

## Curator's Statements

### Réflexions des commissaires

Haema Sivanesan, Pip Day, Ryan Rice, Jennifer Fisher, Jim Drobnick, Pamela Edmonds, Scott Marsden, Nicole Burisch, Eunice Béliador, Barbara Clausen, Vanessa Kwan, Vicky Chainey Gagnon, Michelle Gewurtz, Dominique Fontaine, Stefan St-Laurent, Véronique Leblanc, Jordan Arseneault, kimura byol-nathalie lemoine, Chris Lee, Maiko Tanaka, Taklif : فيكلت and Sandeep Bhagwati

Volume 43, Number 2, 2018

What is Critical Curating?

Qu'est-ce que le commissariat engagé ?

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1054387ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1054387ar>

[See table of contents](#)

#### Publisher(s)

UAAC-AAUC (University Art Association of Canada | Association d'art des universités du Canada)

#### ISSN

0315-9906 (print)

1918-4778 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

#### Cite this article

Sivanesan, H., Day, P., Rice, R., Fisher, J., Drobnick, J., Edmonds, P., Marsden, S., Burisch, N., Béliador, E., Clausen, B., Kwan, V., Chainey Gagnon, V., Gewurtz, M., Fontaine, D., St-Laurent, S., Leblanc, V., Arseneault, J., lemoine, k. b., Lee, C., Tanaka, M., Taklif : فيكلت & Bhagwati, S. (2018). Curator's Statements / Réflexions des commissaires. *RACAR : Revue d'art canadienne / Canadian Art Review*, 43(2), 104–123. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1054387ar>

Tous droits réservés © UAAC-AAUC (University Art Association of Canada | Association d'art des universités du Canada), 2018

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

**é**rudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

## Haema Sivanesan

AS A CURATOR OF COLOUR WITH A BACKGROUND in South Asian historical and contemporary art, it is impossible not to be always already aware of the implicitly colonial and capitalist structure of art museums and public galleries. In more traditional art museums, this coloniality is underpinned by frameworks of art history that tend to reinforce ethnographic and Orientalist paradigms. But in smaller, perhaps less-formal institutions, it may be possible to challenge and shake up these foundational assumptions of the art museum. I am interested in the question of whether it is possible to curate critically from inside the institution—that is, to subject the institution to processes of systemic inquiry that reveal its biases and blind spots—and through this process unsettle, trouble, or complicate the various structures of the institution. What agency do we have to do this work? Can non-Western cultural paradigms or ways of seeing, experiencing, and understanding objects and artworks infiltrate the art museum in challenging and productive ways?

One constructive approach towards the possibility of critical curating from inside the art institution might be to go back to an originary idea of curating as *curare*, meaning “to care.” Traditionally, this approach to curating has meant to care for objects and collections in taxonomic, materialist, and administrative ways. However, in recent years, curatorial practice has become increasingly focused on exhibition-making, such that this traditional, art-historical notion of “care” has become almost redundant to curatorial work. But can an idea of care continue to have relevance? Can a more expanded view of artworks, collections, and their relationships to communities restore notions of care to the practice of curating? What does it mean to care for culture and the role of culture in society? Is the notion of care culturally neutral? How do we recognize and facilitate the multiple historical and contemporary meanings of objects and their relationships to communities?

The idea of “care” operates on a number of levels for me. The idea of caring for one’s (non-Western) culture—of working to redefine curatorial and institutional practices—is an activist practice, not a placard-carrying activism, but a practice of calling certain ideas, belief systems, and assumptions into question. It is challenging and provocative work, because by raising these questions you are inevitably asking your colleagues and the institution to reconsider foundational assumptions and entrenched ways of doing.

Curating in this way is also a process of advocating for a kind of art history that does not objectify our cultures in colonial and Orientalist ways, but which dignifies cultural histories, beliefs, meanings, and practices by advocating for systems of knowledge and forms of experience that are sensitive to communities and community understandings. One of the big questions I grapple with has to do with how to account for the coexistence of modern and non-modern epistemologies in the experience and understanding of art. We assume that ways of looking at and experiencing art is universal, but this is an assumption.

There are very few curators of colour in institutions in Canada and around the world. The issues of race, representation, and coloniality are difficult to raise and discuss at any depth, let alone resolve. The problem of secondary Orientalism is barely discussed or acknowledged in the field of art history. We have to be aware of these issues in art museum settings, especially when we are looking to engage diverse cultural communities in the Canadian context, where we argue—rightly, in my view—for the social value of our cultural institutions. ¶

Haema Sivanesan is a Curator at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, British Columbia.  
—hsivanesan@aggv.ca

## Pip Day

*We are never alone in politics, which is why my politics are never mine only.*  
—Sarah Pierce, after Hannah Arendt, *Practices of Negation*, 2017

In *On Being Human as Praxis* (2015), writer Sylvia Wynter traces important transitions in historical knowledge systems—among others, the sixteenth-century shift away from a theology-based system, via Copernicus’ then-radical claim that the Earth is not the centre of the universe but actually *moves*—and is careful to note that while each transition represents a radical rupture for its time, what she calls our current *oeconomicus* absolute order of knowledge is steeped in the same old patriarchal, racist, classist, and colonial Euro-American order.

As Wynter’s analysis of historical changes demonstrates, though, absolute orders of knowledge can also *cease* to exist and, as she declares, “We must now collectively undertake a rewriting of knowledge as we know it” (18). For that, though, a new conception of humanness is needed, one that takes into account the beyond-biological that makes us unique—what Wynter calls the storytelling capacity of human beings. In short, we need to tell ourselves a new story.

Bringing objects, ideas, bodies, text, matters of concern, and political orientations into close relation is, of course, a form of storytelling. Museums and exhibitions have long been employed in propping up stories founded on patriarchal, racist, classist, and colonial legacies—as incisively displayed in the opening museum scene of Ryan Coogler’s film *Black Panther* (2018)—but they have also established themselves as spaces

for discursivity, thus enabling the establishment of *otherwise* relationality between those objects, ideas, bodies, text, matters of concern, and political orientations. Common ground can be established through exhibitions, or conversely, space can be held for incommensurable narratives and experiences; both results can be fruitful, if sometimes painful.

Wynter points out that the widespread emancipatory movements of the 1960s—fueled by earlier, anticolonial struggles all over the world—actually began “*all together*” to undo the existing *oeconomicus* knowledge system and conception of “Man” and his power over all things (23). She laments the later fracturing of those radical movements and the ensuing stall of the potential for dismantling the capitalist system that she saw emerging back then. We can lament with Wynter, but we can also posit that the force of our predecessors’ collective labour had perhaps begun to *move* Earth again. As cultural workers, we must harness the inertia of this movement, supporting the increasingly rapturous and rupturous radical storytelling woven by artists and activists working today, causing much-needed structural impact on both curatorial and institutional processes and engendering presents and futures in which we want to take part. ¶

Pip Day is currently Director/Curator at sbc Gallery of Contemporary Art in Tiohtià:ke/Montreal.  
—pipday@gmail.com

## Ryan Rice

THE DEMOCRATIZATION OF CURATORIAL PRACTICE over recent years has afforded and warranted wide-ranging diversity (a good thing). At the same time, it has been criticized for promoting a superficial approach (not such a good thing) that has watered-down and shifted the “profession’s” objectives of upholding dominant discourse and aesthetic judgment. The “profession” carries a historical burden of privilege that has existed as a barrier for many, while still struggling to maintain itself despite the doors to “institutions” and mono-cultural spaces being consciously and publicly cracked open for resolution. Such resolve addresses better forms of social equity, accessibility, and engagement to reflect critically beyond the status quo and recognize diverse social conditions. The motivation “to curate” shifts and shapes the practice considerably as a more sociable and popular action capable of reaching wider/other audiences. As a usurped or recouped/attainable practice, the focus of its intent becomes interdisciplinary by nature, with multiple platforms to access and coordinate. Similar to art, the professionalization of curatorial practice is not, nor should it be, limited to one specific trajectory. However, critical rigour sets it apart, while assuming an opportunity to encourage examination and opportunities to rethink the canon.

Critical curating should be framed as a creative intervention, which acts as a catalyst that merges and circulates

scholarship/discourse within an intellectual and emotive space for negotiation/reaction. The curatorial intent is the entry point that welcomes and offers a public or audience access to navigate within the foundations of venerated and DIY spaces. The guiding hypothesis offered considers the dynamics of ideas and aesthetics that are intentionally positioned/installed to flow fluidly across carefully selected artworks, ephemera, and/or visual culture, performance, etc., and that are influential across a multiple matrix of interpretation. The curator, therefore is a social mediator, one who draws upon the necessity to engage with a collective body and provide an opportunity to tease out the layers embedded in evidence to activate creative agency within art and culture beyond its physical manifestation and who seeks to inspire conversation, mediate truths, and fulfill desires. The curator is also an architect, one who has the foresight to build an approachable, empathetic space that can broaden perspectives within the cultural landscape. ¶

Ryan Rice, Kanien'kehá:ka of Kahnawake, is an independent curator, critic, Associate Professor and Associate Dean of Academic Affairs, Faculty of Liberal Arts, School of Interdisciplinary Studies at OCAD University.  
—rrice@ocadu.ca

## DisplayCult—Jennifer Fisher & Jim Drobnick

CRITICAL CURATING CAN MANIFEST IN A VARIETY of forms: thematic exhibitions that address timely issues and promote activist causes; monographic exhibitions that increase the art world's inclusiveness and diversity; curatorial interventions that reveal the operations of power; experiential situations that challenge normative ideologies and animate new forms of sociality and citizenship. As significant and as impactful as these examples have been over the years, critical curating involves more than just artworks, artists, curators, and exhibitions. As curators practicing in post-media genres, academics teaching in universities, and editors of the *Journal of Curatorial Studies*, we have witnessed how curating can be deployed across platforms, disciplines, and perspectives. Each venue and type of activity affords the opportunity for different critical strategies to be employed.

The themes and topics we conceptualize perform across the burgeoning field of the curatorial. We perceive an essential continuity between the practices of curating, artmaking, teaching, writing, and editing that engages with how the curatorial can generate knowledge. While the representational rhetorics of visual art are important, we are simultaneously interested in how the extra-discursive aspects of exhibitions construct experiences, transmit affects, and mobilize perception. Of particular interest are the performative and relational aspects of display: how the atmospheric charge of exhibitions intersects with sensibilities of the historical, the political, and the social.

What we find compelling about cultivating the field of curatorial studies through our recent work at the journal is how the purview of the “critical” can be expanded from curatorial *practice* to curatorial *analysis*. Criticality, especially in the popular inventory of “top ten lists,” has become misconstrued as opinionated projection, heir perhaps to habits of art-historical authority and canon formation. Instead, we find it valuable to foster a criticality that attunes not only to curatorial narratives, but to the experientiality of exhibitions. As editors of the *Journal of Curatorial Studies* we have often had to encourage writers to step back from focusing on discrete artworks to consider more broadly the relevance of context, the spaces between objects, and the specificities of location and time. With an emergent field such as curatorial studies, we aim to publish texts that provide informed understandings of the significance of exhibitions and develop theoretical models that explicate the dynamics of display culture. The expanded critical function of the curatorial, then, fosters analysis of the contextual grounds for exhibitions and the conditions of possibility for aesthetic encounters. ¶

Jennifer Fisher and Jim Drobnick form the curatorial collaborative DisplayCult, an organization for creative and interdisciplinary projects in the visual arts.  
www.displaycult.com  
—jefish@yorku.ca  
—jim@displaycult.com

## Pamela Edmonds

AS A “CRITICAL” CURATOR, I AM INTERESTED not only in the notion of decolonization within white-cube spaces, but also of “curating in the expanded field” to explore alternative spaces outside of the institution. My practice is largely about institutional critique and claiming space for a greater range of expressions of identity within Canadian art and Black visual cultures and developing strategies for thinking through a representational field dominated by the over-determined figure of the Black body and the normative assumptions of race, protest, and identity articulated through it.

Despite multiculturalism initiatives in Canada, work by artists of colour is still primarily viewed as “educational” or “ethnic.” The dominant cultural and funding bodies have, so far, succeeded only in accommodating certain elements of change, without really altering hegemonic structures. Currently, it seems that the most striking feature of contemporary race relations is the widening division between race as it is depicted in commercial popular culture and race as it exists in sociopolitical reality. The paradox of marginalization and empowerment seem to coexist in the ideas of representation and resistance. If artists of colour work uncritically within the dominant tradition of practice and theory, they risk participating in their own subordination. At the same time, working completely outside of the system is naive and impossible. It is a constant negotiation. Agency remains a key issue. However, the more contentious problem of how to attain and maintain it remains unresolved.

In her 1992 book *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, bell hooks posits the idea of an “oppositional gaze” working through film and the visual arts as a critical intervention to reclaim (mis)representations, and as a means of forging a communal space of “mutual gazing.” With respect to my own curatorial practice, an example of this critical strategy was exemplified in a group exhibition called *28 Days: Reimagining Black History Month*, which I co-curated with Sally Frater in 2012. Presented

at two venues in Toronto—the Justina M. Barnicke Gallery and Georgia Scherman Projects—the exhibition brought together the diverse work of Canadian artists with that of their international contemporaries in the United States and the United Kingdom in an exploration of the staging of Black History Month. This annual observance has continually sparked debates about the value of a designated month committed to the history of one particular race. While some artists refuse to show their work during Black History Month as a political stance against the marginalization of their practices, others feel it is one of few opportunities they have to participate in the broader cultural landscape. What do artists and curators from these historically marginalized communities do when they are interested in presenting issues of difference, but are working within a system whose colonial institutional structures are still largely intact? Do they challenge or reinforce them? ¶

Currently based in Chatham, Ontario, Pamela Edmonds is Curator of the Thames Art Gallery and Co-director (with Sally Frater) of Third Space Art Projects.  
[www.pe-curates.space](http://www.pe-curates.space)  
 —pamelae@chatham-kent.ca

**28 Days: Reimagining Black History Month, January 19–February 29, 2012, curated by Pamela Edmonds and Sally Frater, organized by Justina M. Barnicke Gallery and Georgia Scherman Projects (Toronto). Works pictured by Wangechi Mutu and Godfried Donkor. Photo: Toni Hafkenscheid.**



## Scott Marsden

*INSURGENT CURATING.* CREATIVE FORMS OF CRITICAL inquiry and the use of dialogue underlie my concept of insurgent curatorial practice. By insurgent, I refer to how dialogue-based social art practices simultaneously reveal conflicting and contradictory voices found within the dominant cultural narrative of neoliberalism and mainstream galleries and the voices of those who have been excluded, marginalized, and who are outside of these dominant discourses. Dialogue-based social art practices encourage the disruption of mainstream, elite, curator-driven exhibition programs and instead explore new definitions of community engagement, connectivity, and the role artists and art galleries play within contemporary communities.

My role as an insurgent curator has been to examine how art galleries operate, what they exhibit, and how the authority of the art gallery is a contested space that critiques dominate narratives, proposes the concept of critical artistic dialogue, and engages the public in meaning-making processes. My curatorial approach to working with artists, curatorial collaborators, art galleries, museums, and viewers is process oriented: it uses collaboration and participation to create dialogue and explore inter-subjectivities that are downplayed by neoliberalism in its privileging of individualized self-expression. This strategy challenges the traditional display of objects in the art gallery as a sacred space for quiet contemplation and recreates a space where diverse dialogues and multiple voices are heard, and where members of the public can reimagine themselves through the voices of others, thus giving voice to working-class, marginalized, and disfranchised peoples as a means for community transformation.

The use of dialogue has important implications in helping to situate art galleries and museums as public spaces that invite participation, dialogue, exchange of community knowledge, and provide opportunities that can have a profound impact on visitors' meaning-making and informal learning. My work explores how exhibitions can help to situate the viewer as a central part of the meaning-making process and how this can lead to a change in consciousness, creating a greater capacity for compassion and responsibility to communities and community ways of knowing and alternative meaning-making. ¶

Scott Marsden holds a PhD from the Faculty of Education (Art Education) at the University of Victoria, an MFA from York University, and is an Associate of OCAD University.

—scottmarsden316@gmail.com



## Nicole Burisch

FOR ME, “CRITICAL CURATING” MEANS reflecting on practices and platforms that have not traditionally been privileged in Euro-Western art institutions or canons. I come to this position through the research and writing I have done on craft, craftivism, feminist art, documentation, and performance art. Guiding questions include: How do certain practices come to exist “on the margins” and what happens when they move into or towards the centre? How do the power dynamics at play in institutional structures and methods get articulated in relationship to what is *not* there? How do curators/institutions use, adapt, absorb, appropriate, and benefit from the inclusion of politically engaged works? And how do they get pushed, opened, shaken up, and provoked by the inclusion of practices and exhibition strategies that may not be a comfortable fit?

Both craft and performance art are fields of practice that have been (and still are) especially important to women, BIPOC, and queer folk. These ways of working often foreground live bodies, materials, process, domesticity, labour, politics, care, and community—subjects traditionally excluded from or intentionally practiced outside of the purview of fine art. With the increased permeability between art and craft, high and low, inside and outside, social practice and activism, it is important to ask: How might we (as curators, critics, historians, cultural workers, audiences) acknowledge the history of these exclusions and refusals, while also moving forward with dialogues around inclusivity, sovereignty, hybridity, and materiality?

I have spent most of my career working in artist-run centres. I have been lucky to work alongside colleagues (from

administrators to artists to maintenance workers) who were interested in (re)thinking how these spaces function, how they might best support artists, and how they represent and serve their broader constituencies. This is a line of questioning related to curatorial practice that can and should be taken up outside of artist-run models and that deserves more consideration in larger institutions. For me, this goes hand-in-hand with talking openly and frequently about equitable working conditions across the cultural sector, as well as practices of collaboration, risk, site-specificity, ephemerality, failure, and non-hierarchical models of governance.

I recently attended an expansive and generous talk given by Los Angeles-based curator Hamza Walker, who encouraged the audience of emerging curators to think about how we engage with our communities. He told us to get out there, to figure out what we are interested in as curators, and to pursue it—to not worry too much about what was popular or who would become famous, but to develop strong social networks and enthusiastic interests. Walker also pushed us to think about what we were not seeing or not paying attention to and summed up this approach with the phrase “look behind you.” His words have been ringing in my ears ever since, and I borrow and riff off them here as an additional answer to the question, What is critical curating? Let’s keep looking all around us. ¶

Nicole Burisch is Assistant Curator, Contemporary Art, at the National Gallery of Canada.  
—nburisch@gallery.ca



## Eunice Bélidor

J'AI ME TOUJOURS COMMENCER MES RECHERCHES SUR les diverses pratiques curatoriales à la source: l'origine du mot *curating*, *curare*, qui signifie «prendre soin». On comprend ici que la curatrice prend soin des œuvres, les conserve, les garde en lieu sûr. Cette définition ramène tout de même aux balbutiements du métier, quand la curatrice était surtout conservatrice. Malgré que le commissariat d'exposition ait évolué, et que la fonction de la commissaire s'étende à l'extérieur de l'institution muséale, l'idée de prendre soin, somme toute, reste. Le commissariat d'exposition s'apprend et se réfléchit maintenant dans un contexte académique, par le biais des domaines de l'histoire de l'art et de la muséologie en grande partie, cloisonné dans le milieu universitaire traditionnel. On assiste ici à une restriction du domaine commissarial aux personnes privilégiées ayant accès à l'éducation supérieure. Est-ce donc possible d'avoir accès aux réflexions sur le commissariat d'exposition si nos conditions sociales nous excluent de l'académie? Qui sont les gens qui y réfléchissent et comment l'université donne-t-elle accès à son savoir? Qui est son public? Car il faut être conscient que le commissariat d'exposition est également une question de diffusion: prendre soin des œuvres dans le but ultime de perpétuer leurs idées et leur histoire à travers le temps.

Jusque dans les années 1960, le commissariat était surtout une histoire d'objets. La commissaire diffuse les objets conservés selon un fil conducteur d'idées, créant ainsi un pont entre les objets et le public, leur donnant une valeur au-delà de leur matérialité. Par la suite, avec Lucy Lippard, et son livre *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (1973), l'art n'est plus objet: le commissariat d'exposition se doit donc de prendre soin d'œuvres immatérielles, et pousse plus loin l'idée de soin.

Ma pratique commissariale, bien ancrée dans le XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle, réfléchit à l'idée de prendre soin de l'art non-objet, mais surtout de ce qui apporte à sa compréhension. L'art s'active par les personnes qui le regardent; je souhaite surtout prendre soin de ce regard, particulièrement celui des personnes non invitées à profiter des arts: les personnes racisées, autochtones, les artistes autodidactes, les personnes n'ayant pas accès au milieu universitaire, les personnes ayant des capacités différentes, toutes marginalisées pour la simple raison qu'elles sont à l'extérieur du statu quo, du privilège blanc. Ces personnes développent des savoirs sur notre époque, sur les mouvements de notre société, et sur les discours contemporains qui étendent la compréhension des œuvres d'art au-delà de leur tangibilité. Le vrai commissariat d'exposition engagé crée de l'espace pour ces idées, non pas nouvelles mais souvent tues. Il se doit de réfléchir à des possibilités de diffusion créative, de mettre ensemble des œuvres d'art qui racontent une multitude d'histoires, qui parlent à tous les membres de la société. La commissaire engagée prend soin des œuvres et prend aussi soin des gens. ¶

Eunice Bélidor est commissaire, critique et chercheure, spécialisée en art contemporain haïtien et intéressée par le design de mode, la performance, les études post-black et le féminisme.

[www.eunicebee.net](http://www.eunicebee.net)

—[programmation@article.org](mailto:programmation@article.org)

## Barbara Clausen

MON TRAVAIL, EN TANT QUE COMMISSAIRE, historienne de l'art et professeure, est consacré à l'investigation de l'intersection entre les champs du curatorial, du performatif et de l'archive. Réfléchir à ce que cela signifie aujourd'hui de développer une pratique de commissaire engagée et critique, implique nécessairement de se questionner sur la relation qu'entretiennent expérience et savoir, spécifiquement au sein du format de l'exposition. Dans cet espace politique de représentation, se demander «qui a fait quoi, quand, comment et pourquoi?» devient plus qu'un point de départ ou une réflexion a posteriori, mais plutôt une stratégie méthodologique, particulièrement lorsque l'on se penche sur la relation de plus en plus symbiotique de la performance avec le musée.

This rich and complex affiliation between actions and institutions over the past twenty years affirms performance's socio-cultural function as a discourse-based practice and a fluid medial entity that oscillates between affect-driven agency and conceptual site-specificity. It is a subject that implies expanding the field of curatorial and artistic investigation towards a broader field of various ecologies and networks of interests, choices, ideologies and institutional politics.

En raison de la prise de conscience actuelle du caractère auto-réflexif de la performance et de son existence contingente, le fait d'exposer une performance historique extraite d'une collection ou d'une archive (allant de la bibliothèque à Internet), de commander une ou plusieurs pièces inédites, ainsi que de demander à un artiste de travailler à partir d'une performance faisant partie d'une collection ou tirée de l'histoire de l'art, soulève une toute nouvelle série de questions autant pour les artistes, que pour les commissaires et les historien.ne.s de l'art.

My fields of interests are those that challenge concepts of experience and subjectivity and that ask how practices such as curating, teaching, and writing on performance art influence the medium and challenge the institutions that host live practices.

How can performance art's claim of authenticity be discussed and developed within the setting of an exhibition and the framework of a curatorial project? And what are the political and social implications and shifting power relationships that become visible and hence negotiable when authenticity and cultural knowledge become accessible through social media and live streaming?

Ces questions remettent en cause les concepts d'expérience et de subjectivité. Elles permettent d'analyser comment artistes et commissaires interagissent avec l'imaginaire du musée en tant que site liminal, nourri autant par le désir de l'immédiateté et de l'accessibilité à l'infini que par le caractère d'instabilité des archives.

Au sein d'une démarche commissariale, le défi est donc de trouver un équilibre entre les intérêts et les concepts théoriques, institutionnels et artistiques, tout en s'interrogeant sur la manière dont les pratiques basées sur la performance non seulement façonnent et reflètent, mais également contribuent à la politique de l'image en direct en utilisant le format de l'exposition pour définir le musée comme une sphère publique.

From a curatorial standpoint, the challenge is to find a balance between theoretical, institutional, and artistic interests and concepts, asking how performance-based practices not only shape and reflect, but more specifically, contribute to the image politics of the live by using the format of exhibition to define the museum as a public sphere. ¶

Barbara Clausen est commissaire d'exposition indépendante et professeure en histoire de l'art à l'Université du Québec à Montréal.  
—clausen.barbara@uqam.ca

## Vanessa Kwan

FOR ME, THE SUBJECT OF CRITICAL CURATING relates to the question of how we negotiate relationships, respond supportively to artists' practices, and transform capital through our work. These elements of curatorial practice are perhaps less obvious on the surface, as our presence is most deeply acknowledged in the moment of presentation, be it in the white cube, a publication, or during a public discussion. But these quieter activities—the “doing” behind the “saying”—are what constitutes, for me, the basis for a critical curatorial practice.

One project we've been working on at grunt gallery hints at some of these factors. Since 2014, I, along with my colleagues Dan Pon (grunt gallery Archives Manager) and curator Maiko Tanaka, have been working with artist Jacqueline Hoang Nguyễn on her project *The Making of an Archive*. Originating in the artist's ongoing, research-based practice, the project addresses a conspicuous lack in state-run archives in Canada. While researching at the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the National Film Board, and Library and Archives Canada, Nguyễn found they had precious little in their holdings under the search heading “multiculturalism” that reflected the lived experiences of immigrants in this country. *The Making of an Archive* is a grassroots attempt to provide a more representative photographic record—one that addresses a fuller range of experiences, civic engagements, and activist solidarity networks. It is a simple premise: collect and preserve the photo albums and ephemera from immigrants who identify as persons of colour (POC) and their families, and in the process offer a service to an intergenerational donor base—digitized copies of precious family archives. In practice, the work and the many points of outreach, cold-calling, digitization, interviewing, archiving, and cataloguing has required unique qualities of grit, reflection, and gentle ambition—and it has engendered a unique network of relationships and collaborations in the doing.

*The Making of an Archive* is a project with no foreseeable endpoint. Indeterminate in scale and evolving in scope, the project employs as guiding principles two, not necessarily complementary logics—accumulation and speculation. Built on a speculative premise (that there might be a way to gather a collection that addresses the diversity of immigrant experience in Canada) and driven by a logic of accumulation (gather what you can, for as long as you can), the project resists all attempts at a summarizing statement. Where we in arts institutions have become used to presentations that organize content in specific ways—exhibitions, websites, publications, and talks—*The Making of an Archive* challenges not only what these presentations might look like, but how they might be managed and supported. In this way, the effects of the archive far exceed the moment of presentation and bring into relief the role of the art institution in supporting projects of this scope.

There is no moment of presentation or closure with this project. It's a work in progress, and, for me, it has given some shape to a state of not knowing in creative and curatorial practice. This position, unresolved as it may seem, is central to remaining open to new ways of building relationships and sustaining knowledge that we might not have figured out just yet. This seems important. ¶

Vanessa Kwan is Curator at grunt gallery, Vancouver.  
—vanessakwan@gmail.com

## Vicky Chainey Gagnon

IN MY CURATORIAL WORK, I HAVE SOUGHT to activate exhibition spaces that challenge and unsettle historical forms of museum display—unmasking questions of power that I view as typically invisible, even in exhibitions. I was first influenced by Mary Anne Stanislewski's *The Power of Display* (1998) and then completed a summer course in museography/scenography at the École du Louvre in 2009, after five years working as a curator at the Foreman Art Gallery at Bishop's University. My motivations at the time were to understand the ways different cultures find their expression in how objects are presented and socially situated in the institution of the museum. Self-reflexive forms of curating continue to fascinate me most, specifically those that disrupt traditional museum experiences. I have always thought that these discrete interventions into the public sphere ("exhibitions") can bring the practices of interventionist feminist history, research, and ethics to bear on the visual arts: this is what endures for me.

I have always conceived the exhibitions I have curated as interactive, social spaces, and I consider that my role as facilitator was and is fundamentally a muscle I developed slowly though trial and error. I remain steadfast in my belief that exhibitions are materially discursive forms, their languages, social aspects, socio-economic and political functions being deeply and historically tied to (neo)colonialism and (neo)liberalism. Destabilizing narratives of power and display in my curatorial work has revealed to me the many possibilities that can be found in different forms of "writing."

My instincts tell me that exhibitions should always be active sites of criticism and action, with an end goal (hopefully) of fashioning a more diversified, socially engaged culture that increasingly tests the visual arts with different perspectives, making it richer and plural. My faith lies in this potential for a new grammar to emerge, opening up additional avenues of experimentation in the area of exhibition-making across the field, now and in the future. ¶

Vicky Chainey Gagnon is Executive Director & Chief Curator of the Campbell River Art Gallery, Vancouver Island, British Columbia.  
—director@crartgallery.ca



*Value*, January 11–March 17, 2012,  
curated by Vicky Chainey Gagnon,  
organized by Foreman Art Gallery,  
Bishop's University (Sherbrooke, QC).  
Artists featured: Cooke-Sasseville,  
Antoni Muntadas, Red Channels,  
WochenKlausur, and Antoni Vidokle  
& Iulieta Aranda.

## Michelle Gewurtz

In my view, naming one's practice "critical curating" is predicated upon recognizing that there is a relationship between curating and politics. As a feminist curator, I strive for a radical politics of inclusion. My approach to critical curating can be seen in the methodology used in *Àdisòkàmagan/Nous connaître un peu nous-mêmes/We'll All Become Stories* (Ottawa Art Gallery, 2018), an exhibition that I co-curated for the newly built facility for Ottawa's only municipal gallery, founded in 1988. Each component of the trilingual title is distinct and specific to the three languages—Anishnabemowin (Algonquin), French, and English—which appear in the order this land was settled.

*Àdisòkàmagan*, which translates as "every object tells a story," was conceived as the first, in-depth telling of the art history of Canada's Capital Region, a geographic area that encompasses Ottawa, as well as Gatineau, Quebec. As the new building is located on the traditional and unceded territory of the Anishnabeg (Algonquin), it was crucial to employ critical curatorial strategies so that the exhibition fostered cross-cultural dialogue and acts of reconciliation. Hence, in the planning stages, my colleagues and I engaged in a process of consultation with the Elders of the Kitigan Zibi First Nation, and also met with the director of the cultural centre of the Pikwakanagan First Nation, as both communities lay claim to the territory that makes up Ottawa-Gatineau.

The Elders debated our proposal to include well-known watercolours by British land surveyors, as these contained stereotypical and colonial representations of their land. Collectively, we decided to juxtapose Henry Pooley's *Entrance of the Rideau Canal*, 1833, with Dean Ottawa's *Kabeshinàn* (2000). Pooley's watercolour features a view of the military barracks on the site that is now Parliament Hill and an Indigenous encampment with a cone-shaped tent (*tipi*) that is not typically associated with Anishnabeg dwellings, but is instead unique

to people of the Plains. *Kabeshinàn* (2000), a drawing by Dean Ottawa (of Kitigan Zibi), depicts the same site—Parliament Hill—with the traditional structure, a wigwam. Such a juxtaposition serves as an interrogation of the colonialist depictions of Indigenous peoples. In addition, we installed nearby Kitigan Zibi artist Janet Kaponicin's *Tragic History Behind the Parliament Building* [Kà kotàmigowebak ishkwàyàng Wàbishkiwe ogimàwogamigong] (2004), an acrylic and birchbark collage that tells the story of an Anishnabe girl raped and murdered by British soldiers. The story has survived through seven generations; it was recounted by women beginning with Kaponicin's own great-great grandmother, who was at the encampment at the time of the murder. Recovering this element of oral history and making it known to a wider public is but one example of the way, I believe, curators should make space for the telling of different stories. Employing a thematic, non-chronological approach enables art to serve as a form of encounter and engagement that links contemporary society and politics to the past, as we could include this young girl as one of the subjects of the Canadian Government's Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls.

I view the processes undertaken here as deeply feminist, as they prioritized diverse knowledges and histories to achieve radical inclusivity. Hence, we also included works by artists from Ottawa's Being Studio, which serves a community with developmental disabilities. I believe that a key question curators must ask in our work is, What stories do people want to tell each other so that as-yet-untold stories can emerge? Artistic practice is full of potential to reimagine the world and the alternate narratives that need to be told. ¶

Michelle Gewurtz is Curator at the Ottawa Art Gallery.  
—mgewurtz@oaggao.ca

## Dominique Fontaine

Une réflexion dans l'action. Une réflexion sur la nécessité du travail curatoriale comme modèle théorique, comme champ disciplinaire qui contribue au développement, à la transformation et à la proposition de nouveaux paradigmes artistiques. Le « commissariat engagé » c'est aussi se confronter à une série de questions qui forment les enjeux vitaux de la pratique, de la théorie et de la production des expositions.

J'œuvre comme commissaire indépendante depuis la fin des années 1990. Très tôt, je me suis intéressée à la reconnaissance et à la diffusion des artistes d'ascendance africaine et c'est pour cela que j'ai lancé en 2005 le projet de recherche documentaire *Évidence: Interdocumentation*, rassemblant une importante collection de livres, de catalogues d'exposition et de documents sur l'art contemporain, notamment d'Afrique et de sa diaspora.

Mes projets curatoriaux ont toujours eu pour but de permettre de prendre conscience que le contexte critique d'une exposition participe d'un système discursif plus vaste, qui n'est pas statique ni figé théoriquement, mais au contraire en constante évolution. À titre d'exemple, l'exposition *Between the earth and the sky, the possibility of everything* (Scotiabank Nuit Blanche Toronto, 2014) proposait une réflexion poétique sur les enjeux sociaux et politiques qui affectent notre temps présent et possiblement notre avenir. Aussi, de 2013 à 2017, j'ai collaboré à titre de commissaire-consultante au programme « Of Africa » du Royal Ontario Museum (ROM). De cette plateforme, qui favorisait une présentation plus ouverte et plus dynamique de la diversité et de la créativité du continent africain ainsi que de sa diaspora, découle mon plus récent projet d'exposition, *Here We Are Here: Black Canadian Contemporary Art (Nous sommes ici, d'ici: l'art contemporain des Noirs canadiens)* (ROM, 2018), une exposition qui remet en question les préjugés sur la condition des Noirs au Canada à la lumière des œuvres d'artistes contemporains.

Le « commissariat engagé » est aussi la résidence de recherche que j'ai réalisée au centre articule. Intitulée *Scènes de la vie quotidienne à Montréal (on belonging and the politics of belonging)*, la résidence examinait la relation entre arts, migration et représentation dans le contexte montréalais et celle entre pratiques artistiques contemporaines, ainsi que les enjeux auxquels font face les villes où se concentrent les populations diverses issues de l'immigration. Dans un contexte de transitions sociales, dans une situation de compétitions économiques, d'inégalités sociales qui semblent exponentielles, comment interroger la notion d'appartenance sociale? Quel est l'impact des politiques d'appartenance sur la cohésion sociale à Montréal? L'art ne peut-il se résumer qu'à la connaissance théorique ou peut-il renvoyer à des expériences collectives? Comment donc penser le monde dans lequel nous vivons? Et comment réfléchir à ces questions de société qui nous interpellent tous?

Durant la résidence, plusieurs activités ont été organisées et articule a été transformé en un espace collectif où artistes, chercheurs, écrivains, sociologues, penseurs, publics, entre autres, examinaient les problématiques liées à l'espace social et politique de l'art. Le but était de montrer comment les intellectuels et les artistes réimaginent les caractéristiques spécifiques de la vie contemporaine: la mobilité, l'éloignement, l'appartenance, la marginalisation. L'exposition concrétisait la première phase de recherche de la résidence et s'est présentée comme une accumulation de passages, une collection de moments ou une autre manière de penser le monde. ¶

Dominique Fontaine est commissaire indépendante et fondatrice d'aPOSteRIORii, une structure à but non lucratif qui s'intéresse à la recherche « curatoriale ». [www.dominiquefontaine.com](http://www.dominiquefontaine.com)



Vue partielle de l'exposition *Repérages ou À la découverte de notre monde ou Sans titre*, du 29 janvier au 28 février 2016, organisée par Dominique Fontaine dans le cadre de sa résidence de recherche de commissariat à articule, Montréal. Photo: Guy L'Heureux.

## Stefan St-Laurent

HAVING ORGANIZED MANY EXHIBITIONS and events, I have come to realize the importance of producing politically engaged projects that allude to or address some of the poignant issues of our time. In my opinion, contemporary art exhibitions should not be too disassociated from societal and political realities—it is precisely why we call this production the “art of our time.” In stark opposition to radical or political art, apolitical art aligns itself with the neoliberal project, giving little space to ideas that unsettle the status quo. For the 2018 exhibition *Live in Palestine*, which I co-curated with Anna Khimasia and Rehab Nazzal, following our participation at the *Art & Resistance Conference* (2016) in Bethlehem, it became clear to the three of us that we would focus on Palestinian artists living in Gaza and the West Bank, to offer a more nuanced look at life in Palestine today. It was undeniable that there were many parallels to be made about life in Palestine and life for the Indigenous peoples of Canada, including access to water, occupied territories, and the right to self-govern. These links were put into focus by presenter Wanda Nanibush and other Indigenous attendees. As Palestinian artists living in Palestine do not fit

so neatly in the Western-art canon, galleries and museums rarely present their work. We therefore felt compelled to produce a major group exhibition at AXENÉO7 that would tour internationally beginning in 2019, so that this lesser-known work would be seen by a large and engaged audience. Given how often artistic institutions self-censor in order to maintain donor funding, artist-run centres like AXENÉO7 have a duty to defend artistic work that other institutions choose to ignore for political reasons. Many audiences are actively seeking politicized exhibitions like *Live in Palestine*. Oftentimes, these exhibitions attract the most visitors, demonstrating how art institutions sometimes fail their audiences because of cowardice and greed. If cultural workers purport to be defenders of artistic freedom and freedom of expression, then they must also muster political courage. As the world crumbles before us, the art community cannot remain silent. ¶

Stefan St-Laurent is Director of AXENÉO7.  
—direction@axeneo7.qc.ca

117

*Live in Palestine*, July 11–August 11, 2018, curated by Anna Khimasia, Rehab Nazzal, and Stefan St-Laurent, organized by AXENÉO7 (Gatineau) in partnership with ΔΑΪΜŌN (Gatineau), A Space Gallery (Toronto), and Dar al-Kalima University (Bethlehem).  
Photo: Iustin Wonnacott.



## Véronique Leblanc

LES PROJETS D'EXPOSITION ET D'INTERVENTION dans l'espace public que j'ai initiés depuis 2010 sont intimement liés à des questions soulevées par le travail des artistes et à leur inscription dans une réalité située. Le caractère engagé de ma pratique de commissaire est ainsi façonné par les manières dont les œuvres interrogent la construction des discours dans l'espace social et mettent en scène différentes manières de représenter, de ressentir et d'imaginer notre rapport à la collectivité.

Plusieurs attitudes esthétiques et discursives alimentent une réflexion de nature politique dans mon travail. Confronter des idées antagonistes au sein d'une même proposition et exposer une contradiction—comme le font les œuvres vidéographiques d'Artur Zmijewski ou du collectif Chto Delat?—activent un doute nécessaire pour problématiser les rapports entre l'art et le politique. Élaborer des formes polyphoniques en rassemblant des éléments issus de processus de collecte ou d'enquête—tel que le proposent les projets de Raphaëlle de Groot et d'Emmanuelle Léonard—déploie une diversité de perspectives et attire l'attention sur les points aveugles d'un ensemble toujours fragmentaire, permettant d'échapper aux catégories identitaires. Exposer le fonctionnement d'espaces disciplinaires régissant l'espace public et déterminant certains de nos comportements—ce dont on trouve des exemples chez Richard Ibghy et Marilou Lemmens, Anne-Marie Ouellet, Édith Brunette et Arkadi Lavoie-Lachapelle—ouvre des avenues de résistance à différentes formes de violence et d'exclusion. Dans le même esprit, mettre en lumière la banalisation de discours sexistes et racistes—tel que le font Dayna Danger, Chun Hua Catherine Dong et Helena Martin Franco—force à interroger l'intégration d'attitudes oppressives à l'égard des minorités. Les œuvres de ces artistes (et de plusieurs autres, dont les pratiques fondent la mienne) sont des lieux de production de discours et de connaissance. Elles sont des espaces de conflit, d'expérimentation,

de recherche et d'ouverture sur des réalités autres, tout comme les événements qui les présentent.

Mon intérêt pour les projets contextuels, performatifs et collaboratifs, de même que pour les œuvres qui utilisent des stratégies documentaires, m'incite à adopter une approche du commissariat qui est d'emblée axée sur l'attention portée à un contexte. Ma pratique en est une d'accompagnement des artistes et d'apprentissage collectif à travers la réalisation d'un projet émergent ou s'inscrivant dans ce contexte. Mettre en œuvre des projets d'exposition, c'est ouvrir des terrains de recherche et de réflexion sur nos manières d'être en relation avec le monde, avec le territoire et avec autrui. C'est être une interlocutrice des artistes et proposer une lecture politique de leurs œuvres. C'est aussi apprendre, continuellement, à éviter de reproduire les schémas hiérarchiques, les relations de pouvoir et les modes de connaissance coloniaux et patriarcaux qui s'installent si naturellement au sein du monde de l'art et des institutions universitaires. Pour moi, cela commence par prendre en compte le privilège et le pouvoir que me confère ma situation personnelle et professionnelle et par cultiver, autant que possible, une vigilance critique face à mes propres idées, habitudes et attitudes. Il s'agit d'être à l'écoute d'une multiplicité d'approches, de m'exercer à développer des réflexes plus inclusifs, justes et éthiques. Faire l'expérience des œuvres et contribuer à les mettre en contact avec différents publics, tant au moment de leur création que de leur diffusion, me transforme et infléchit les relations que j'entretiens avec les personnes et le monde qui m'entourent. ¶

Véronique Leblanc est commissaire indépendante, auteure et chargée de cours en histoire de l'art à l'Université du Québec à Montréal.  
—leblanc.veronique.2@uqam.ca



## Jordan Arseneault

FILM IS NOT, AND NEVER HAS BEEN, about mere entertainment. Like the two modes of creation that the moving image stands between—the still image and the theatre—“films” are a product of lenses, makers, and collaborators working in a context that is always more than meets the eye. As a performer, translator, drag artist, activist, and the coordinator of MediaQueer.ca, I argue this is triply so for films made by and about LGBTQ2S+ people, whose social and political context was, for so long, inhospitable, despite our unrelenting ability to infiltrate systems of production and visual languages that have left their mark on art history in Canada and around the world.

The mission of the Queer Media Database Canada-Québec Project is to study, catalogue, and promote the exhibition potential of queer Canadian and Québécois moving-image art at home and abroad. We have worked with over twenty festivals and co-presenters to show little-known and canonical works by and about LGBTQ2S+ people. We do this out of a shared belief that there is something radically informative about the queer lens—both in its distortions and its representational precisions.

Camp, drama, performance-as-community, sex work, Indigenous struggles, drag (kings!), Internet romance, feminist politics, and affect history are all embedded in the film programs we curate. While we are known for our durational

short programs, *Still Not Over It*, a program of films about queer temporality, clocked in at over two hours and required an intermission. We curate from the perspective of political and aesthetic whiplash that is the “resting affect” of queer people: we live in an era of stark contrasts, between expanded rights and freedoms for queer and transgender people—namely in Canada, the European Union, Nepal, and parts of Latina America—and massive setbacks occurring in the countries that brought us Sergei Eisenstein and John Waters. Aesthetically wedged between Eurocentric art traditions and American commercial giants, queer Canadian filmmakers have had the benefit of almost fifty years since the decriminalization of homosexuality, as well as sixty years of federal arts funding, not to mention the queer, pan-cultural phenomenon of film festivals, those always-political watching parties that let us see where the medium is going, and the bodies and stories behind the images that move us.

Two other great formal modes characterize the Canadian queer film wedgie: the lust to make a commercially successful narrative feature (*Big Fictions*) and the need to show our truth in experimental shorts where form and content can be married (*Little Truths*). Between *Big Fictions* (society, money, romance, utopia/sex) and *Little Truths* (subjectivity, precarity, loneliness, sex/dreams) lies that great Canuck and Québécois tradition of the documentary feature, a mode in which we have always, and continue to, excel. On the cusp of our year-long critical commemoration of the decriminalization of homosexuality (and abortion) in 2019, I have made it my mission to show these works in their complexity, their genre-busting, musical, eccentric, tragicomic, glitchy, vhs-to-digital glory. ¶

Jordan Arseneault is currently Coordinator of the moving-image encyclopedia [www.mediaqueer.ca](http://www.mediaqueer.ca), which is the online home of the Queer Media Database Canada-Québec Project.

—jordan.arseneault@concordia.ca



Launch of the online platform of the Queer Media Database Canada-Québec. © MediaQueer. Photo: Greg Wong, Toronto.

## kimura byol-nathalie lemoine

FAISANT PARTIE D'UNE MINORITÉ (POC) dans la minorité (adopté.e.s) des minorités (LGBTQ2S+), je ne devrais pas me plaindre de la non-existence d'artistes de couleur dans des expositions majeures ou de leur représentation souvent pas plus élevée que 1 %, voire 2 % lorsque nous sommes chanceu.x.ses.

Ayant grandi en Belgique où j'ai été importé.e/adopté.e, je trouvais « normal » que les grands artistes soient des hommes blancs pour la plupart hétérocentriques. Toutes mes références artistiques ne représentaient pas ma réalité.

En arrivant en Corée, pays de mes semblables (physiques), je retrouvais une autre frustration et discrimination envers les artistes de la diaspora coréenne et surtout les adopté.e.s. Je n'allais pas attendre que l'on me propose d'exposer. Prenant le taureau par les cornes, j'organise la première exposition d'adopté.e.s en Corée. À l'époque, je ne savais pas que cette initiative allait engendrer une discussion sur l'appartenance de l'art diasporique dans le pays d'origine et le pays d'adoption/d'immigration. Cette culture d'entre-deux me semblait importante dans une ère de mondialisation. Depuis une vingtaine d'années, j'ai organisé des expositions de groupe en Corée du Sud.

En arrivant à Montréal, il y a plus d'une décennie, le monde artistique fonctionnait encore différemment de la Belgique et de la Corée. Malgré le réseau des galeries autogérées, j'ai découvert que la présence d'artistes autochtones et POC n'était pas représentative de la communauté artistique. L'exposition *Orientity* à la Centrale, en 2007, a été ma première expérience de commissariat dans le « nouveau » monde. Quelques programmes de projections vidéos commissariées (avec le groupe *Qouleur* au Studio xx et à articule) ont suivi.

Mon devoir en tant que personne de couleur, LGBTQ2S+ et adopté.e est de continuer à initier, à proposer, à soutenir des expositions ou des projections qui mettront en lumière le travail des artistes de couleur jusqu'au jour où le genre, l'origine ethnique, l'orientation sexuelle et l'identité sexuelle de l'artiste ne seront plus sujets à discrimination ou/et à invisibilité. ¶

kimura byol-nathalie lemoine (나타리르무완 \* ナタリー・ルモワーズ) est un.e artiste conceptuel.le féministe en multimédia qui travaille sur les questions identitaires.

—nathalie.cho@gmail.com

## Chris Lee & Maiko Tanaka

*CRITICAL. MODEL. MINORITY.* First, some context: Gendai Gallery is currently a collective, artist-run entity whose mandate is to work with artists, curators, writers, and designers that engage the world through an East Asian diasporic lens. Since 2012, it has been a mobile operation after vacating its brick and mortar gallery space. This created a sense of an existential crisis.

In 2013, Gendai curated an itinerant program called *Model Minority*. Primarily comprised of workshops, discussions, and screenings of films such as Christine Choy's *Who Killed Vincent Chin?* (1987) and Grace Lee's *American Revolutionary: The Evolution of Grace Lee Boggs* (2013). *Model Minority* staged reflections on the fraught relationship between the existence of a minority arts organization and the funding lines of the settler state. Through research into the notion of the model minority—a subject constructed to reinforce racial hierarchies by holding up as the ideal one minority group, while trivializing the grievances and struggles of others—we asked what it means to be a component of Canadian (settler) diversity amidst the persistence of colonialism, while rediscovering “counter-models” and pursuing the articulation of more critical imaginaries.

The program was held with the intent of producing a publication that would document and propel this process and discourse. The resulting book, which includes essays and other forms of textual contributions, was a catalyst and site for the production of commissioned artworks by Will Kwan and Jacqueline Hoàng Nguyễn. The slow, extended pace given to this project allowed a dwelling in study, and a speculative investment in a way of being that suspends a reckoning with the demands of exhibition cycles (also, printing books can be

cheaper than paying rent). It was a way to creatively navigate the margins of underfunding with a sense of commitment *and* resentment. Together, these sentiments simultaneously characterize the pragmatism of the model minority and function as engines of critique and creation. Identification with the model minority provokes an unsettling, (self-)critical view on the role of diverse cultural production as an instrument of Canadian settler-state multiculturalism. ¶

Chris Lee is a graphic designer and educator based in Buffalo, NY, and Toronto, ON.  
—chrislee.uu@gmail.com

Maiko Tanaka is the Executive Director of Squeaky Wheel since 2016; she also serves on the programming committee of Gendai Gallery in Toronto.  
—maiko@squeaky.org



Photo courtesy of Steffanie Ling.

## Taklif: تکلیف

TAKLIF: تکلیف IS AN IMAGINARY SPACE and a travelling library for radical imagination dedicated to learning, unlearning, and relearning practices through art and dialogue; an artist-run initiative formed with the ambition to rigorously bridge our intellectual activities with our emotional embodied intuitions, within and beyond institutional settings.

Taklif: تکلیف enfolds connotations shared by diverse linguistic territories, including Arabic, Bengali, Farsi, Kazakh, Pashto, Turkish, Urdu, and Uzbek, among others.

Taklif: تکلیف is homework—processes of learning, unlearning, and relearning within an imaginary space, in which our attempts to escape finally cease through our fugitive practices of togetherness.

Taklif: تکلیف is invitation—the call to elude the logic of either/or in favour of the *neither/nor* of unbelonging.

Taklif: تکلیف is pain—the affective difference in our disoriented collective bodies. Disorientation as the distance from the orientaling tropes propagated towards us.

Taklif: تکلیف is responsibility, as we study institutional and organizational frameworks, rhetorics, and behaviours that perpetuate the marginalization and the subjugation of the marginalized.

Taklif: تکلیف is cost, the kind that escapes the market economy through vigilante modes of sharing and generosity, the cost that gifts are made of.

Taklif: تکلیف is fate, where the entangled possibilities cross each other, in resisting the promises of belonging we heard through our precarious passages of home-leaving.

Taklif: تکلیف believes our principles are only valid once we remember the unceded lands on which we dwell, think, read, write, and work. ¶

Co-founded in Montreal (December 2016) Taklif: تکلیف has produced and participated in numerous critical engagement initiatives, including *Common Aliens: Diaspora in Time* (Studio xx, 2016), *Disorienting Diaspora: Shorts by Brown Queer Artists from the Canadian Archive* (RIDM Festival, 2017), *Utopia as Method* (Regart, 2018), and *Ideas of Femininity* (FOFA Gallery, 2018).  
www.taklif.org  
—info@taklif.org



**Taklif: Ideas of Femininity, November 5–December 14, 2018, organized by FOFA Gallery, Concordia University (Montreal). Taklif: تکلیف poster series. Image courtesy of Taklif: تکلیف.**

## Sandeep Bhagwati

EUROLOGICAL ART MUSIC (EAM)\* has often seen itself as the endgame of all possible music traditions: all other musics are fondly perceived as being “on the way” towards its avant-garde position. However, in his book *Philosophy of Music* (1987), Indian singer-musicologist Ritwik Sanyal accorded EAM another role—as anti-music, a bitter drop in the ocean of universal indo-centric music. EAM musickers need to accept that theirs is just one tradition among many, that what they call “universality” and “contemporaneity” in EAM are, in fact, pre-emptive power grabs on the future of music. What they call “newness” and “genius” are ways of excluding community traditions through asymmetries of historicity and individuality. Being truly “contemporary,” however, would mean acknowledging different modes of meaning within diverse creative ecologies. Many musics made today are the result of a widely distributed, collective authoring process that may include trans-generational practices, improvising performers, discerning audiences, computer hardware and software, musical assistants, curators, and, of course, composers. Basing the curating of newly created music on the nineteenth-century model of the genius composer and their work is an increasingly limiting strategy.

This also applies to cultural policy concerns such as decolonization, gender equity, and music technology. Here, headcounts may be helpful to raise awareness, but they are not enough: focusing on composer-authors is already a eurological predilection. Not diversity of personnel, but a diversity of musical expressions, tools, techniques, languages, and traditions may bring new relevance to current creative music events.

In order to get there, I propose the following: 1) *Get rid of all ideological terms for music made today* (i.e., contemporary music, world music, new music, etc.): these terms are toxic. Find a term specific to your type of recently created sound events. 2) *Create multiple simultaneous levels of participation and presentation*. Participation does not have to mean dumbing down. Many

musical works comprise various levels of difficulty, and recent technology affords new, live interaction options. Create entry points for all audience members, including those who would like to just listen. 3) *Curate practices, not only works*: a sit-still-and-listen concert with masterworks is great but not the only social situation in which sonic events can be enjoyed as music. Other listening practices may not require the concept of “the work” at all. 4) *Abandon the radial view of the world, embrace rhizomatic provincialization*: Gerardo Mosquera once observed that the world consists of cultures that curate and those that are curated upon. Break this logic. Be a node in the rhizome of musical traditions. This means being a stop on a journey and not, like a centre, aspiring to be the logical end of all possible journeys. This means acknowledging and retransmitting the many influences and connections that determine one’s own agency, to forge strategic alliances with the nodes of other musical traditions, accepting their aesthetic regimes as equally pertinent to the future of music.

As its introductory gift, EAM might offer its most valuable insight: to think of music not as entertainment or as a commodity, but as fundamental research. Time and again, EAM has successfully negated the relevance of economic metrics for the cultural significance of its art. To know how to build viable shelters from the storm of monetization that devastates all cultural activity may yet, next to the many wonderful musical experiences EAM can give us, prove to be its second most valuable contribution to the musics of this world. ¶

*Sandeep Bhagwati* is an internationally active composer-conductor and curator of current music concerts and festivals, as well as professor and former Canada Research Chair for Inter-X Art at Concordia University Montréal.  
—sandeep.bhagwati@gmail.com

\* This is the more precise term for what many call Western New and/or Art Music, Contemporary Classical Music, or Avant-garde Music. It refers to all musical practices that trace their lineage to European Art Music traditions, their instruments and orchestras, their concert formats, and their focus on composed, written music—and that use them to make freshly conceived music today.