REPORTS FROM THE FIELD

Perspectives from curators from around the world, who are alumni of the Curatorial Intensive, ICI’s professional development program for emerging curators. The commissioned texts are reflections on the impact of the global pandemic on their lives, ways of working, their communities, and how they are adapting as a response.
A Field Note From Bangkok Under Lockdown

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Bottled Cold Brew by designer-artist Lita Chala-adisai in front of Blessing poster designed by herself. Image Credit: Pongsakorn
Everyone here has been very concerned about the coronavirus outbreak since late January when the first cases were detected in Thailand. But it really hit us at the beginning of March after the super-spread Muaythai boxing event at the Lumpini Stadium set off a chain of local cases. A few weeks later, the government declared a state of emergency, and by April the lockdown was implemented. Malls, cinemas, museums were closed, and all public gatherings restricted.

The Thai New Year holiday Songkran, usually taken very seriously by locals, was for the first time in history canceled to avoid social gatherings and stop people from returning to their hometowns. By then, we had been told repeatedly to “stay home, stop the virus, for the nation,” the slogan issued by the government’s COVID-19 Response Centre. The situation allowed nationalism to pride, or disguise itself as a solution. And in the mind of many, it has since been a fight of and for the “Nation.” May 4, the infographic released from the Centre announced

From the Tiger & Tomato kitchen: Hong Kong Beef with Tofu (beef belly braised in soy sauce & orange zest, with sesame oil & vinegar sauce), Atit Sornsongkram’s recipe; and Bitter Melon and Pork Rib Soup, Prae Pupityastaporn’s recipe; served with rice.
Empty Siam square, a usually very crowded shopping area
“Finally Thais have 0 new infections!” And the second line in the smaller typeface reads “But 18 immigrants are infected.”

Despite their hard-to-believe attitude, the lockdown did help. Fourteen days later the number of daily new infections went down to a single digit. But it also puts many out of their jobs. Thailand’s biggest site for job search has reported that there is a big reduction of job posts especially the ones with lower wages. It was estimated that seven million jobs have been lost since the outbreak, and it would reach eleven million in the worst-case scenario. And nobody is certain when or if the “normalcy” will return.
Seeing these signs no doubt puts people in the local art industry on edge. Not only that, galleries, art centers, museums, are still closed. In the Bangkok art scene, already small and tight-knitted as it is, the artist’s career and questions of survival have been raised long before the coronavirus crisis. Jobs for art workers have always been scarce: let alone secure, well-paid ones. The majority of us have had unpaid art jobs while working paying jobs outside the arts field.

During the lockdown, many Bangkokians staying inside, including myself, are relying so much on takeouts and food delivery. Sending food and masks to friends has also become a new trend representing a gesture of care. Last week I delivered mangoes to six artists. Surprisingly, several young artists are now picking up pots and pans and setting up new businesses either for serious or for fun making sausages, bread, meal plans; and they are acing it. It reminded me of collectivistic contemporary art communities and how many of them formed around sharing food and eating together.

Some examples: The N22 community, a lofty compound that housed seven art galleries and artist studios, including Gallery VER founded by Rirkrit Tiravanija, is known for its barbecue parties at art openings; Bangkok CityCity Gallery hosted many great events featuring wonderful menus such as Dusadee Huntrakul’s Oxtail Rice Noodle Soup with Grilled Chilli; or the after-show ritual that artists and curators run for a late round-table dinner at a Chinese place in Silom followed by karaoke. All of this is now clearly impossible.

On the structural level, the local community of contemporary art has long been dependent on the money from a limited group of patrons, collectors, very little corporate sponsorship — and very little from the government. This is poised to change as many of these donors themselves were heavily affected by the crisis. The stagnation is expected to deprive art initiatives of its major funding, which could make this very tight-knit community even tighter.

One of the first groups of curators and artists that came together to respond to the crisis was the Surviving & Fighting COVID-19 Art Alliance (SFAA). They are taking their concerns to the government directly, and after conducting a survey with artists via Facebook, SFAA handed the Ministry of Culture a request for financial aid and strategic measures in supporting people in the arts, with a list of artists who were critically affected. The Ministry assured that the enlisted artists will be considered for a rescue package of 5,000 Baht (about 160 USD) per month but has stopped short on confirming if all or how many individuals will receive help. SFAA continues to push more proposals and strategic projects to further aid the community and is hoping to be able to eventually form an art council, one which the scene has never had yet.

The longer physical distancing continues the more social interaction takes place online. One of the noticeable trends on Facebook here was the emergence of these “alma-mater marketplaces.” For example, an alumnus of Chulalongkorn University created a “Chula Marketplace” for other alumni to exchange and advertise their businesses so that they can help one another. In these groups, you can purchase all kinds of things ranging from fermented fish...
to a plot of land on some private island. These online groups don't exist merely for commercial purposes; they offer a sense of affiliation, at the moment when people want to feel that they 'belong' to a community, and this has been at the source of their popularity.

This applies to the art community, too. A group called “Thailand Art Ecosystem” was created by contemporary art and cultural workers with the intention to create a database of art professionals. It gained over 1,300 members overnight. But not long after, a few artists noticed that one of the group’s rules barred “political topics,” leading to some drama. A large number of contemporary artists who disagreed with the rule left the group which nevertheless continued to grow in number.

Artists and art workers may be underpaid and isolated, but they just won't cave in! It’s the spirit that reminds me very much of the old normal, pre-COVID-19.

A respected curator told me they think art for art’s sake won’t work anymore post-COVID-19. But where will art fit in society after the pandemic? Seeing those who suffered far worse than not being able to attend an art exhibition, I can not help but be reminded that art is a luxury, especially for this moment. What is more important now is survival (physical, mental, as well as economic). So, the least we can do is check in on our friends and colleagues to make sure they still feel they belong in the world at the time when “the art world” is temporarily suspended. For if they survive, we know they’ll find away.

A Field Note From Bangkok Under Lockdown was originally published on ICT’s website on June 22, 2020.
I had 20/20 vision of how I wanted my year to pan out. Every calendar was laid out: my work comes in perfectly color-coded boxes to remind our team, we ought to work most weekends from January to March, which is reasserted by a new cycle of programs to mark the beginning of the fiscal year from April 1 onwards. Most artists have been contracted. For those coming from abroad, flights and hotels have been booked with schedules finalized all the way until the first quarter of 2021. Even the surprise birthday cake for each of my team members has been noted in my calendar with a script running in my head how this could unfold.

I had saved and calculated all my annual leaves and overtime to fulfill the other side of my life. Personal activities that involve furnishing the flat, sorting out of the weekly menu, planning the holidays with my partner, family reunions to celebrate milestones such as 50th, 60th and 80th birthdays, taking advanced studies in performance curation, writing an essay for a book, investing on some curatorial research here and there, maybe even enrolling in a special culinary course while finding suitable well-being classes like pilates or yoga. I had it all planned for 2020. I can even say forward-looking until 2021 to 2022.

Like my work calendar at the Gallery, my life goes into this planned cycle accommodating little surprises along the way.

Everything was working out fine until… well, the news about coronavirus slowly concealed itself and made its presence felt in the city where I live in, Singapore. As this spiked ridden feisty disrupting menace crown virus meanders freely in the air, hops on to someone’s system, physically, psychologically, and emotionally, it enters our workplace and homes whether we like it or not. If it’s not in your body, it pervades your mind through the news, social media, or even your immediate surroundings. Through the lens of those closest to me who had close encounters with the uninvited guest, I began to feel the intensity of its invasiveness.

As I continued to go about my work routine in February, news and government announcements gradually shifted its DORSON level (Disease Outbreak Response System Condition) from the color yellow to orange. At this point, most things remained business as usual. Although partially disturbed by the lurking idea that this virus could eventually rule over our lives, take over my body, my loved ones, my friends across the globe or my colleagues, by unknowingly acquiring it from a public event, from meeting friends at dinner, grocery shopping or en route to work, I found refuge and comfort from following Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong’s Facebook and Instagram accounts. His calm face and manner gave me and still gives me an assurance that all is fine, and it will be fine. I am safe. We are safe at home. Lucky to be in Singapore. To my colleague’s amusement, one day I began reciting “we have to be resilient.”

On the first weekend of DORSON Orange, our team for artistic programs began the temperature-taking and travel declaration exercise at the entrance of the Gallery. As fewer people than usual entered the door and attended our special offering on Somatic Movement workshop-tour led by Singaporean dancer/life coach, Vincent Yong, a combined feeling of nostalgia and pride entered me. This
one-and-a-half-hour session—which calls our participants (visitors) to be in contact with oneself and their bodies and to reflect on the connection between their body and the artwork, while encouraging ways of contact with others—maintained its form, though with a slightly different approach to the notion of touch and connection.

The week that followed proved to be more promising. As layers of guidelines were progressively introduced and implemented, I noticed that people were turning up as per usual to one of our special in-Gallery performances. Aply titled in this new world, a devised theatre piece by Cake Theatre, directed by Natalie Hennedige, drawn from selected poems written by Madeleine Lee inspired by works from our national collection, attracted an impressively sizable crowd. They seemed to already be hungry for art, only in the second week of curling up under the darker shade of sunset. What privilege it is to serve our audience, our public, our fellow human beings through the gift of art. Note that the two programs mentioned above were realized before enhanced safe distancing measures were implemented.

The presence of our audiences gave me some confidence to assure artist Maria Hassabi on the third week of February that the plans for the Southeast Asian premiere of her work for TOGETHER for Performing Spaces 2020 can still be realized. The virus, which was initially known to be present in this part of the world, took a speedy route to the US
and Europe. In less than a week, both of us had to acknowledge that we had to adjust to the unpleasant realities presented by COVID-19. Alas, after more than a year of discussion and preparation, our team momentarily accepted to move the marquee that bears a delicate image of Maria’s show to our basement.

This gesture felt akin to bringing the curtain down to close the theatre without even having the chance to raise it and share the experience with our audience. Through performance, which has been key to the Gallery’s artistic and exhibition-related programs, we have continuously introduced original artistic content to our audiences, offering multiple ways of seeing, experiencing, and perceiving our exhibitions. The range of presentations varies from historical re-stagings, performance-based responses, and participatory works, which our team painstakingly co-develops with artists in the fields of dance, theatre, music, literature, fashion, and new media.

These interventions—which are aimed at establishing human connections from the simplest form of encouraging eye contact to enable people to be together in one space—have become integral to the fabric of our storytelling. They take place in the intimacy of our galleries to unexpected encounters within the public circulation spaces.

Even though these small initiatives, intimate performances, I think we are able to offer a glimmer of hope and fulfill our role of humanizing even now during the less humane presence of this uninvited guest, COVID-19.

Amidst all these, I could not be prouder of my younger colleagues who appear to be unfazed by the situation and have continued to run our programs as planned. Somehow, the ethos of our work felt more potent than ever: “humanizing” the artworks and our exhibitions. There is a reason we are here. There is a reason we do our jobs. There is a reason we are needed in the museum. There is a reason the museum and art exist, so we stand tall and brave to remain open.

While continuously doing the work and repeatedly washing my hands at any given chance, stringent measures were being implemented day by day, week by week, I began actively reaching out to friends in Manila, Berlin, New York, Amsterdam, London, Paris, Vienna, Athens, Bergamo, Sydney, Bucharest, Edinburgh, Bangkok and so on. It is like I’ve missed each one of them so much in this lifetime. Yet, maintaining a sense of gratitude for having taken the time for a quick ‘catch-up’ last time we met in person. My friends and I began calling each other as opposed to just texting. In the third or fourth week of February, only a handful of my friends understood the fear I had of COVID-19 and its impact on our lives, our relationships, especially that we are physical worlds apart. Like many people nowadays, I have browsed through many photographs pre-social media era, iCloud library, past, and unrealized art projects. I began an exercise of remotely organizing the archive of curatorial projects and articles together with one of my best friends in New York, just so we could intentionally say hi to one another before I go to bed in Singapore and as he wakes up in the East Village.

Having a sense of gratitude for life’s kindness and giving me the privilege of togetherness even with loved ones and friends from a close distance, working from home, having a job, having shelter
above my head, enough food to eat, I attempt to fulfill some good deeds. They could be as minute as finishing the food on my plate, watering my plants, and being kind to myself so I could be kinder to others, being fully present at work (virtually) appear on top of my accomplishment list. I feel like a child again. I could hear the voices of my late grandparents who used to remind me to be thankful for the food and everything else that I have. In their moments of resignation dealing with a mischievous child, they would utter; she'd never know what it's like to live through war. Gratitude is holding me up.

As the guidelines matured between March and April, from checking travelers from specific countries or regions to banning entry to Singapore; from the enforcement of social to safe distancing measures; from the deferment of gatherings of more than a thousand people to those of more than a hundred and eventually just 10; from the implementation of split team schedules at the office to full work from home arrangements; from wear mask only when sick, to wear a mask when outside; to the observance of the circuit breaker measures and the closure of non-essential services from April 7.

I think I might have been working from home for over a month now. I am beginning to miss my colleagues and going to work. I look forward to Tuesdays where I get camera time with my team. Every day, I wake up like I am physically going to work. I turn on my company computer shortly before 9 a.m. attend meetings online, review the online plans, adjust the plans, attend meetings online again, improve the plans, write emails, think, pause, repeat. End the day by 7 or 8 p.m. by shutting the computer down to focus on my home chores. Hey, this could go on for a while but I'll continue to do what I'm called to do in my little way.

As a propagator and champion of the unknown, untested, and live interventions with the hope of connecting people, this COVID-19 has unkindly stretched and unpacked what the power of the invisible means. Just the same, I remain a firm believer that such power resides in each one of us. Since life has led me to this world of art, working with artists, a group of young people in my team, and reaching out to people, I will continue to do so.

During this pregnant pause that we all share, where the weight seems heavier than carrying a baby inside the ballooning womb deters us from running on our usual phase with that feeling of the stubborn yet to be born child kicking inside the belly, I hope each one of us would find the balance in reflecting how rich our lives are because we live not only for ourselves but most importantly for many others.

The Pregnant Pause: A Countdown on Living with the Invisible was originally published on ICI's website on May 18, 2020.
Dear Prof. Choy,

I’ve been thinking a lot about Queens. Primarily the neighborhoods of Elmhurst, Jackson Heights, and Corona, which has emerged tragically as the epicenter of a coronavirus outbreak in New York. Corona (and later Woodside) was my home from 2013-17. While my time there was brief, the largely migrant, working-class, multilingual, intergenerational community/ies along Roosevelt Ave and its ethos had a profound impact on my work as an educator and curator. In central Queens, I strengthened my foundation as a cultural worker and community organizer. At Diversity Plaza, I invited authors Gina Apostol, Mia Alvar, Hossannah Asuncion, and Queens writers Bino Realuyo, Paolo Javier, and Ninotchka Rosca to read their work. As Gina reminds me, it was the first time she’s shared her work in front of a busy beauty salon. This gathering led to the Pilipinx American Library, an itinerant collection of printed matter and programming platform dedicated exclusively to Filipinx perspectives.

I am thinking about care and the brown body. In particular, I am thinking about the Filipinx body, those of Filipinx American nurses (and their families) in Elmhurst and in hospital wards and care centers the world over. When I first moved to Queens, I used to laugh remembering that common refrain among us Filipinx in America: where there are hospitals there are surely Filipinx around. During this global pandemic this refrain stings: knowing full well that Filipinx bodies carry the brunt of care and labor at the risk of their own lives. The stories are heartbreaking.

“Filipino American medical workers have suffered some of the most staggering losses in the coronavirus pandemic. In the New York-New Jersey region alone, ProPublica learned of at least 30 deaths of Filipino health care workers since the end of March and many more deaths in those peoples’ extended families. The virus has struck hardest where a huge concentration of the community lives and works. They are at “the epicenter of the epicenter,” said Bernadette Ellorin, a community organizer.” ProPublica

I am reminded of your critical work on Empire of Care: Nursing and Migration in Filipino American History, making visible the complex account of Filipino nurses in America and the forever linking of two countries: the Philippines and the United States.

My own family’s American crossing is intrinsically connected to this history. In 1975, my aunt Consejo, my mother’s sister, flew on a one-way flight to New Jersey, where she was to work as a nurse. At 25, she traveled alongside many other young highly trained Filipina nurses, whose sought-after labor was necessary to fulfill critical shortages in U.S. hospitals. (Countering commonly peddled narratives of immigrants taking away American jobs.) In large part owing to my aunt’s labor, my mother’s sprawling family would slowly emigrate to the United States, including my own uprooting to San Francisco in 1998 at 13. I could see that she was happy when we finally arrived. My ma and pa and I decided to stay with her in Los Angeles for some time before life in the United States would officially take hold of us. She took us on the requisite “newcomers” tour: Disneyland, Universal Studios, plus a quick detour to Las Vegas. One day she took us to Hollywood Presbyterian, the hospital where she worked at the time. She was proud to be a nurse. She took pride in
how her profession could make life better for her family. In 2005, my aunt would die of colon cancer in the Philippines.

Just as we can’t tell the history of agriculture and the labor movement of the west coast without the story of Filipino farmworkers, we cannot tell the history of healthcare in the United States without the story of Filipina women. More fully, as the late historian, Dr. Dawn Buholano-Mabalon reminds us all: “You can’t tell the story of labor, migration, and empire [in America] without the story of Filipino Americans.” As I write this letter sheltered-in-place here in San Francisco, I can’t help but ask how I can be of service to this place that has given so much to me. How can I support the nurses, health care providers, and essential workers in the front lines? Who cares for the caregivers?

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Dear PJ,

It’s lovely to hear from you. I enjoyed reading about your personal connections to Filipino nurse migration. I love that photograph of your aunt!

I’ve been teaching Filipino American History at UC Berkeley for over 15 years, and the vast majority, if not all, of my
students with Filipino heritage, has an intimate connection to nursing. At least one of their relative’s works or has worked as a nurse in the United States.

When I read about the Filipino nurses in the U.S. who have died as a result of their work on the COVID-19 frontlines, I am also filled with grief and heartbreak. It is so important to take time to grieve, to confront the enormity of this loss.

The other day I sat by the front windows of my home with my journal and pen in hand. And I started to write the names of some of the Filipino nurses in the U.S. who have died. Araceli Buendia Ilagan. Noel Sinkiat. Rosary Celaya Castro-Olega. Divina “Debbie” Accad. The list continues to grow. I wrote their names in cursive and, again, in block letters. I want to commit these names to memory.

I think about their stories. How some of them were so close to retirement. How others emerged from their retirement in order to serve as nurses during this pandemic. How one nurse, Celia Marcos, raced to treat a “code blue” patient wearing only a thin surgical mask, and then died fourteen days later.

I’m moved to read that you have found my book Empire of Care important for the challenging time that we are living in. Learning the history of Filipino nurse migration to the U.S. is relevant now more than ever. This history illuminates that their presence in the U.S. is not new. Their mass migrations to the U.S., especially during times of crises, is six decades old.

Furthermore, to understand why so many Filipino nurses specifically are here, we must go back in time further to when the Philippines was an official U.S. colony. That is when Americanized education, including nursing education...
modeled after U.S. professional nursing, created the prerequisite training for Filipino nurses and other laborers to work in the U.S. It also fueled Filipino dreams and desires to travel overseas and especially to the United States.

The sizable presence of Filipino nurses in the U.S. and their significant contributions to American health care delivery are the consequences of this long and unequal history.

I also wish to emphasize that this is a history created by the Filipino nurse migrants themselves as well as broader historical forces. I think about all that they have accomplished, beginning with their rigorous training. One of the reasons why I am ambivalent when I hear people say that Filipinos make great nurses because they are so caring is because it erases the hard work of their nursing training and on-the-job experience.

I recall in my oral interviews with Filipino nurses how they had also experienced intense homesickness, unequal work assignments, formidable licensure requirements, and racial and ethnic scapegoating. How they confronted these struggles with bravery and the will to organize so that things would be better for future generations of Filipino nurses has made a profound impression on me. Even in the depths of my grief, their history inspires me.

Being the dynamic and kind educator, curator, and organizer that you are, you are well-positioned to support and care for Filipino American nurses and other health workers on the frontlines. I hope that you participate in documenting their lives as well as their livelihoods through art; that you showcase their stories through curation and collaboration; that you share their contributions with the local and global communities in which we live and serve. I look forward to learning about your future projects.

Wishing you health and safety,
Cathy

Epicenter of the Epicenter was originally published on ICI’s website on July 21, 2020.
In Spanish, curar ‘to cure’ means both to heal and to curate. With the current conditions in the midst of the pandemic, the polysemic characteristic of this word seems more relevant than ever. While we readapt to the new realities of an emerging society, I want to share some of my thoughts about exhibitions as a measure of psychosocial care; a methodology that might help us guide our work in the current context and to envision a future perspective of curatorial practices.

We are living through atypical times where uncertainty opens up the possibility of envisioning a shift of paradigm in art, culture, and museums. However, such a short time has passed since it all began, that we have not been able to identify the new order and the demands that will fall upon curators, educators, and other cultural workers. Nevertheless, it is important to prepare ourselves by proposing alternative ways, paths, or places to convene with others, and instill trust towards each others’ bodies, even those we share similarities with, as well as to persist in the inclusion and accessibility of otherness in cultural institutions.

While we are in this mandatory break, we should evaluate the social role of cultural institutions, identify what has been done by them (or us) until now, and from there prioritize our efforts to carry out pertinent, useful, reparative, and healing curatorial statements. Curatorship at the service of vulnerable people and communities is necessary now more than ever before to change the cycle of historical subordinations which have become more evident during the pandemic.

Currently, a good number of texts and papers about museums in times of...
COVID-19 are circulating. They address issues related to sustainability, how to slow down, rethink presentiality and prosociality, the end of the object’s fetishism, the urgency to turn to virtuality, and even about the precautions that will have to be taken to reopen the museums. But few have questioned the responsibility museums and curators have in perpetuating (or not) discriminatory discourses and the status quo of a selfish, individualistic, and deeply unequal model. Cultural institutions are not exempt from participating in discussions about the co-responsibility of the negative impacts of the pandemic and, based on a critical point of view, should commit to becoming agents for change.

We should not allow “health and sanitation” to be established as a category for exclusion in our daily lives and, in extension, in museums, we must certainly avoid for them to become more aseptic (literally and metaphorically) than they already were before the lockdown. We should make
the best out of this situation, use it to innovate and create museological processes that might help to heal the psychological effects caused by COVID-19. But let’s not limit this possibility to the subject matter of the pandemic, and broaden it out to remedy and repair collective suffering and traumas, caused by discrimination and segregation due to sex, gender, age, race, social class, country of origin, religion, physical or emotional disability, to name a few. If we can demonstrate the effectiveness of the museum and exhibitions in the treatment of collective trauma, we will be relevant and necessary for society in post-pandemic times.

To do so, first, we have to be aware of the healing potential that museums have when they carry out processes based on a social sense and an ethical commitment. We should take the time to think over the implications of each curatorial decision since displaying the past without asking what memories are being denied or suppressed is negligence, an unacceptable waste in a time of economic austerity and ethical failure.

It is therefore vital to recognize the cultural sector as a professional field under the care of the collective and the social weave. We must understand that the exercise of curatorship consists of recomposing, mending, healing, taking care of emotions and affections; understanding responsibility in the management of memory, and oral history is our most valuable heritage. Seeing that the museum is what
makes meetings possible, in a society of uncertainty and over-information, everything that unites us must be empowered and communicated. We must also be aware of the multiple and diverse challenges that the current situation demands of the cultural sector, moving away from the logic of the market and approaching the socio-psychological needs of people. As healers, we must accept that our true responsibility focuses on the ability to put symbolism at the service of the common and the collaborative. It is important that we consider museums and cultural institutions as receptive spaces that link curatorial work to the concept of communication as a social activity. This helps to build relationships of trust and collaboration, to foster conversations that allow us to commemorate together, and to reflect on the past.

Some of us are already undertaking museological processes focused on topics related to the current pandemic. It is up to us that these exhibitions do not replicate what is often hastily constructed, with official statements, conclusive or heroic narratives. The ethical duty is to remember that we are working with the pain of those who could not say goodbye to their loved ones, with the trauma of those who lost everything and to become aware of our own emotions. In my opinion, activists should be leading the conversation on this topic, giving voice to people and communities that have been most dramatically affected by COVID-19, denouncing and making visible what is
currently buried in the emergency and in the urgency of saving both lives and the economic system.

I would like to conclude with some ideas to keep in mind when we embark in curatorial activism projects in the future:

* Delimit a territorial and populational approach to address the issue.
* Research a list of actors and invite them to participate.
* Create public and accessible spaces for participation.
* Once the community has gathered, collectively define the purpose of the exhibition or museology process.
* Be clear about the intention of the exhibition or the museology process.

* Be informed as to why these people are interested in contributing to the exhibition. Many of them require a place to process their mourning and to participate is, for them, cathartic and liberating.
* Invite and involve colleagues from all areas of the cultural institution in the process: participation starts at home.
* Be honest, build trust, and create networks of affection among the communities and hereafter, co-curators.
* Be aware that in the course of the collaborative process and exhibition, new needs and demands may arise for the communities and co-curator.
* Give up power and control, lose the fear of criticism, leave your ego, and the urge for authorship behind.
* Do not let any institutional interest prevail over the interests and needs of the people who are part of the exhibition process.

Be aware that:

* The exhibition is a process.
* The exhibition is a means, not an end.
* The exhibition is not the most important thing.
* The complaints that the exhibition does not make, the silences, include and integrate participation devices for the memories that arise.
* Curatorship is a political action.
* Curatorship must be a social practice.
* The exhibition is made by someone, made for someone, and worked among communities.
* Nothing about us without us.

These are lessons to be learned about the museological processes in parallel to other social emergencies living in Latin America, such as war, xenophobia, and LGBTIphobia, threats that worsen with COVID-19, and I hope these are taken as an invitation to continue fighting for rights as they are not granted and must be taken. Now, it is time to embrace our diversity and support each other in our work.

Curatorship to Cure Inequality was originally published on ICI’s website on July 7, 2020.
With the MuseoQ, we commemorate the International LGBTIQ+ Pride day from home. My rights are not quarantined.
The day that it hit me was like any other, whilst on the train home from work. I had been willfully compartmentalising prior to this, blocking out the news, being a resilient rock to those around me whilst also trying to prioritise my own mental well-being. Through this striving to maintain some kind of productive momentum fueled by a cautiously optimistic energy, which I knew was insensitive to the moment but ultimately necessary in order to reach urgent deadlines that were still due despite the pandemic.

During the ride home though, I gave myself permission to slip out of my usual, hard-ass, disciplined self. Allowing myself a small moment to break away, I slowed the hyper-productivity stream of consciousness as I leaned back into my blue carriage seat. I closed my eyes, yawned deeply, and then clicked my fingers in front of my mouth (a habit I learnt from my ex as a method to awake positive energy) as I casually gazed around at those in the carriage near me. Despite the sparse carriage - with people working from home - there was still ample conversation to overhear.

In front of me, I witnessed a young woman speaking to her mother over the phone; she was hunched over, holding her head, expressing her disbelief at the mass lay-offs that had occurred at her corporate job, and venting about mis-management and internal company politics. Nearby was a group of three food-delivery-app delivery drivers; they were taking their yellow bikes across town, moving closer to a restaurant strip for the hope of finding a higher volume of work. Behind me was a rowdy group of teenagers who seemed to be making some surprisingly compelling arguments for the current state of the world, despite their inebriated state.

This moment of personal reflection was formed in context of proximity to, and an awareness of a sense of collective empathy with other travellers, a moment manifested through the temporal community of the train. A feeling that us curators would always hope to conjure up with our audiences when diligently conceptualising exhibitions, projects, or texts. What I’ve outlined above is a transition from one psychological state to another. The enabling moment for this being the yawn; and the willingness to step away from a standard flow of consciousness into a temporary community. After yawning the real depth of the situation hit me, because I could see it on other people’s faces, hear it in their voices, see it in their changed stature. I had always known it was there, but as a sensitive person, I wanted to protect myself from the reality. However, rather than leading me to despair, surprisingly
there was something unusually generative about working through this in a public space surrounded by company.

A moment of transience bringing us together. I would like to imagine or propose an analogy for these moments of psychological transitions - from one state to another - a yawn as a vessel. What is the purpose of yawning? A yawn is a transition, a preparatory state, preparing us, alerting us, waking us up to look at our present situation with renewed rigor.

“Yawning as a primal form of sociality, yawning may be, at its root, a mechanism of social signalling. When we yawn, we are communicating with one another. We are sending an external sign of something internal, be it our boredom or our anxiety, our fatigue, or our hunger—all moments when we may need a helping hand. In fact, yawning may be the opposite of what we generally think. It’s less likely a signal that you’re tired than a signal that it’s time for everyone around you to act.” Can we imagine our current COVID state as a yawn, preparing us for renewed energy needed to face our collective future with optimism, grace, and integrity?

How do we frame modes of production during collective grief?

I understand that this has been an internationally reaching phenomenon

![Image: Tess Maunder, Melbourne, Australia](image-url)
$190B ECONOMIC INJECTION
WHAT YOU AND YOUR BUSINESS WILL GET
FULL DETAILS STATES CLOSE BORDERS

Image: Tess Mauder, Melbourne, Australia
but I can only speak to what I know. What that means for me is to speak from my geo-political position in Melbourne, Australia. In line with this, I will speak to the collective anxiety, grief, and trauma that this pandemic has brought upon us here. Initially, the indicators of the shift were in the government warnings, the unveiling of government policy, daily press conferences, public health announcements in public space. Then came the loss of consumer confidence; with this the cancelling or postponing of large scale events, the firing of precarious workers, displacement of international students. All of this was of course undertaken in context of an industry dependent on such structures that have proven their precarity in the wake of the pandemic.

Initially, there was a false sense of security in Melbourne, that although these temporary measures were being taken, that although life was challenging with social distancing and the fear of contagion, all of this was only temporary and a sense of normality would return soon. However, now writing from the ‘second lockdown’ in the state of Victoria - it’s harder to imagine that. Our second wave has been harder for the public to process. Following the false sense of security, in thinking that we had made it through, there has certainly been a greater sense of community fear, despair, and anxiety. How has this impacted the arts and creative production? I can only again speak to what I am seeing right now; which is being written during the second week of a six-week stage three-state-wide lockdown. How did we get here?

We imagine our reality in context of our contemporary paradigm
1989 is the year that ultimately re-defined the contemporary art industry with a definitive shift towards the warm embrace of globalisation. Think about it - biennales, art fairs, blue-chip global gallery conglomerates, international art residencies, ambitiously scaled collections, travelling consultants, Internet Art (or IDK Post-Internet Art?), Zoom meetings, discourse-led mobility, international curatorial training courses. Each of these signifiers can be inherently linked to the rise of globalization and its subsequent impact on the industry that we all work within and commit our lives to (let’s be real!).

The well traversed trio – 1. the rise in internationally driven markets, 2. the expansion of the middle class, and 3. increased international mobility. Each of these three points has dramatically shifted the way we discuss, consume and formulate our connection to contemporary art. Contemporary art is the love-child of capitalist acceleration, but the art-world’s critical mistake is expecting this paradigm to stay consistent and fixed, in a volatile world. With every rise, there is a fall, and perhaps that is what we are collectively facing right now is the dipping of global capitalism.

Shifting our gaze to the present, we live right now in the wake of a global industry that has faced a virus providing the impetus for morphing and shifting, which has completely shattered our international way of life. How is the art world responding, what does the world today offer the contemporary art world or vice versa? We need a critical dialogue that is informed, intuitive, and reflective.

We need to re-frame our collective reality with growth, renewal and hope in mind.
Capitalism \[\rightarrow\] financially driven

individualism \[\rightarrow\] exhaustion

illness
Imagining this global moment as a yawn, and opportunity to take a step back from our reality momentarily and to see it renewed. I can only speak to my own personal experience; and a yawn was really needed. The art world has been riding a hamster wheel of production for production’s sake – can we all acknowledge the sheer exhaustion of the cyclical nature of the contemporary art industry – and the problematic vectors of labor associated with this. I have realized that I can soften my approach to art and life. Not every intellectual moment happens during a conference. There are moments of encounter in everyday life that inform all of us, to be better people, to continue to inquire, continue to challenge ourselves, continue to take responsibility and to imagine and re-imagine a way of life that is transgressive.

So, this weird time that we are faced with – why not use it to our advantage? Do we really have to produce so much? Can we not use this crazy situation as an opportunity to actually radically re-define what is important to us and why? Let’s take a radical step back and ask ourselves, why are we here? What do we want to do? What do we have to offer now? Who do we want to work with now and why? This is an urgent consideration for all of us.

What we have actually seen in this industry during this time has been incredible insecurity in acknowledging our value in broader society. It’s an existential gripe. In the rush and silent pressure to make everything digital, have we forgotten the point of why we are all actually here? I mean what motivates you to work in this industry? I would expect that most of us are not here due to a purely financial impetus.

The most beautiful moments of my career are serendipitous moments exchanged between friends, moments of utter unexpected joy, of actual growth and development, a sharing of something intimate and vulnerable.

My proposal is that we consider this period of disruption as a shift in consciousness, and we lean into this challenging and uncomfortable feeling and use it to our collective benefit for growth.

The personal and professional have so much crossover in the art world, let us embrace this reality in a post-COVID context, and enable as many opportunities as possible for radical interpersonal tenderness and vulnerability. Let’s use this yawn to regenerate, wake us up, and encourage interpersonal growth, support, and development. Our culture, intelligence, and mental health urgency depends on it.

A Yawn and Three Clicks was originally published on ICI’s website on August 3, 2020.
have been curating public programs (talks, lectures, etc.) running the art school as well as the school’s learning program at the National Gallery of Zimbabwe for the past two and a half years. I started off the year feeling especially motivated. I finished an inspiring curatorial residency at the Bag Factory Artists’ Studios in Johannesburg at the end of 2019 and was getting ready to move to Makhanda for my Master’s in Art History at Rhodes University. News of COVID-19 and the impact it might have on my personal life and work were the last things on my mind.

To wind up my time at the National Gallery of Zimbabwe, I had lined up quite a number of interesting, in my opinion, talks, readings, performances, and screenings. When the National Gallery closed its doors to the public on the 13th of March it had been because there had been a warning aimed at large gatherings and the government had given us the directive to close. Quite naturally the closing meant initially an absence of gallery programming. School group tours booked months in advance with painstaking work put in and all programming including exhibitions that were set to open had to be canceled. Suddenly instead of spending the day welcoming groups for tours, and workshops; and planning events we were left with a lot of unimplemented programs. That tanked the morale of the department. Especially when I had experienced a different kind of self-isolation during my stay in Johannesburg last year and I was not ready for another one so soon. We have always relied on delivering our programs to physical audiences and had only recently started uploading some talks online but not really keeping track of the impact of these uploads.
We were eventually asked to stop coming into work when we had the first COVI-19 death in the country. Zimbabwe went into total lockdown on the 30th of March. I struggled quite a lot to adjust to our new reality and to stay inside all the time coping with (mis)information overload. I found it increasingly difficult to get any work done as I soon had to start working on my Master’s attending seminars on Zoom. The constant messaging of social distancing increased my anxiety and fear. Twitter and WhatsApp became the sites of all my fears with a deluge of information that was hard to process and make sense of and two weeks into the lockdown I had to take a mental health week to regroup and prioritize my psychological wellbeing. I started a conversation with an artist Gladys Kalichini which became an interview.

The month-long emails, calls, and WhatsApp messages on practice and ideology became a form of self-care in the face of real valid fears. Zoe Samudzi, on one of her Instagram stories, pointed to an app for yoga, Down Dog, which could help with yoga practice from home as I could not have my normal class. This meant my children could also participate and would be out of my and my sister’s hair for part of the day.

I have had to think of finding new ways of engaging and adjusting to this new normal. Because museums are not considered essential services in emergency situations we could not come into work. Mental health, wellbeing, and social change through work during these very stressful times have been at the forefront of the engagement with the public. Curating in fragile democracies where information is
mostly disseminated by rumors, and half-truths, without much ICT infrastructure for the greater part of the population is difficult enough without having to deal with a global pandemic as well.

Working for a big institution that is not ready for remote engagement has also been hard; not everyone in the team has home internet access and phone data has become prohibitively expensive. Other smaller outfits who have room to maneuver have been using Facebook Live to stay engaged for example Enthuse Afrika has been having ‘Live from Home’ sessions from concerts to discussions on making businesses stay afloat during uncertain times. Newspapers have created digital editions that are small enough to be shared on WhatsApp for a weekly fee that is even more affordable than the print edition.

WhatsApp the inexpensive alternative was, to begin with, and especially distressing platform for me because of the constant reminders that no one is taking the virus seriously. But it also became a digital site for the museum that I missed. I have found a supportive community in the Arts of Africa and the Global South’s research group at Rhodes University. Fellows from the British Museum International Training program have been sharing resources on how to cope and how to effectively work cutting out all the noise. A friend Luciara Ribeiro, the Assistant curator at the Tomie Ohtake Institute in Brazil, who is working to reorganize the activities of the institute has asked me to participate in their #togetheraway initiative which is quite informal but also quite serious considering the subject of coping with lack of physical community in the midst of a global pandemic that requires social distancing. This has kept me busy and made me think of new ways of being together even though we are now a little bit further away.

I have found communities of cultural practitioners and educators who are quite set on encouraging each other to keep working and find comfort in art. They have been sharing images of artworks that they are working on, as well as calls for participation and calls for support during the lockdown. I have found temporary spaces and temporary communities where even though nature is unpredictable and variable, and the world has been uncertain, art has brought us together even while we have to be apart.

The Zimbabwean government has not been forthcoming in the support of artists during this period that they are not making money. The Zimbabwean Government and the National Arts Council have asked artists to submit names for welfare support. Both of them are yet to do anything in this regard. Granted Zimbabwe has been in economic freefall for a number of years and the health care system is in a dire state, the private sector is focusing on ensuring the nation stays healthy and cultural practitioners are the least of their worries. The information blackout, as well as movement restrictions, make it impossible to correctly identify how this has affected the general populace. It is important to think of how to navigate this space where artists and cultural practitioners continue to work and have an infrastructure that supports their welfare.

It’s not possible to define what the world of cultural work will look like post-pandemic but the world of work and engagement will change. It might
be difficult to envision the world we know is possible on the other side of the pandemic but if artworks from centuries past that we still admire are any indication, art is a testament to our resilience and cultural organizations should explore how to turn real estate into ‘unreal’ estate – remote access.

I am still exploring how this pandemic impacts my work, sanity, and family life. This has been a meaningful time for me to affect the alterations that I need to make to how I work and deal with end-of-the-world-as-we-know-it situations.

_Cultural Practice in the Time of Fear and Half-truths_ was originally published on ICI’s website on June 22, 2020.
The World, the Flesh, and the Devil: A Lenten Meditation on COVID-19 in New Orleans

LYDIA Y. NICHOLS
Twenty-seconds isn’t enough to wash our hands of some things.

On Friday, March 13th, after Louisiana Governor John Bel Edwards announced state-wide school closures (then just a month long, now two) in response to the first diagnosis of a local COVID-19 case, I combed the aisles of a store owned by Jeff Bezos, the wealthiest person in the world, wondering why the hell is anybody here right now?

The glove-handed store workers were there, restocking shelves, butchering meat, serving food, ringing up baskets, dependent on an hourly wage to care for themselves and their families.
If the workers don’t clock in, they don’t have food if or when stock runs dry from the pandemic’s impact on trade or if the government issues a mandate to close stores, as the chainmail I received that claims to have originated with a neighbor of a cousin of a friend of an upper level military person says will happen “in the next 48 to 72 hours.”

And I was there, creating the demand that justifies the “supply” of labor.

The vast majority of us, dependent on grocery stores for access to food and potable water, expect stores to remain open and even hope that they will, despite the fact that in just three weeks New Orleans has become a hotbed for the virus, with twice the death rate as New York City.

We don’t yet know if, when, or for how long stores might close or go barren, but in the event that they do, we’ve stocked up on out-of-season food items transported here from around the world and tap water branded by Coca-Cola and Nestle, donning masks to replenish as necessary.

Meanwhile, the wealthiest person in the world is being made more wealthy and more secure through the insecurity of his employees and customers in the face of a global public health crisis.

What is the outcome for people, institutions, industries, and systems that hoard power by hegemonizing dependence on them - to the point that, only two or three generations from their inception, our lives without them? Louisiana history has seemingly been an experiment in answering that question.

As with the rest of the world shaped by European imperialism, Louisiana was established on the foundational value for permanent power - originally that of European monarchies and now of the post-colonial nation-state.

From the state’s economic dependence on the theft of land and slavery to the petrochemical and tourism industries, the desire for permanent power has undermined ecological sustainability and, therein, our ability to survive.

When COVID-19 reached national concern, public health experts encouraged us to sing “Happy Birthday” while washing our hands, to make sure we were washing them long enough.

But no matter how many happy birthdays we sing, some things we can’t wash our hands of.

Every time my toddler son sings happy birthday while washing his hands, I think about the apocalypse.

I grew up in a doomsday religion in which celebrating birthdays is considered devil worship that exponentially increases the likelihood of one being destroyed in the Apocalypse.

Though I left my parents’ religion nine years ago, I did take from it faith that there is a way of thinking and being that will make the world a better place to live for all its inhabitants, that the apocalypse doesn’t have to be a frightful end.

The apocalypse is simply a revelation, a confirmation of things we already knew - that this system is insufficient for all of us; it offers us the choice to assess the way we live and accept that changes must be made and that we do indeed have the resources necessary to make them.

Louisianians are currently focused on “flattening the curve” of COVID-19 - ‘using our head to stop the spread’ as New Orleans Mayor LaToya Cantrell admonished. In charging everyone with
that responsibility, we’ve acknowledged the importance of our individual choices to the health of the world - a reality often undermined by the free market values.

Our individual choices will be just as important to the health of the world whenever we get to the here-on-out.

Will the choices we make then be based on the hope that a pandemic doesn’t happen again or the reality that it can and that no one should be in the desperate positions that some of us already are and many more of us very likely will be as the days wear on?

In the world in which we live, it is considered normal for us to demand that others put themselves at risk in service to our chosen dependencies, for people to be so financially insecure that they have to gamble their life chances for the possibility of survival. Another path is being cleared.

As I ration water, oatmeal, honey, and cranberries for my toddler’s breakfast, it’s hard to believe that Mardi Gras, the finale to a season of excess, was just a few Tuesdays ago.

The discovery of COVID-19’s presence in Louisiana coincided with the Lenten season, the 40-day fast that follows Carnival, a meditation on purpose and our commitment to a path that will make life better for all who come after us.

After his baptism - so Christian mythology goes, Jesus is led by spirit to the wilderness where, over the course of 40 days, he faces the Devil who tempts him three times. Jesus turns down opportunities to demonstrate his power by turning a stone into bread, to prove his importance by jumping off the cliff with the expectation that the angels will catch him, to rule the world in exchange for worshipping the Devil.

Jesus confirms his commitment to his purpose: to sacrifice his perfect life to absolve the sin humanity inherited from Adam.

In the 28 days since the first diagnosis of the novel coronavirus in New Orleans, 16,284 people in Louisiana have been given positive diagnoses of COVID-19, 562 of whom have died.

This Lent, we were asked to make collective sacrifices for the health of the world, now and beyond the moment of crisis. Unlike Jesus, we’re not martyrs who have left the comforts of heaven, but necessary parts of a bio-social ecology that is increasingly debilitated by the maldistribution of resources and life chances.

What have we relinquished out of commitment to humanity, and who will we put behind us once COVID’s curve has been made flat, once we return to work (for those of us with such job security) and send the kids back to school?

So much of our economic infrastructure and practice was designed to assuage the fears of those in power, to assure them that their power would never be dissolved.

It can feel overwhelming, impossible even, to imagine a society in which no one has to submit to the will of another to survive, in which we don’t feel the need to demand the submission of others for our own survival.

But just because you can’t wash your hands of everything, doesn’t mean you stop trying.

The World, the Flesh, and the Devil: A Lenten Meditation on COVID-19 in New Orleans was originally published on The Lens Nola. Published on ICI’s website on April 8, 2020.
The nobility of relations between African art and universal values traditionally sought comfort in indefinable spaces. Art is the greatest social fact to interrogate social realities that COVID-19 has reimagined into a long-distance treasure. Life in Uganda is a reimagined performative installation vested on a bundle of relations facilitated by human physical conversations. It’s such an amazing musical composition with tremendous discordant sounds in jarring juxtaposition. Ugandan narratives seem shaky in a conventional context but traditionally profound and original, though threatened by social distancing in the recent context of “open migration” and “free movement”. The traditional and rich African chain of oral transmission and physical dialogue seems problematic and impossible in the midst of COVID-19. This has proved strong advocacy for high-speed internet to facilitate virtual spheres of conviviality. Hasn’t the scaffold upon which people strategically stand as culture documentation infrastructure been shaken by social distancing? What a country of great orators Uganda has been from generation to generation! With people as libraries, memory disks, and digital databases for ages, oral freedom seems to have traditionally undermined the “New” arena for conversations. Despite a high youthful population, such a belief puts into perspective the discussion of the highly problematic social media taxes, Over The Top (OTT) payable by everyone nursing desires to use social media platforms within Uganda.

As a curator with tremendous interest in Ugandan history in relation to contemporary practice, my life lies beneath archives, and in between gallery walls is a place I call home. Our inability to effectively reach out to artists and other cultural players through physical studio visits and broadcasts finds no refuge in the virtual world of unstable and slow internet connections: I am digitally confined and intellectually constrained in the middle of nowhere. “The lockdown is not a matter of convenience, we’re talking about life and death. This is ‘war’! this is a time for survival”, the president of Uganda asserted as he extended the total lockdown on May 2, 2020.

My ability to pack a century of pains in isolation and meditation was constrained by the mandatory self-quarantine I was recommended to exercise. Not even the prestigious interview with Elimo Njau in Nairobi, Kenya would shape my confidence into a weapon to assail the stigma from COVID-19 in the first weeks of self-quarantine, before doctors draped in protective equipment turned up for blood samples. For the first time in the history of Uganda, traveling was greeted with disdain! Hasn’t life just crawled deep into burnt orange-scented Dingy Taverns? Such traumatic realities only fueled Nosophobic mistreatment to send ceaseless reels of intellectual uncertainty brooded over in search of sanity.

Imagine an African city without people, it’s like a body without a soul. Utopia seems a costly political satire for Uganda where creativity for survival defines the infrastructural outlook of cities. This explains the heavy traffic build-ups and the logical existence of “Boda Bodos” and “Matatus” in Kampala. Dangerous as they may seem, they define the true spirit of the city during normal business days and thus prove a reliable platform.
for unemployed youths. Therefore, grounding public transportation during the national lockdown confined commuters to their own homes and rendered Uganda an online economy perched on an imaginary uptown population whose supplies are procured from local downtown traders by online distributors.

Imagine, an online delivery chain without suppliers! Order cancellation seemed inevitable. Tourism, arts, and culture have totally been mired down by COVID-19; the concept of social distancing left no option but cancellation or postponement of live events until further notice. With online engagement still limited to a few with access to smartphones, internet, and social media; television and broadcast have emerged new social entertainment heroes. However, starvation, high prepaid costs of electricity, and television subscription, without income and coupled with regular load shedding, still confine entertainment to
Bobi Wine and Nubian Li during the Ensasage Mu Nyumba concert that was held in Magere over Mother’s Day Weekend
the privileged. When television seized
the lockdown with live discotheques,
performances, and celebrity interviews,
it focused on music and neglected
film, poetry, literary and visual arts
otherwise experienced by audiences
at biennials, festivals, pilgrimages,
galleries, and museums.
Cultural tourism was shellacked, as
transportation was limited to cargo.
The soaring number of patients in
Kenya, Tanzania, and Rwanda have
overwhelmed Uganda with sick truck
drivers hence frantic with worry upon
handling a subject that has mired the
country into an unending lockdown.
Strict and regular patrolling to restrict
truck drivers from community contact
seems insidious due to the polygamous
nature of drivers in question.

Being physically confined, we’ve truly
been intellectually hurt but digitally
liberated. Our cultural contribution is
perched on the incredible powers to
heal the world; this requires therapy
and mettle to scaffold creativity
necessary for an institutional
restructuring of public engagement.
Uganda ought to rethink the internet
as a basic human need for its urban
population. COVID-19 has rendered
gatekeepers to African national
memory (elderly) immediate victims;
therefore, cultural centers ought to
intensify documentation, digitization of
collections, and online access to project
fragments of forgotten experiences that
inform creative realities.

Collective Memories was originally
I am writing this in the moment when the COVID-19 crisis is hitting hard in Germany. In Peru, Morocco, Denmark, Spain, Italy and many other places, the almost total lockdown of society has already taken place. A few days ago, France declared war against the virus. Most of the borders are closed to people considered migrants: if you are not from the country, you cannot go (back) in. Last year, the art spaces Tlaxcala3 in Mexico and TIER in Berlin started a collaborative project titled Objects Before and After the Wall1 with the intuition of putting forward the wall as a negative symbol connecting past and present conflicts; the wall is a device that defines which degree of being-human any person is. The much needed contingency plans spreading around and alongside the virus show
In Marchalena, eighty people are producing masks at home to support the community.

us a lesson we will need to remind ourselves of in the future—that the very same countries that have been closing their frontiers to refugees are now talking about saving lives.

Luckily, most countries are not following the example of the current UK Prime Minister, who years ago praised the town mayor in the 1975 movie Jaws. In the film, the mayor insisted on keeping the beaches open for profit-making, regardless of people losing their lives. The Prime Minister, very much aligned with this fictional mayor, said that people needed to simply keep swimming. Against the opinion of most citizens, the Prime Minister proposed that very same strategy against the Coronavirus in an attempt at obtaining herd immunity: if we allow as many people as possible to get the disease, they would eventually develop the antibodies and firewalls against the virus. Needless to say, epidemiologists strongly advised against the strategy, and this brainless plan was dropped.

Addressing this pandemic requires close collaboration between citizens and governments. Mutual aid is fundamental, especially in giving psychological support. Many examples are already on view elsewhere: in Italy, neighbours give concerts on balconies; in Spain, general ovations for public health officials and workers take place everyday; distribution networks for those in need are being created in many cities; truck drivers reinforce their mutual support. Collaboration is the only way of overcoming this situation.

As of March 18th, media reports indicated that there are two successful models to address the pandemic—both aided by technology. The first one, implemented by China, puts forward strict control measures over population. The second, in South Korea, is based on close collaboration between citizens and government. In either case, border restrictions strongly apply.

The current situation is also a massive social experiment of global control, with great consequences on biopolitics. There are radical changes that are taking place due to the crisis. As with any war or conflict—such as the September 11 attacks or different
terrorist attacks (although not so much with far right-wing terrorism)—the paradigms in terms of social organization are going to change dramatically.

Among others, there are four interwoven elements that will need to be closely looked at once the virus is contained. The credibility of left-wing parties already in government—or the progressive ones in their struggle for recognition—is going to be highly affected by how they deal with these four topics. Therefore, social and cultural organizations must work towards rethinking these issues and continue to come up with new ways of producing communities.

Secondly, the fear of new pandemics will justify new control strategies over populations. If after the September 11 attacks many people agreed to a reduction of privacy in exchange for security, the technological protocols of both successful models of containment—as implemented in China and South Korea—will be applied globally and at different levels. Let's not forget that precisely at the same time the September 11 attacks took place, much of the global digital infrastructure was developing intensively and the internet began to model into its current formation. It may have been that corporations had already sought, prior to the attacks, the kind of access to our data that was later justified by the fear of terrorism. Decades earlier, it would not have been possible to imagine that we would all
allow tech companies to collect our personal information, geo-location, and even our desires as seen through data.

Very much connected to the entanglement of state control and algorithmic technology, exploitation of resources continues to devastate lands and communities in the Global South, worsening the long trail of colonial enterprise. The activities of tech corporations have left a severe footprint in different territories across the globe, but mainly in countries of the Global South: the need for resources in terms of energy, water and rare minerals to fulfill their production has brought entire communities under conditions of mass impoverishment and violence, as one can see in Congo or in Chile. These conditions have been brought on by very aggressive control measurements, in order to pursue the development of the fabrication of digital devices. The “cloud” is actually quite terrestrial and material—it is brought about by radically worsening the lives of the Global South. Technologies of control and material exploitation of lands and workers come hand in hand. They also feed climate change, the consequences of which were recently seen, for example, in sad devastations in Mozambique and Puerto Rico.

The impact that corporations have on our lives is undoubtedly strong. We have recently witnessed, for example, how elections were affected by social media campaigns based on fake news. However, the influence goes even further in neoliberal modulations of micropolitics: beyond disciplinary systems of control, corporations have understood that the battlefield is also molecular, that they go beyond already-controlled state policies. Once the current pandemic is over, control of individuals by either the state or technological corporations will be reinforced. The combination of technologies with authoritative governments will be a disaster for democratic and autonomous thinking. The struggle to keep a right to privacy, along with free speech and freedom of movement, will be a great one.

A third issue to consider is the concept of social distancing. Under this notion, how can anyone imagine any public demonstration? Consider the recent case of the feminist strike 8M in March. Many friends were concerned with the virus after participating in the gathering. As we know with Glissant, Lorde, Preciado or Bifo, politics are not possible without a certain (or even great) degree of eroticism: the capacity of being together, feeling the bodies of others and producing a common consciousness. The challenge then is how to produce such political consciousness without being together: a feeling of touch or closeness while being far away. For many, it will take time and effort to lose their newfound fear of being close to others. We need to imagine new ways of being together beyond the restrictions of the virtual. Our political, social and cultural life depends on it.

Lastly, the pandemic will affect workers’ rights. In recent years, there has been a political struggle to address the precariousness left by the last economic crisis in Western societies, in addition to the long lasting Western exploitation of the rest of the world economies. The general impoverishment of working conditions of workers’ lives of the last decade was made under the guise of economic recovery. What we’re seeing instead is how wealth has been flowing to the top (and from South to
North) tirelessly, leaving the working class everywhere under increasingly worsening circumstances. The financial class has been sucking the blood of workers globally. For instance, a general model of working as freelancers instead of working under contracts is widespread. This means that things like health insurance are the responsibility of the individual, instead of the employers. Out of necessity, everybody has become a brand of oneself, and therefore common struggles are more difficult to organize. Unions have to be reclaimed, rethought, and redrawn. Is it the time of organizing a new Internationale?

Paraphrasing William Burroughs, walls are a virus: always create as many insoluble conflicts as possible and always aggravate existing conflicts—this is done by dumping on the same planet life forms with incompatible conditions of existence. There is of course nothing “wrong” about any given life form since “wrong” only has reference to conflicts with other life forms. The struggle against the wall is still and will be even more of a pressing one. As cultural workers, we operate within the imaginary of a society: providing images, platforms and strategies for tearing down any wall is a task also for us. COVID-19 will be probably one of the epic moments of our generation. The shape of the myth around it is still to be made.

https://vimeo.com/72089729
Las puertas (De mi casa a La Casa) / Doors (From home to La Casa), Fermín Jiménez Landa, video-action, 2013.


The Wall is a Virus that was translated from Spanish to English and originally published on Concreta March 2020. Published on ICI’s website on April 6, 2020.

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1We used the figure of the wall to link present and past realities of Mexico and Germany. Through this connection, we reflected, together with few practitioners and in different formats, not only on those two countries, but also on border policies in many places. See online at: http://theinstituteforendoticresearch.org/wp/projects-current/objects-before-and-after-the-wall


Experiencing the pandemic and its ramifications from my position in which I could afford to stay at home in Hungary—a small, post-socialist country currently with an ultranationalist-populist government—has simultaneously been moderate (short-term) and petrifying (long-term).

A European society (from a global perspective) with a population of around 10 million people, Hungary has had a moderate number of cases, according to the government’s registered numbers, which are also fed into the John Hopkins University’s global map (Center for Systems Science and Engineering at John Hopkins University). And all of Hungary in the midst of reopening from the lockdown, just as I am writing these lines. From a socio-political and economic-ecological standpoint, however, an iteration of the “shock doctrine” is unfolding in Hungary, which is more than worrisome. With these perspectives, I attempt to analyze both a current snapshot and a speculative trajectory of the contemporary art scene in Hungary, and more specifically in the independent, non-profit art scene of Budapest, with its initiatives with local and international profiles—the area in which I have been deeply involved and engaged in as a curator. Even within this particular part of the contemporary art scene, there are many aspects to discuss, but I will focus on issues of internationalism—a vantage point and practice I have been preoccupied with for a long time.

As everywhere, the contemporary art scene in Hungary has seen postponements, cancellations, virtualization, and crises. Most of the arts in Hungary are still state-funded.
Tamás Kaszás, piece from the series "Lost Wisdom," 2017. Courtesy of the artist
There is a long tradition of state patronage that has changed very little, even since the neoliberal transition that followed the end of the Cold War. Today this means that freelancing and running an independent art organization—one that is both financially and ideologically independent of the state—is rare and difficult to establish and to sustain. According to surveys conducted by Hungarian art magazine artPortal, during the lockdown, the state continued to fund state museums and art institutions as well as their employees. Nonetheless, at the same time during the state of emergency, the government passed a law that will strip state-funded cultural institutions’ employees of their current employment securities as public servants in the months ahead. There was also a state aid package for independents, freelancers in the arts—which, however, only included the performing arts, and visual arts fell through the cracks. As a result, visual artists, who are freelancers, (and independent curators in Hungary, even if few) received no state or municipal support. Their “day jobs,” or paying jobs, often temporary ones (from documentation to graphic design, or installation), came to a halt and for a majority of those artists with a market, the sale of their work stopped. The engine of almost all independent art organizations in Hungary is volunteer work (or with symbolic fees), which organization members can only fulfill if they have stable jobs elsewhere. The difficulties faced by the independent art scene in the coming times may well be existential.

Two examples of initiatives that I am involved in that are currently being reshaped. INHALE!, the third edition of OFF-Biennale Budapest—a biennial that is built on a grassroots basis and boycotts state funding and infrastructure. It would have opened by now—it was supposed to have taken place between April 21 and May 31, 2020—but it was postponed to next Spring. The main mission of OFF-Biennale is to support the local art scene. At the same time, OFF is also embedded in an international cultural framework. In addition to exhibitions, events, the OFF-Biennale welcomes people from outside of Hungary, which is of key importance. The embodied, physical encounter with Hungarian contemporary art is a significant channel through which art and artists from this region can circulate internationally. It offers a way to spend time physically together to build alliances, where participants could all together learn about and expand their national/regional experiences in a transnational way. This type of experience was also generated by the online magazine Mezosfera, which is funded by international sources through tranzit.hu, and had to be re-thought to continue to offer a program of “building international alliances” outside of Hungary.

International travel in the coming years seems uncertain—if it changes at all—but we need a way to counter isolationism. While in the wake of the current momentum we will perhaps witness a decrease in “jet-set flâneurship,” less internationalism is a double-edged sword, especially from the vantage point of Hungary, where international engagement is not a given but a privilege. This may be the case in many other art scenes. It is easy to imagine a decrease in the number of people visiting Hungary, and that members of the Hungarian art scene
will be less able to travel abroad to see exhibitions and meet colleagues. What will happen to the international mobility of artists and curators? What will happen to international funding? The alternative to Hungarian state funding for large-scale, independent, grassroots, non-profit art initiatives that are not aligned ideologically with the government is international funding. There is only little Hungarian private and Hungarian corporate sponsorship in this area. In the likely scenario of a global economic recession, how different will international funding be and how will it affect art scenes outside of the main international centers? Sources of funding, of course, always need to be critically-ethically considered, but we also need to consider the impact of such a decrease of international funding opportunities on these independent initiatives.

This is particularly important because less international engagement and more isolation falls in line with the current nationalist Hungarian government’s agenda. The xenophobic, anti-immigrant government rhetoric that condemns initiatives that receive international funding as foreign agents and foreign influence that violates Hungary’s sovereignty most probably will only be louder and even more fear-mongering in the coming times. The state of emergency also paved the way to the current government’s indefinite and infamous rule by decree. In several places around the world, one could witness governmental power grabs under the guise of fighting the pandemic. The ramifications of this are again yet to be seen fully, but tighter control and more disciplining are likely to be expected. Philosopher G.M. Tamás noted in an article on the Hungarian government’s recent rejection of the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence: “Those whose model of social coexistence is domination fear that equality does not mean equal footing, but the tyranny of the enemy. Suffragettes will rule! Queers will rule! . . . The fear of those in power had to be always dispelled by cruelty and terror of the frightened sovereigns.” Regimes currently on power cannot be changed (now), but individuals must aspire to remain internationally connected, not to uphold the jet-set flâneurship, but to stay in touch with and about each other, beyond Zooming. The art world, particularly in the last decades, has been super-globalized, but the international connections—a kind of “internationalism after the end of globalization” or perhaps before that, to refer to artist Tamás Kaszás’s Lost Wisdom—will perhaps signify more than before, on a new footing.

International We Stand was originally published on ICI’s website on May 19, 2020.
E iho ana o luna
E piʻi ana o lalo
E hui ana nā moku
E kū ana ka paia

The high will be brought low
The low will be lifted up
The islands will be united
The walls shall stand upright

Chant it with vigor, sing it out loud, three
times then pau. Systems are “collapsing,”
“spreading,” “rising.”

DKB: March 25th, 2020, a headline
blasts, in ALL-CAPS, across the front
page of the Honolulu Star-Advertiser,
Hawaii’s daily newspaper and self
proclaimed “Pulse of Paradise.”

“TOURISM MELTDOWN”

Presently, the State of Hawaii has one
of the highest unemployment rates
per capita in the United States of
America. Over one-third of the labor
force has filed for unemployment.
An unsurprising statistic given the
state’s overreliance on tourism, its top
industry. Tourism and Defense, the
second largest industry, both vestiges
of World War II and U.S. Empire in
Moananuiʻakea, the Pacific, must
be reconsidered, especially now. In
Summer 2020, this year’s Rim of the
Pacific exercise, the largest international
maritime warfare training in the world
held biennially in Hawaii across land,
sea, and sky, “will go on.”

JT: Our long history of
disconnectedness from Western
Disease is what made us so
susceptible... to death. Our people went
from just under a million to around
25,000, from pre-Contact 1778 to 1920.

After a century, we as a people
represent around a quarter of the
Islands’ population. Despite our
efforts toward recovery as a people,
Native Hawaiians, as with other ethnic
minority groups, are still considered
high-risk for severe illness and mortality
from COVID-19. This is mostly due to
the underlying health conditions we
continually face—tourism, militarism,
colonialism, and so on. But, as proven
before, there is an inherent resiliency to
who we are as a people.

DKB: April 10th, 2020, I went down to
Waikīkī, an epicenter for international
militourism. As dusk approached, I
stood on the shoreline and flipped
HAE HŌʻAILONA IA, THE FLAG IS A SIGN, which opened on January 17th, 2020, one hundred and twenty seven years after the U.S. military-backed overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom, was to travel to the East Hawaiʻi Cultural Center in Hilo, Hawaiʻi Island, in conjunction with Merrie Monarch, the most culturally significant festival in the Islands. The event celebrates King David Kalākaua and the cultural practice of Hula. The event attracts thousands of international visitors and generates millions of dollars for local communities. Because of COVID-19, the event was cancelled along with the exhibition. Other articles, writing assignments, and exhibition plans, were also postponed.

In terms of my career trajectory as a contemporary art curator, I would still consider myself to be in an emerging limbo state. I, still, have not had an institutional position. My resume is concise. I live and work on the margins of the art world in a kind of self-isolation from the supposed art centers of Los Angeles, Tokyo, Melbourne, Sydney, and Auckland, which trace a Pacific-Rim.

Hawaiʻi, as you may or may not know, is quite literally the most physically “isolated” place on the planet. We are at least 2,400 or so miles from each of the locations previously mentioned. Before June 29, 1927, when the U.S. Army landed its first successful flight from Oakland, California to Wahiawā, Oʻahu, everyone arrived in Hawaiʻi by the Moananuiākea. The great, wide, expansive, ocean of Wākea.

Na ka Moananuiākea e hoʻopili mai iā kākou. The Moananuiākea is what connects us all.

DKB: April 24th, 2020, I am currently employed by the State of Hawaiʻi to through a copy of Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures (1990), edited by Russell Ferguson, Martha Gever, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and Cornel West. My attention was fixed on a series of black-and-white photographs by artist Félix González-Torres. Each photograph documents a single identifying word, inscribed in recognition of Theodore Roosevelt, on the facade of the American Museum of Natural History on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, New York City.

AUTHOR, STATESMAN, SCHOLAR, HUMANITARIAN, HISTORIAN, PATRIOT, RANCHMAN, EXPLORER, NATURALIST, SCIENTIST, SOLDIER

Haunted by this string of words, I set the publication down and scrawled in the sand with my hand—HUMANITARIAN—between outgoing and incoming waves. Then I took a photograph. Before I could finish writing another—EXPLO—a Honolulu Police officer was standing by my side. Gesture interrupted. He informed me that the beach was closed to the public and that I would be given a citation if I did not leave the premises immediately.

JT: It’s hard to fully assess the impact of COVID-19 on my life and practice when things are still shifting daily. After returning home, from visiting the 2020 Sydney and Adelaide Biennales, I went immediately into a two-week government recommended self-quarantine at home in Mākīki, Honolulu. It wasn’t until weeks later that the State finally got with the global program to limit the spread of the virus and “flatten the curve.” It was during this time that most of my personal projects as an independent curator and writer came to a halt.

The show I curated earlier this year for Aupuni Space in Honolulu, HE
teach studio art courses and direct Koa Gallery, a modest venue dedicated to art communities of Hawai‘i, Oceania, and Asia-Pacific at large. Established in 1987, Koa Gallery is nested within Kapi‘olani Community College, “a model indigenous serving institution accredited by Western Association of Schools and Colleges,” in the presence of Le‘ahi, a volcanic tuff cone and storied place, on the southern shore of the island of O‘ahu, Hawai‘i.

The rapid phase-shift from he alo a he alo to remote learning, despite ample synchronous options, has been a difficult transition for students, faculty, staff, and administration alike—now factor in unemployment, proposed pay cuts for state-employees (up to 20% by Gov. David Ige), and widespread anxiety over a recent global pandemic.

April 8th, 2020. “Was anyone else laid off from their jobs?” A student enrolled in ART-189-0 [KAP.33249. SP20]: H-Introduction to Hawai‘ian Art, posed this question during an online class session. It is essential in Hawai‘i, as elsewhere, to hold multiple jobs in order to meet basic needs and live paycheck to paycheck. This student, as with several others, had lost their jobs in the hospitality industry.

In response to these urgent situations, we put our class discussion of the international repatriation of iwi kūpuna, moe pū, and mea kapu on hold. Instead, we used the rest of our time together that day to work on individual applications for the local Urgent Student Relief Fund and gather materials in advance of the first wave of the national Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund. Neither are long term solutions, both provide a bit of respite. Beyond social distancing, isolation, and quarantine, lived-life across the archipelago is always precarious, right on the edge.

April 15th, 2020, At noon I met New York-based artist Sung Hwan Kim just beyond the campus boundary line, near posted signs—“CAMPUS CLOSED TO PUBLIC, Services are being provided to Employees and Students only.” We hugged. Under the watchful eye of campus security we transported gallery contents into idling cars, and drove with Berlin-based Suin Kwon and New York-based David Michael DiGregorio (dogr), over Pu‘u o Kaimuki and up Wilhelmina Rise toward Mau‘umae ridge. After two weeks of drifting with uncertainty, due to an ongoing stay-at-home order, the inaugural artists in residence were forced to relocate their project as the University of Hawai‘i System was shutting its doors.

JT: Since returning from Sydney, my M-F has been spent with helping a small Hawaiian-owned and operated business, Native Books / Nā Mea Hawai‘i, expand its presence online.

The business is a pillar in the Native Hawaiian community, and has been a source for knowledge exchange for three decades. Nā Mea Hawai‘i is much more than a retail store, rather, a network of native (and non-native) makers, writers, thinkers, creatives, artists, and so forth, who carry a continuity of culture, through traditional means, today. The impact of COVID-19 in our community has been felt in critical ways, as we are used to gathering and doing business face-to-face. He alo a he alo.

As the first of the month quickly approached, a coalition of tenants was taking shape online. Nā Mea Hawai‘i is located in an urban neighborhood
work with pōhaku, and walaʻau. At the end of the evening she usually asked those in attendance to pose a question to themselves, a question they wanted answered. Then she would place a book in their hands, a weathered copy of the Yijing (Book of Changes). “Open up the book,” she would say, “hold your question at the forefront of your consciousness and let your finger fall on a page.” “Read it out loud,” she would continue, “What was your question?” I woke up this morning with a question, “How do I embrace transformation more fully?” Opening the ʻŌlelo Noʻeau (Hawaiian Proverbs & Poetical Sayings), finger falling on a page:

Laʻi Hauola i ke kai māʻokiʻoki. Peaceful Hauola by the choppy sea. Peace and tranquility in the face of disturbance.

called Kakaʻako, just about halfway between Honolulu’s central business district and its famed tourist center, Waikīkī. Here, two commercial real estate developers compete over who can make the coolest, trendiest, most expensive, walkable boutique community. Rent is high. We are just one of more than fifty struggling small local businesses in the area, most new to community organizing, practicing collective bargaining power. Despite efforts by the landlord to divide and conquer its tenants, the hui has largely remained together and the group continues to grow.

DKB: Growing up, in the summer, I would visit my Aunty Manu, an educator working in the field of indigenous epistemology, who at the time lived in Pāpaʻikou, outside of Hilo on Hawaiʻi Island. Aunty would often hold gatherings, to make lei pēkaʻa,
JT: April 24, 2020, as if it were any other Friday, a small intergenerational hui of weavers from Nā Mea Hawai‘i went out to harvest leaves and care for the trees we regularly gather from. Climbing up aerial roots and over long spiked branches we pulled down dead leaves, harvested heavy spined fruit, and cleared the ground below the tree of any debris. Hala trees were heavily cultivated and cared for by Hawaiians so that the trees would throw long healthy leaves. Leaves would be and continue to be cleaned, softened, and stripped into strands and woven into large moena or sleeping mats, sails for canoes, baskets, and so on.

The traditional practice of ulana lau hala (weaving pandanus leaves) is itself a kind of metaphor for transformation. Hala is our name for the pandanus tree and it is also a word for death or passing.

If he alo a he alo is what our kūpuna know, how does knowledge get passed to future generations today?

“Make the most of every crisis.”

Across Ka Pae‘āina o Hawai‘i, amidst a moment of heightened regulation and control, it is vital to temper mandates of the U.S. government (state and federal) with cultural practices rooted in collective care and being in relation. We take guidance from actions that flow laterally through self-organized community support networks. Hierarchy and heroics long forgotten.

May we continue to gather in unanticipated ways—across public, social, personal, and intimate spaces—and work towards the repair of alternative futures already in the making.

E iho ana o luna was originally published on ICI’s website on May 6, 2020.

\(^1\)E Iho Ana, a wānana attributed to kāula Kapihe, adapted from Hawaiian Antiquities (Mo‘olelo Hawai‘i) (1898) by David Malo.
The Inconvenient Feelings

SU WEI
On 21 December 2019, an exhibition that I curated was on, which was entitled “Community of Feeling: Emotional Patterns in Art in Post-1949 China”. The exhibition set out to investigate the role of emotion and its production played in artistic creation as well as the artistic discourse that circulated during the socialist and post-socialist periods. It never occurred to me that a virus named Covid-19 was spreading across Wuhan right then. All of us were then forced to become part of a temporary community of feeling and were consequently subject to the maneuver that state politics and lies imposed upon our everyday life.

All took place in the midst of tension between the spontaneous emotions and those that were forced upon us, and that between these emotions.
and the urge to act. As for me, I have been staying in my flat for 80 days straight given the semi-mandatory quarantine regulations, and have cut down on my social interactions to only those that are absolutely necessary. I gathered information about the pandemic from the Chinese SNS providers including Wechat and Weibo: on these platforms, one finds a whole spectrum of information ranging from officially endorsed information issued by the state to voices of small businesses (even random diners) and social institutions, and to personal blogs produced by innumerable self-media and nameless individuals like me. Apart from this, I have also been reading western media and Facebook which I can access using a VPN service, though that the connection can get wobbly at times. Despite the existence of a handful of reporters upholding the spirit of independent journalism, the official media have been known for fabricating lies. There are, on the one hand, enthusiastic public mobilization and propaganda of governmental actions combating the pandemic, the combination of which has been so adroitly used by the party throughout the last century, and, on the other hand, the cover-up of facts and of the truth. Indeed, even after the reform and opening-up policy of the late 1970s, the party still possesses the power to parcel out every bit of truth, which forces every one of us discontented with the reality to be a “dissident”, despite the rather intense political and less intellectual implications of the word. In the eyes of a legion of nationalists, we also become the pathetic “worshippers of the West”.

On 6 February, Dr. Li Wenliang, the whistle-blower of the pandemic, died because of the virus. I, along with tens of millions of Chinese people, was enraged and expressed my anger on the internet. The event, which can be understood as an online mass movement, bears a certain resemblance to the April Fifth Movement in 1976 as well as to the commemoration of Zhang Zhixin in 1975, a female dissident executed in prison for criticizing Mao’s extreme leftist policies. By way of mourning Li online, people expressed their indignation at the initial cover-up of the pandemic, which led to the doctor’s death. (I have to concede, though, that I also detected a grain of performance in some of the mourning gestures I witnessed online.) I then realized that by participating in the mourning, I was truly living a historical moment, though the history which we were supposed to relive—the student movement in 1989 which braided radicalism with somewhat puerile appeals—were not truly far away. Li and all others who lost their lives to the cover-up, all those who died in despair from the corruption and impotence of the state, have forced me to look squarely at the fact that my country is still some distance from the ideal of civilization that I have cherished. I also had to stay awake to the fact that the peaceful life to which I am entitled today may simply be a figment or an evanescent bubble.

That aside, when all the rage and sadness slowly died down, I then began to be plagued by a deep sense of uncertainty as if I were rambling amidst a massive wasteland deep in the mountains, not knowing where to go. All these emotions and feelings, though real, seemed inconvenient to a degree, as it would be difficult to fit them within the current system and the accepted
discursive field. If the demand for truth is bound to have something to do with the political institution, then in what ways can I forge my own connection to the state as an individual? I am aware that such questions can sound hopelessly outdated and not contemporary enough, yet I still feel the need to ask: if I have long got used to an absolute individuality, and am aware that such individuality relies much more on than the contempt of on—and resistance against—the censorship that has become increasingly stringent where exhibitions, writings, and all cultural activities are concerned, then, what other ground can I shore against my individuality?

Or, if we pursue it further, can these emotions be effectively turned into thoughts and into action? Or is it that we think too much to still remember how to act and to change?

In the context of the pandemic, keen discussions on the relationship between art and reality have taken place within the art industry in China, where capital and the market predominate and suffer. Reality—along with the realist discursive framework which comes as a bundle—has always assumed a phantom-like existence in China: they epitomize a whole set of concepts, discourse and a particular way of artistic expression that has held sway since 1949 and keep haunting us art practitioners who profess to work in a globalized, de-historicized manner. We have attempted to superannuate realism with the American leftist theories, European critical thoughts as well as our own renewed self-imagination based on our piecemeal knowledge on Asia and the Global South. We are never ready to admit our reliance upon this realist framework that in our opinion should have long ceased to exist. As a result, we have also scorned the historical continuity that can bridge all intellectual resources and possibilities generated within or outside of this framework, mainstream or unorthodox. In China, the anxiety has always existed for art to justify and locate itself in a set of coordinates alternative to this historical framework. The elusiveness of—or the failure to capture—such an alternative framework is also what makes our emotional reactions to the pandemic so inconvenient, and so painfully visible in the face of the disaster.

The Inconvenient Feelings was originally published on ICI’s website on April 20, 2020.
POJAI AKRATANAKUL

Pojai Akratanakul, based in Bangkok, is an independent curator, researcher in-practice and member of curatorial collective Charoen Contemporaries, with whom she curated public art exhibition PostScripts (2018). Until recently, Pojai managed and acquired works for The Petch Osathanugrah Collection and worked as the Project Director for the collector’s museum-in-planning Sansab Museum of Contemporary Art. Previously, she has worked on exhibitions, publications, and public programs for non-profit institutions including Bangkok University Gallery, BACC, MAIIAM Contemporary Art Museum, where she assisted in producing shows such as Mon Art du Style (2017); Operation Bangkok (2014) with Roslisham Ismail; Concept Context Contestation: art and the collectives in SEA (2013). She was a guest lecturer at King Mongkut’s Institute of Technology Ladkrabang and Chulalongkorn University. Pojai holds an MA in Visual Arts Administration with Non-profit Management and Curatorial concentration from New York University, and a BFA in Visual Arts from Chulalongkorn University. Between 2014-2016, Pojai lived in New York and interned at ICI, the SculptureCenter, and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum.

VANINI BELARMINO

Vanini Belarmino joined the National Gallery Singapore as Assistant Director (Programmes) in November 2016. Her curatorial interest focuses on the productive potential of encounters by identifying and facilitating collaborations between artists across genres. The resulting works create new experiences by situating the body as an object in a museum or public space. Prior to the Gallery, she worked as an independent curator, producer and writer, and developed art initiatives in Asia, Europe and the Middle East. From 2011-2013, she curated the artistic programmes for ArtScience Museum at Marina Bay Sands’ blockbuster exhibitions and was commissioned to curate site-specific and durational works for the inaugural year of ArtScience Late, 2014-2015. Vanini received academic training in theatre arts, art history, European cultural policy and management. She was a recipient of the Asian Cultural Council Fellowship in New York City in 2014.

DREW KAHUʻĀINA BRODERICK

Drew Kahuʻāina Broderick is the current director of Koa Gallery at Kapiʻolani Community College on Oʻahu. From 2012 to 2016 he operated SPF Projects, an artist-run initiative dedicated to building capacity for the production, display, and review of contemporary art in Honolulu. He was a contributing member of Hawaiʻi-based collective PARADISE COVE (2015-2018) and co-founded CONTACT, an annual thematic group exhibition, in 2013. Recent and forthcoming projects include the inaugural Honolulu Biennial 2017: Middle of Now | Here, curated by Fumio Nanjo and Ngahiraka Mason; Transits and Returns (2019) co-developed by Sarah Biscarra Dilley, Freja Carmichael, Léuli Eshraghi, Tarah Hogue, Lana Lopesi for the Vancouver Art Gallery; and Revisiting Kealakekua Bay, Reworking the Captain Cook Monument (2020), a speculative group endeavor presenting unrealized interventionist proposals. Drew holds an MA from the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College, New York and a BA in Biology and Studio Art from Wesleyan University, Connecticut.

CATHERINE CENIZA CHOI

Catherine Ceniza Choy is a Professor of Ethnic Studies and an Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. She is the author of the award-winning book, Empire of Care: Nursing and Migration in Filipino American History (2003), which explored how and why the Philippines became the leading exporter of professional nurses to the United
States. Her second book, *Global Families: A History of Asian International Adoption in America* (2013), was published by NYU Press. She is the co-editor of the Brill book series *Gendering the Trans-Pacific World*. She received her Ph.D. in History from UCLA and her B.A. in History from Pomona College. The daughter of Filipino immigrants, Catherine was born and raised in New York City and is a graduate of Stuyvesant High School. She lives in Berkeley with her husband and their two children.

**PJ GUBATINA POLICARPIO**

PJ Gubatina Policarpio is an educator, curator, programmer, writer, and community organizer. He is the Manager of Youth Development at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco (de Young Museum / Legion of Honor) where he designs and implements dynamic and relevant youth programming, especially addressing a diverse, multilingual, and multicultural audience. PJ’s thought leadership in museum education, youth development, and arts administration has advanced institutions such as The Contemporary Jewish Museum, Brooklyn Museum, Queens Museum, and The Museum of Modern Art. He has presented at conferences nationally including the American Alliance of Museums (New Orleans, Washington DC), College Art Association (Los Angeles), and National Art Education Association (New York City). He has delivered keynotes, lectures, and participated in panel discussions at California College of the Arts, Maryland Institute College of Art, University of California at Berkeley, New York Art Book Fair, Cooper Hewitt, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, Parsons School of Design, University of Illinois at Chicago, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Haystack Mountain School of Crafts and more. He has organized readings, exhibitions, publications, and public programming at Southern Exposure, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Asian Art Museum, Dixon Place, NURTUREart, and other unnameable spaces. PJ is co-founder of Pilipinx American Library (PAL), an itinerant collection and programming platform dedicated exclusively to diasporic Pilipinx perspectives. He serves on Southern Exposure’s Curatorial Council and SOMA Pilipinas Cultural District’s Arts and Culture Committee.

**LUIS CARLOS MANJARRÉS MARTÍNEZ**

Luis Carlos Manjarrés Martínez is currently the curator at the Queer Museum and Maloka Interactive Center in Bogotá, Colombia. In 2018 he was part of the curatorial team of the exhibition of Voices to Transform Colombia. This exhibition aimed to address the enormous challenge of recounting the Colombian armed conflict, starting from the perspective of its victims; Voices is for the long-run script of the Museum of Historical Memory of Colombia on the armed conflict and peace. In the last five years, he has curated four art exhibitions on sexuality, sex, sexual diversity and gender expression with the MuseoQ, a museological initiative to make visible that makes visualized stories and memories related to identity and gender expression as well as the non-hegemonic sexualities and orientations, as an essential part of the national story. In addition to this, he participated in 2015 in the creation of the Thinking Center for the Arts and the Social Agreement of the Faculty of Arts of the National University of Colombia and served as the public coordinator of the Ephemeral Museum of Oblivion in the National Salon of Artists of 2015.

Martinez has a MA in Museology and Heritage Management from the National University of Colombia and is also specialized in International Cultural Management and Cooperation from the University of Barcelona. Martinez is also a graduate in Management Museums from TyPA Laboratory and journalism from Pontificia Javeriana University and has eight years of experience in the management of pedagogical, communicative, advertising, and museological.
**Fadzai Veronica Muchemwa**

Fadzai Veronica Muchemwa is a Harare based researcher, writer and curator. She is currently the Curator for Education and Public Programming at the National Gallery of Zimbabwe. Fadzai is interested in gender and sexuality in visual art, conceptual art, performativity and the history of African art. Fadzai is also interested in how the diaspora and the global North have influenced trends in Africa. She has worked on Basket Case II, and the Zimbabwe Pavilion at La Biennale di Venezia in 2015 and 2017. She has co-curated Culture in Communities, and Jazzified: Expressions of Protest with Lilian Chaonwa, and Dis(colour)ed Margins with Tandazani Dhlakama. She is currently working on Moulding a Nation at the National Gallery of Zimbabwe and The Unseen: Creatures of Myth and Legend on show at the Lusaka National Museum in July 2018. Fadzai attended the ICI curatorial intensive in Dakar in June 2016. She also attended the British Museum's International Training Programme in 2017 and was based in the Department of Africa, Oceania and the Americas and her partner

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**Tess Maunder**

Tess Maunder is a curator, author, and publishing executive. Based in Melbourne, Australia; Maunder has championed projects, relationships, and strategic plans between Australia and the US, China, India, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Indonesia, and the Philippines. She is invested in bridging intellectual differences; highlighting the beauty of multiplicity and holding the industry accountable for producing quality work. She currently works as Executive Manager for Art Ink Publishing and Vault art and culture magazine; where she is spearheading a new imprint for delivery in late 2020. Maunder believes that the curatorial cannot ignore the financial liquidity that supports it, and she argues for greater economic transparency in curatorial ventures. She is also a believer that 'the curatorial' is an attitude, a political position, and personal rhetoric. The curatorial is not defined by form; i.e. exhibitions, but rather should be approached as a greater philosophical scope on life; where artists are integrated into a wide spectrum of activity. Prior to her current publishing role; she held a range of institutional and guest invitational positions. In 2016-2017 she worked as a Curatorial Collegiate for the 11th Shanghai Biennale curatorial team, led by Chief Curators: Raqs Media Collective. The biennale is called Why Not Ask Again? ran from 11 November 2016 – 12 March 2017 at the Power Station of Art in Shanghai, China. In 2016, Maunder was awarded the prestigious MPavilion / Art Monthly Australasia Writing Award, where she will be presenting and publishing writing about Australian Indigenous artist Archie Moore. She is a founding Co-Director of the trans-national editorial initiative: Approximating, between New Delhi, Yogyakarta, Manila and Brisbane. Her recent independent curatorial projects include the Curator of Anywhere Elsewhere at Jan Murphy Gallery, (2015) Brisbane, Co-Curator of the exhibition: Herding Islands session: Intervention, Reaction and Violence, conceived by Renan Laru-an at the University of the Philippines, (2015) Manila, and the Curator of the Subtropic Complex at the Institute of Modern Art (2014), Brisbane. Recent curatorial workshops, training, and conferences that she has participated in include Para Site’s workshop for young professionals (2016) in Hong Kong, The Australia India Youth Dialogue (2016) in New Delhi, Bangalore and Mohali, 4a Centre for Contemporary Asian Art’s Curators Intensive (2014) Sydney, the 5th Gwangju Biennale International Curator Course with Maria Lind (2013) in Gwangju and the Independent Curators International (ICI) Curatorial Intensive: What Does It Mean To Be International? held at Mori Art Museum (2013) in Tokyo. Prior to joining the Shanghai Biennale Curatorial team, Maunder worked in a programming capacity at the Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane. In 2017, Maunder undertook curatorial research during a funded residency at the International Studio and Curatorial Program (ISCP) in New York.
Born of Kabuye Benedict family, Balimuusi Philip is currently the curator of Uganda National Cultural Centre and the Uganda National gallery or Nommo gallery who for over seven years worked as an independent curator and artist pursuing an interest in Ugandan art history in relation to contemporary practice. He holds a Bachelor’s Degree in Industrial and Fine Arts from Makerere University. He received curatorial training and scholarship from the New York Independent Curators International in Addis Ababa- Ethiopia and completed a curatorial training program at the School for Curatorial Studies Venice by A Plus Gallery-Venice Italy during the 2019 58th Venice biennial to pave way for processes of organizing a Ugandan pavilion at Venice biennial.

He is a national award-winning artist and art judge of Youth Alive Uganda, a member of UVADA, IRC-American embassy, ICI-New York, 32° East | Ugandan Arts Trust and Bayimba foundation. He is a co-curator of the “Know Go Zone”, “Dance in the City”, “KLAART014” and a curator of the “DADs” and “Climate Change” exhibitions with Embassy of Sweden, JAMAFEST visual arts pavilion with UVADA, “Know Way Out” with Belgian embassy, “Art Creates Water”, “Hope Art exhibition”, a retrospective of “25 years of Bruno Sserunkuuma’s Ceramic Philosophy” and “Anecdotes of Origin” at the A Plus gallery featuring 5 renowned European artists in a group of 20 curators from; Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, south and North America. Balimuusi has shared prestigious panel discussions with leading curators and art historians including; Zoe Whitely, a 2019 British pavilion curator, Fiona Siegenthaler, Kizito Maria Kasule, the dean of Margaret Trowell School of art and many more. He’s previously published articles with Start Journal, JAMAFEST magazine, and contemporary And.

LYDIA Y. NICHOLS

Lydia Y. Nichols is a native New Orleanian cultural critic and arts administrator. Her work centers the lived experiences of Africans in the Diaspora and prioritizes community accessibility. Lydia’s essays have appeared in Pelican Bomb, Liberator Magazine, Gathering of the Tribes Magazine, and The Killens Review. As co-curator of street art exhibition and Prospect P3+ site ExhibitBE, Lydia researched and documented the history of the blighted apartment complex in which the work was created to guide the curatorial process, managed community programming and daily operations, and, after the exhibition closed, coordinated the #PaintWhereItAint Tour through which several ExhibitBE artists traveled across the southwest United States to collaborate with artists in other cities on community-centered public art projects. Since, Lydia has created “In ‘Between Spaces’ - a mobile group exhibition series in a 26’ U-Haul that explores Black identity in various spheres of modern life and that travels to predominantly Black neighborhoods in New Orleans to engage those who have been alienated from the world of contemporary fine art. Lydia continues to manage production for artist Brandan “Bmike” Odums, including his first solo exhibition “Ephemeral Eternal” at Studio Be and, in collaboration with Welcome Table New Orleans, the Algiers Oral History and Public Art Intensive through which 24 high school youth are creating a freestanding mural based on interviews they conduct with elders on the evolution of race relations.

LORENZO SANDOVAL

Sandoval works as an artist and curator. He holds a B.FA and a Masters in Photography, Art and Technology from UPV (Valencia, Spain). He received curatorial prizes such as Inéditos 2011, Can Felipa curatorial prize and Nogueras Blanchard 2012. He won the art prize ‘Generación 2017’ presented in La Casa
Encendida (Madrid) and ‘V Beca DKV-Álvarez Margaride’ for ‘Shadow Writing (Algorithm /Quipu)’ at LABoral, Gijón, 2017. He was nominated for the ‘Berlin Art Prize 2018’ and ‘Premio Arte Contemporáneo Cervezas Alhambra 2020’. He presented ‘Shadow Writing (Lace/Variations)’ in Lehman + Silva Gallery in Porto and Nottingham Contemporary. He was part of ‘Canine Wisdom for the Barking Dog. Exploring the sonic cosmologies of Halim El Dabh’ curated by Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, Kamila Metwaly and Marie Heléné Pereira for Dak’art Biennale 2018. He was artist in residency with Bisagra in Lima, with an exhibition at Amano Museum. He was a part of the Miracle Workers Collective representing Finland in the Venice Biennale 2019. He presented ‘Shadow Writing (Fábrica Colectiva)’ at IVAM Alcoi, a research on the collectivization of factories related to sound. He was part of ‘Part of the Labyrinth’, Göteborg International Biennal for Contemporary Art 2019, curated by Lisa Rosenthal. Together with Tono Vízcaino, he’s preparing ‘Industria. A partial study about sound and immaterial practices in the industrial heritage of Comunidad Valenciana’ for IVAM. Since 2015, he runs The Institute for Endotic Research, which opened as a venue in 2018, in collaboration with Benjamin Busch. http://lorenzosandoval.net

ESZTER SZAKÁCS

Eszter Szakács is a curator, editor, and researcher in Budapest. She works at the contemporary art organization tranzit.hu, where she is co-editor of the online international art magazine Mezosfera, co-editor of the book IMAGINATION/IDEA: The Beginning of Hungarian Conceptual Art—The László Beke Collection, 1971 (Budapest, Zurich: tranzit.hu, JRP|Ringier, 2014), and she curated the collaborative research project Curatorial Dictionary, which has been realized in online and offline formats, including being one of the participating projects of ICI’s exhibition Publishing Against the Grain. She was a research group member of the ...OPEN MUSEUM...project initiated by the Museum of Ethnography, Budapest (2014–2018). She is co-editor with Naeem Mohaiemen of the forthcoming anthology Solidarity Must Be Defended (tranzit.hu – Van Abbemuseum – SALT – Tricontinental – Asia Culture Center, 2020). She is a curatorial team member of the civil initiative OFF-Biennale Budapest. Her practice revolves around questions of internationalism, methods of cultural resistance, relations between Eastern Europe and the Global South, as well as the exhibition form of research.

JOSH TENGAN

Josh Tengan is a Honolulu-based contemporary art curator. He was the assistant curator of the second Honolulu Biennial 2019, To Make Wrong / Right / Now. Since 2015, he has worked with Native Hawaiian and Hawai‘i-based artists and cultural practitioners, through the arts non-profit Pu‘uhonua Society, to deliver Hawai‘i’s largest annual thematic contemporary art exhibition, CONTACT, which offers a critical and comprehensive survey of local contemporary visual culture. In 2019, he curated CONTACT, Acts of Faith, presented at the Hawaiian Mission Houses Historic Site and Archive, which explored the role of religion in the colonization of Hawai‘i through artistic interventions in the historic collections and an artist book library. He holds a Curatorial Studies M.A. with Distinction from Newcastle University (UK) and a B.A. in Fine Art from Westmont College.

SU WEI

Su Wei (born in Beijing, 1982) is an art writer and curator based in Beijing. After conducting his Ph.D research in Berlin between 2008 and 2010, he received his Ph.D at Institute for Foreign Literature, Chinese Academy for Social Sciences (CASS). His recent work focuses on re-depicting and deepening the history of Chinese contemporary art, exploring the roots of its legitimacy and rupture. He participated in the 2012 Curatorial Intensive at Independent
Curators International (ICI) in New York. In 2014, he was awarded first place at the first International Awards for Art Criticism (IAAC). He was the Senior Curator of Inside-Out Museum Beijing between 2017 and 2019.


He has published a number of articles in local and international art journals including *YISHU: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art*, Journal of Contemporary Art (Bristol, UK) and Kunstforum. His publications include Little Movements. Self-Practice in Contemporary Art (with others), Guangxi Normal University Publishing House, 2011; Individual Experience: Conversations and Narratives of Chinese Contemporary Art from 1989-2013 (with others), Ling Nan Art Publishing House, 2013; Hans Belting, Art History after Modernism, translated from German to Chinese by Su Wei, with additional annotations by Su Wei and others, Beepub Publishing House, 2014; Crescent: Retrospectives of Zhao Wenliang and Yang Yushu, Beijing Inside-Out Art Museum, 2018; The Lonely Spirit, Beijing Inside-Out Art Museum, 2019, etc.

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