

Week 3 | Audience in curatorial ethics

written by Luosijie Ding | 3 February 2026



From viewing experience to ethical issues of curation

This week, I visited *The Children are Now*, an exhibition in Talbot Rice Gallery in Edinburgh, and watched *Children's Rights: What's Right?* The video prompted reflections on curatorial ethics. In the work, a boy makes a discriminatory remark about a Chinese person in a school setting. Although the work aims to reveal how children absorb and reproduce social language and power structures, as a Chinese audience member, I still felt uncomfortable. This made me realise that the critical intention of a work does not automatically translate into a critical effect for all audiences. Whether a work is understood as critical depends not only on the artist's intention, but also on the display context and the audience.

link: [The Children Are Now](#)

Curator's responsibility in the theoretical

framework

This experience led me to consider the target audience of the exhibition. As a public exhibition, *The Children Are Now* faces a wide audience, including adults and children. In a workshop, curator James emphasised that contemporary curatorial practice should balance creative expression and political sensitivity and guide audiences to think rather than impose conclusions. However, when works involve language prejudice and power structures, different audiences interpret them differently. For critically informed viewers, such content may provoke reflection; for children or those without background, it may be misread as acceptable language. Therefore, curators must consider not only “whether to exhibit” but also “for whom” and construct interpretive frameworks through spatial design, texts, or education.

This can also echo the curriculum literature. In *Ethics of Curating*, Meng Shichen pointed out that curatorial ethics is not only a matter of institutional norms but also involves “who is speaking for whom” and how curators face others. This view helps me understand that the curator should not only stay at the level of “the original intention of the work is not malicious” but also must think about the possible secondary harm caused by the work in the exhibition.

link: [Ethics of Curating, Meng Shichen](#)

Enlightenment to future practice and JIJU Collective

If the future curatorial project is related to traditional art, historical images, or traditional visual images, the curator should not only present their form and history but also be wary of being simplified into a single cultural symbol in the contemporary context.

This is also related to the formation of the group JIJU Collective.

“JIJU” comes from the pronunciation of “sojourning” in Chinese, reflecting the shared cross-cultural condition of members living and studying in Edinburgh. It reminds me that audiences are never homogeneous; cultural differences shape interpretation. Curatorial ethics, therefore, is not about finding a single correct answer but about sustaining a reflective and responsible practice within diverse viewing contexts.

Bibliography

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