, in 2040, called "social justice". Those ideas are permitted to be exhibited, celebrated, but any content outside of these accepted ideas will be excluded from any form of exhibition, and legally prosecuted further by the designated regulatory bodies and judicial system.

TRANSFORMATION: POETIC EXHIBITIONS

In the world of 2040, the values in the artworld have shifted to "in favour of substance". Poetic Exhibitions in which human values are explored through meaning, concepts are in demand. The audience has a new-found curiosity around finding meaning in life. Artists are revered for creating work that not only explores existential dilemmas, but they are also expected to present their work in meaningful ways where emotional resonance is measured and valued by the audience' response. Significant cultural institutions, such as revered museums and galleries, celebrate and exhibit the bodies of work that are emotionally sensitive. Curators look for emotional resonance, developing content in collaboration with artists and cultural institutions that connect the audience to what is considered to be "aspirational". There are debates around what is "emotional" and significant in the arts. Philosophy and Poetics are heavily taught in educational institutions and curricula globally. Audience is heavily engaged in the process of evaluating and creating works of art with the intention to create work that remains in history and propels human evolution forward.

TIME MACHINE

INTERWOVEN

Based on the Transformation Scenario, in the section that follows, a Time Machine is created to understand the reception of strategies and ideas pertaining to this MRP. Following the development of scenarios, I took the last one (Transformation: Poetic Exhibition) in order to create a Time Machine in that context. Contrary to conventional foresighting tactics, this chosen scenario is, in fact, the least likely possibility if we consider the previously discussed trends in the contemporary artworld. However, for the purposes of this MRP, the Transformation Scenario is the most suitable context to test the role of narratives. At this point in the research, I was interested in testing the impact of my theory on an audience more than being concerned about the probability of the scenario.

To reach the intended Stakeholders within the artworld (identified on page 15 of this document), I set out to curate an installation that would leverage a narrative as a tool for connection, and Reliable Narrator as a literary device. The findings in the previous chapters have given me a considerable amount of guidance to what is expected in contemporary art, and what is missing in that space. Time Machines in foresighting practice is a form of experiential futures where "designing and staging interventions that exploit the continuum of human experience in order to enable a different and deeper engagement in through discussion about one or more futures, that has traditionally been possible through textual and statistical means of representing scenarios, (CANDY, 2010).

To design this future-oriented experience, I collaborated with a Toronto-based artist Hajar Moradi. In February 2018, she asked me to go to her studio for a visit. I looked through her paintings and gave her my honest opinion for what it would take to turn them into a thematic solo exhibition with a focus and a coherent subject. Amid our conversation, she told me about an idea that she had for an installation. Hajar had learned to weave Gabbeh (a type of rug) as a child, back in Iran. Her grandparents' neighbour had taught her. She admitted that she may have forgotten the details, but she was willing to track down someone who may know this traditional practice in Toronto and learn from them. We excitedly

parted. The prospect of turning 'weaving' as a concept into an exhibition was intrguing. Carpet weavers had mesmerized me whenever I visited a Bazaar. They were also often featured on national television in Iran. The ones from rural areas hardly spoke on TV. They sat behind their looms and weaved in front of the cameras, and their weaving created this melodic, mesmerizing sound. They were patient. They were calm. They understood that it took a long time to create something of value, and in the world of 'rapid change' and 'high speed', that alone, to me, seemed to be a rare understanding—something worth exhibiting.

Hajar called me after a few days, informing me that she had found the right instructors. They were able to teach her the skills that she would need to weave a Gabbeh as well as help her build her own rug-loom. I had found my Time Machine. We decided to propose the installation to the city of Toronto for Nuit Blanche 2018. Insomniacs and art admirers alike were called upon to attend the 13th annual Nuit Blanche Toronto, an all-night celebration of contemporary art organized by the City of Toronto. Consisting of projects by over 300 local, national, and international artists and curators, the festival, every year, explores an overarching theme of the evolving and storied landscape of what Toronto is, and what it can be. As the festival's visitors brave long line-ups and view remarkable artwork throughout the night, the audience is encouraged to think of their roles as individuals and as a collective in this moment in time. I wrote the proposal with Hajar's input:

We are here. We have arrived, each from a distinct path, all informed by narratives. And we are here to connect. Interwoven is a conceptual, narrative-based performance; it's an installation that aims to, visually and symbolically, connect various narratives. Through the medium of Gabbeh—a tribal woven rug specific to the nomads of Iran—the artist/performer weaves a visual piece, inviting the audience to participate with their narrative, in the creation of the final artwork. Participants will be instructed by the wall-text to select strands of wool from a series of sculptural molds of the artist's hands and interact with her, adding their visual, cultural aesthetics to the final woven Gabbeh.

"Gabbeh" is an indigenous rug, originally woven by nomads in south west of Iran. The word "Gabbeh" comes from the Persian language, meaning raw, natural, uncut. Its pattern showcase very minimal designs focused on the use of colour, which can be vibrant or soft and earthy. Moreover, it is often woven by women as a purely indigenous, utilitarian and tribal textiles that were not intended for trades, and therefore, has cultural and artistic values. The most interesting characteristic of Gabbeh is that the weavers don't have a pre-imagined, fixed design prior to weaving it. The colours, objects and patterns of Gabbeh is inspired by weaver's sur-roundings as she creates the piece. Gabbeh weavers, akin to painters, may be telling a story, depicting a landscape/scene; they even convey an emotion. Most commonly the final Gabbeh is asymmetric, representing a visual tale with figures and symbols similar to a 2-D animation. It is this subjective process that renders a genuine Gabbeh as a work of art, distinct from other Persian rugs and from many other types of weaving or knitting practiced in the world.

The installation, Interwoven, consists of a vertical rug loom with a seat in the front for the performer. It also includes sculptural hands containing of colourful pieces of wool installed on the adjacent wall intended for audience participation. The performer en-livens a forgotten medium—Gabbeh—as a traditional, intricate practice by her ancestors, Nomads of Iran, in a contemporary con-text. She live-weaves a multicultural, unified artwork with the help of the audience. Cathartic and symbolic, the performance not only enlivens the story of the artist but it also connects her narrative, through time and space, with other fellow citizens of Toronto.

Three weeks after the submission, we got the call. The proposal was not only accepted to be part of Nuit Blanche 2018, but Bata Shoe Museum (a revered Toronto institution) had offered to host the installation. We were thrilled. The next six months were spent on building the pieces: rug-loom, sculptural hands, acquiring the tools and the wool from Iran. We also made a video piece, narrating the history and practice of weaving Gabbehb by the tribal women. The Curatorial Narrative (on the following page) was also developed in first-person: a Reliable Narrator would tell the audience the story of the artist, the installation art, and the history of the piece.
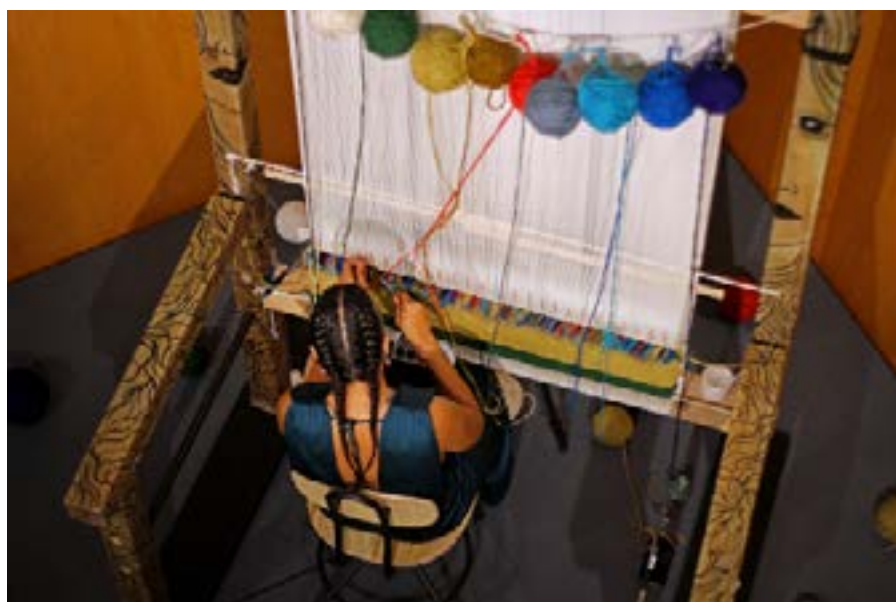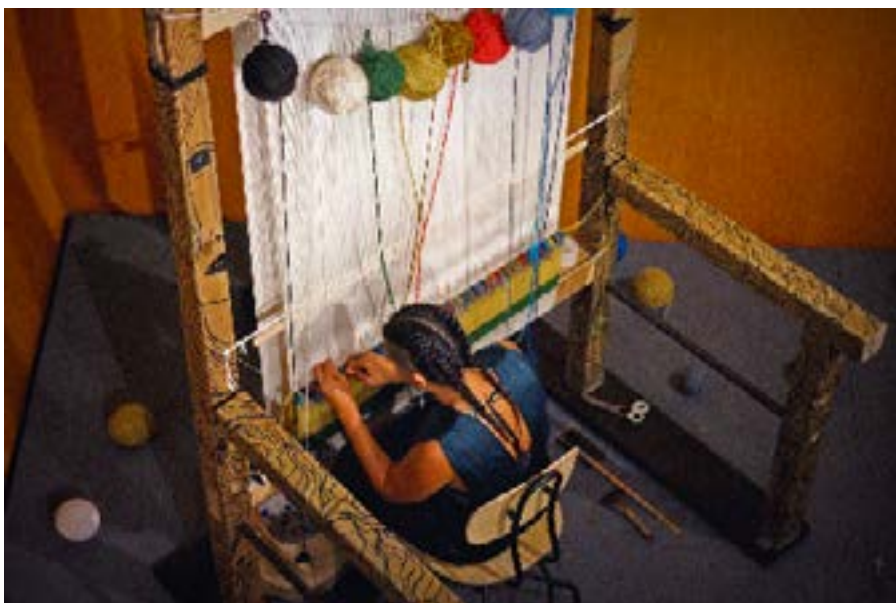
TOP/BOTTOM:
VISUAL .12 & VISUAL .13
INTERWOVEN
NUIT BLANCHE, 2018
BATA SHOE MUSEUM, TORONTO
ARTIST: HAJAR MORADI
PHOTOGRAPHY BY VAHID FAZEL

The Bakhtiari Tribe are one of the indigenous, nomadic tribes in Iran. They have been weaving rugs since the early 19th century. A mostly female-run practice, the resulted woven rugs are known as Gabbeh—crafted in wool and simple in geometry.

These tribal weavers, akin to painters, tell stories. They often depict a landscape, a fable, a scene, often conveying an emotion. Most commonly the final Gabbeh is asymmetric, featuring figures and symbols similar to a two-dimensional illustration. It is this subjective process that renders a Gabbeh to be a visual tale.

Hajar Moradi, whose ancestors come from the Bakhtiari Tribe of Iran, has regressed back in her history, learning this intricate craft and weaving it into her visual, contemporary practice.

And tonight, for the 2018 Nuit Blanche Toronto, she is weaving a Gabbeh, inviting you and the entire city to, visually and symbolically, participate in the creation of this artwork with your narratives.

Let us consider that we are here, together. Let us consider that we have arrived, each from a distinct path, all informed by narratives. And we are here, in Toronto, to connect.

Please take a few minutes, think about your story and the visual colours, order and aesthetic that would represent it. Then choose 10 colours from the sculptual hands to your immediate right and place them on the provided cards, and then in the basket next to the artist, and have her weave your narrative, along with others, into an interwoven Gabbeh.

Let us consider that we are, in fact, interwoven.

Thank you,
Sanam Samanian (Curator)

EXPERIENCE & RESULT

Interwoven was one of the most-attended installation at 2018 Nuit Blanche (GAMROT, 2018), engaging with nearly 7000 visitors. A month after, in October of the same year, Aga Khan Museum acquired it for a month-long installation "due to its resonance with the public" (AGA KHAN MUSEUM, WESBITE, 2019). It was installed on February 12 2019, at the museum, engaging nearly 40 patrons per day until March 8th. They continued contributing to the piece with their narratives, together, building on the stories that were woven on the night of Nuit Blanche. They thought about their story, chose the colours and took part in the creating of a Gabbeh. They also, almost always, took selfies with their colour selection, and posted in on their Social Media channels. A pre-determined hashtag (#interwovengabbeh) was set up to track the progression of the piece (AGA KHAN MUSEUM, WEBSITE, 2019).

Upon arrival, the audience would read the Curatorial Narrative and proceed to watch and examine the loom. During Nuit Blanche, the performer, Hajar Moradi, would answer their questions, show them how she weaves, and accept their selection of colours. The interaction often led to discussions around the social, cultural and political environment in Iran, and the Middle East in general. After the interactions, the visitors would either continue to watch her weave, or watch the video to come back with more questions. Children were often interested in having their own story submitted and woven as part of the Gabbeh. The colourful strands of wool and the loom in combination with "getting to play" with the entire piece seemed to be an engaging experience for them. Did the curation strategy resonate? By the number of participants alone, and judging by Aga Khan's acquisition of the installation for a month-long exhibition, it is safe to conclude that the installation connected with its audience. It is important to note that Hajar Moradi has not had an exhibition other than this installation in the past, and yet her first public artwork was exhibited at a globally reputable museum such as Aga Khan.

By choosing the Transformation Scenario, I created a Time Machine against the trajectory of current trends in the contemporary artworld. The installation, Interwoven, was far from tech-focused. It had retreated in time, finding a practice that is slow, not very sensationalized, or promotional. The audience, however, connected with it through a common vehicle: narrative. It is, therefore, recommended, for international, Independent Curators, to strategically and intentionally use narratives in their practice, as a tool for connection, in order to design and deliver compelling exhibitions globally— those that would inclusively attract an audience, connecting them together through emotional resonance.

VISUAL .14 & VISUAL .15 & VISUAL .16
INTERWOVEN
AGA KHAN MUSEUM, TORONTO, 2019
ARTIST: HAJAR MORADI

ANALYSIS & CONCLUSION

This Major Research Project (MRP) began with a curious question: How can we, as curators, design and deliver compelling exhibitions in the future?

The first chapter, Past, provided the accounts of conducted research through Literature Reviews. It collected information about the history of Curatorial Practice and the influence of Narratives in human development. The findings offered insights about how Narratives have been used in historic, cultural context; it also discussed the role of narrators, specifically a Reliable Narrator, as a literary device to tell a story. The MRP, in this chapter, furthur explored the documented accounts of how curators practiced in the past to understand the evolution of their role into cultural influencers.

The second chapter, Present, exhibited a few samples with regards to current exhibitions in Contemporary Curatorial Practice through Auto-ethnography. The exhibitions that were unable to connect with an audience were without stories. This chapter also included the accounts of curating an exhibition about 'how we tell our stories' on regular basis through Social Media channels. It demonstrated that stories are popular tools. It also showcased that use of narratives and stories are common amongst any audience of Curatorial Practice. They are familiar with the construct of stories and are curious about narratives, creating their own and following others on Social Media platforms. An exhibition itself leveraged a Curatorial Narrative as a tool and methodology for curation in this chapter. This deliberate narrative was the tool that communicated the intent of the exhibition to the stakeholders (including the audience) and was able to attract the attention of them long enough to be acquired by a reputable cultural institution in Canada: Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) which is a testament to its method of delivery.

In the final chapter, Future, the next 20 years of exhibitions were foresighted through Horizon Scanning and Scenario Planning. STEEP (Social, Technological, Environmental, Economical, Political) trends in Contemporary Art were identified along with their implications and values that they would bring to the artworld and Curatorial Practice. It was predicted that exhibitions are likely to continue to become rapidly more immersive, yet promotional rather than influential; and therefore, it is recommended that Independent Curators transform this trajectory by leveraging narratives, connecting and telling the story of the process and the intent of the exhibition and its content. Moreover, four (4) possible scenarios were developed through the insights that were provided by the STEEP trends. And, although in opposition to the current trajectory in Contemporary Art and Culture, the Transformation Scenario was selected to explore the potential of narrative as a tool for curation.

Based on the Transformation Scenario, in the world of 2040, the values in the artworld have shifted "in favour of substance". Poetic Exhibitions in which human values are explored through meaning and concepts are in-demand. The audience has a new-found curiosity around "finding meaning in life". Artists are regarded for creating work that not only explores existential dilemmas, but they are also expected to present their work in meaningful ways where emotional resonance is measured and valued by the audience's reaction and response. Significant cultural institutions, such as revered museums and galleries, celebrate and exhibit the emotionally sensitive bodies of work. Curators look for emotional resonance in artwork, developing content in collaboration with artists and cultural institutions which connect the audience to what is considered to be 'aspirational'. There are debates around what is 'emotional' and significant in the arts. Philosophy and Poetics are heavily taught in educational institutions and curricula globally. The audience is heavily engaged in the process of evaluating and creating works of art with the intention to make work that influences and propels human evolution forward.

The Time Machine experiment, set in the Transformation Scenario: Poetic Exhibitions, in the third chapter of this MRP encountered positive reception and reaction by the Stakeholders (identified on Page 15 of this document) in Toronto's artworld, and beyond: institutions, social media, media, festivals, etc. It demonstrated that there is an opportunity to influence the future into accepting and expecting more meaningful and poetic exhibitions if curators use their role as storytellers, presenting the public audience with narratives that communicate, resonate, and inspire the audience emotionally.

A Time Machine as a foresight tool was created to test the central theory of the MRP. A narrative-based installation titled Interwoven was designed to connect the people of Toronto through their stories and exhibit the effectiveness of narratives for connecting and inspiring a sample of the human population (Toronto). The intent of this exhibition was also to curate through a Curatorial Narrative told by a Reliable Narrator as a literary device, which proved to be useful as Aga Khan Museum acquired the installation for a month-long exhibition.

Curatorial Practice is a relatively young profession, growing and spreading in places such as the digital sphere with the advancement of technology. This MRP takes the Practice back to its basics, understanding its central intention—communicate content to an audience. At this juncture in the global discourse, how do we, in this young profession, address the responsibilities that come with the growth of Curatorial Practice matters. How content—any content—is communicated with an audience will have an impact in our collective, human development. We, as citizens of this planet, consume content on hourly basis. Therefore, the strategies that curators employ to curate content in our contemporary culture (and in the future) will have an impact on the evolution of human civilization. So, how do we design and deliver compelling exhibitions that would influence the global culture? This research project took me to some unknown territories in the field of my practice. I learned about the history of my profession. I learned that it is a fast-changing, evolving profession. I learned that curators, over the past few decades, have experimented with the format of exhibitions, and therefore, have allowed for

innovation and growth in the field. The brief history of this field continues to enable the opportunities, challenging the conventions, experimenting, and finding new methods by which to connect better with an audience. The role (and the responsibility) of curators have morphed into global influencers. They are tasked with finding content and exhibiting it in new formats through fresh perspectives in order to resonate, attracting attention, and supporting the development of new, inspiring content.

The role and responsibility of Independent Curators, these central figures in contemporary culture, is highly critical in shaping the future. Exhibitions, as a curator's medium, are no longer confined to the traditional spaces of galleries or museums. They can be presented in unlikely venues and held in the digital spheres, depending on their content.

In the first chapter of this MRP, the power and impact of narratives in the trajectory of evolution was reviewed and examined. Narratives have been utilized to document the past and shape the future. And so, they are commonly-used and familiar tools/format for communications, including when designing an exhibition.

Curators, particularly independent ones, are encouraged by this research to consider narratives as a framework, communicating content, curating artwork, and connecting with their designated audience. The voice of a Reliable Narrator (a literary device) has been exhibited to resonate with the audience in the examples that were provided in the Present and Future chapters of this MRP. It is important to know that this is a literary device in how to tell stories in Contemporary Curatorial Practice. It is not a moral role in the society. This literary device requires familiarity with the content, credibility in practice, an observational perspective, an analytical framework, and the use of accessible language.

As elaborated in the second chapter, Present, while contemporary art has become more and more abstract in the past two decades, to communicate with the audience, curators have leveraged storytelling as a methodology. Moving forward, it is recommended that they would use narratives more deliberately to not only communicate better but also help with the transformation of the existing trends in the trajectory of the artworld. The current trends demonstrate a set of implications that paint the future of art to be void of meaning, however, through the power of narratives and deliberate storytelling, global curators, these cultural figures, are going to be able to shift the current trends towards more aspirational values—those that train the audience to expect better content. And then, as a system, as species, we might make better, more informed choices than electing officials like Mr. Donald Trump to power. It is predicted, by this MRP, Beyond Exhibitions, that the next 20 years in the system of global artworld, is expected to move towards a tech-focused content; however, Independent Curators will be able to transform the trends by designing and delivering exhibitions that are narrative-based and content-focused, communicating and resonating with the audience through stories and shifting the values from promotional to influential in favour of 'meaning.'

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LIMITATIONS & FUTURE PLANS

I acknowledge that this Major Research Project (MRP), Beyond Exhibition, requires further research conducted through interviews with current practicing curators in the artworld. It also requires a more rigorous Horizon Scanning that takes place over an extended time to be able to monitor the rapid changes that take place in the artworld.

The research would be more informed with the addition of a comprehensive comparison study, analyzing the differences between the impact of Curatorial Statement and Curatorial Narrative to be able to draw more conclusive insights and arrive at more definite strategies. Moreover, the Time Machine experiment needs to be repeated at multiple geographical locations twice (once with a Curatorial Statement and once with a Curatorial Narrative), recording and comparing the perception of the audience, the impression of the artwork, and its resonance.

The MRP would also benefit from developing and exploring more in-depth scenarios for the future. Each of the scenarios, developed in the third chapter, has the potential to be considered, offering a set of strategies for an independent curator in navigating the possible futures of the practice.

It is important to note that although, non-linear narrative structures are significant and also intriguing to explore, for the ambitions of this study. However, to reduce the complexity of the academic process, the research had refrained from investigating the alternative structures of narrative at this point. Non-linear stories intersect with our understanding of "time," and although fascinating, it is reserved for the future. The research remains open and interested in continuing the exploration further, incorporating the perception of 'time' and, as a result, non-linear narrative structures and their role in the Curatorial Practice.

This MRP, Beyond Exhibition, at its best, scratches the surface of what needs to happen for Curatorial Practice to have a more focused, deliberate strategy in designing and delivering compelling exhibitions. However, it is a start. With the advancement of technology, exhibitions have left the spaces of museums and galleries, finding new placements in the digital spheres. And as a result, the strategies for how designing and delivering curated content, today, is more critical than it has ever been in the past. I would, therefore, continue this research in the next few years, collecting detailed data to develop more informed scenarios for the possible futures of this practice, with hopes to arrive at extended strategies that could help contemporary curators in designing and delivering compelling exhibitions, communicating informed content in our global culture.

VISUAL 16 - TRIBAL WOMAN, 2018
ARTIST: SIAVASH MAZLOUMIPOUR

thank you.