

Peer review of Yande He's project

written by Luosijie Ding | 19 April 2026

This 13-week blog collection shows a coherent and gradual in-depth thinking track, including SICP and JIJU Collective practices. SICP started from the exploration of self-portrait and timeliness and slowly turned to the exploration of visibility and finally decided to take "some kind of absence" as the theme. However, although both SICP and JIJU Collective have developed well, the relationship between them still lacks sufficient connection.

One of the great advantages of this collection is that theory and practice confirm each other, and there is no empty talk about theory, but it really uses theory to make curatorial decisions. From Ana Bilbao's "micro-curation" to Hito Steyerl's "delayed visibility", Sara Ahmed's phenomenology and Nicolas Bourriaud's relational aesthetics were combined, which showed the researcher-led curatorial method. This is particularly obvious in the ninth week about Leith Makers' site selection and the intervention of Summerhall's relationship in the tenth week, which shows that you have traces of thought.

However, there are still shortcomings in translating these complex theories into operational methods. Although the strategy of "delay", "blur" and "fragmentation" is solid in concept, the specific operation in the exhibition space has not been fully developed, and sometimes it is regarded as simply creating an atmosphere to make the space look artistic and emotional, but the audience still looks at the works as usual and has not really changed the way of watching.

My suggestion is that in the spatial layout described in week 13, the portfolio needs more accurate technical analysis: how does the

specific light level, hanging height, or physical position of Ron Walker's works force the audience's line of sight to be "interrupted" by physics?

In the eighth week, the group name "Hermit Crab" metaphor about the JIJU Collective provided valuable insights for cooperative ethics and "curatorial conditions", but they were still mainly descriptive. In order to enhance the rigour of the portfolio, the relationship between these collective experiences and individual projects needs to be more clearly expressed, and the extent to which these collective experiences specifically affect the curatorial decisions in individual projects has not been fully reflected. For example, when emphasising the temporality and dependence on the environment in the hermit crab metaphor, can this make you think about the "visibility condition" in your exhibition "A Certain Absence"?

In order to further strengthen the project, it is necessary to transform theoretical concepts into spatial and material strategies more clearly. For example, in the ninth week, it should be clear how the "visibility conditions" specifically affect the selection of works, lighting design and audience movement, especially the implementation under the restrictions of Leith Makers venue. At the same time, cases such as Maura Reilly's 'Curatorial Activism' can be introduced to strengthen the transformation from theory to curatorial methodology.

link: <https://u.osu.edu/kletchka.1/2017/11/19/curatorial-activism/>

More crucially, the project needs to further reflect on its core concept: is "delayed visibility" a critical mechanism that can reconstruct the way of viewing, or does it mainly stay at the level of

perception or atmosphere? How is this “delay” materialised through space design, not just in conceptual description? The response to these questions will significantly enhance the coherence and critical depth of the project. Case studies such as curatorial studies by Paul O’Neill and Mick Wilson can be used to further clarify how the “delayed” viewing process can be used as a teaching tool for non-professional audiences.

link: <https://www.artbook.com/9780949004031.html>

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Critical Reflection

written by Luosijie Ding | 19 April 2026

Introduction

This paper focuses on a core issue: in the practice of curation, how can I change the exhibition from “reproducing cultural content” to “generating meaning structure”? This change can be understood by

Roland Barthes' analysis of "myth": myth is not a narrative content, but a continuous meaning production system (Barthes 1972).

At the beginning of the project, I paid attention to the relationship between "tradition and contemporary" and tried to translate the form through "translation of traditional media". However, with the deepening of research, I realized that this method stayed at the formal level and did not touch the generation of meaning. This limitation urges me to turn from "tradition" to "myth" and further focus on "mythical animals" as a structural mechanism. This change is not only due to theoretical reflection, but also influenced by practical conditions.

The practice of JIJU Collective provides a path for collaboration to generate meaning, echoing the collectivization turn of knowledge production in contemporary curation (O'Neill and Wilson 2010), and prompting me to rethink the relationship and structure in curation.

This paper will discuss how curating changes from content presentation to meaning generation by combining individual projects with collective practice.

Part I: personal curatorial project

1. From "translation tradition" to re-understanding the relationship between tradition and the contemporary

At the beginning of the project, my curatorial ideas revolved around "how to establish the connection between tradition and contemporary". Influenced by the artist Xu Bing, I tried to transform the traditional visual language into a contemporary exhibition experience through the

way of “translation of traditional media”. At this stage, I understand curation as a “translation mechanism”, which echoes Carolee Thea’s view that curators act as intermediaries, that is, curation generates an understanding path between works and audiences by constructing context, rather than neutral presentation (Thea 2009). However, this method soon exposed its limitations: it mainly stayed at the formal level, such as transforming calligraphy lines into spatial paths, or visually reproducing traditional images, but it did not touch the problem of how meaning was generated. As Terry Smith pointed out, “contemporariness” is not a single time point, but the coexistence and interlacing of multiple time layers, so the continuous generation of meaning does not depend on formal translation, but depends on how the work continues to operate in different time structures (Smith 2009).

This problem was further strengthened after I came into contact with the works of artists such as John Tunnard. I gradually realized that some paintings with a historical background can still respond to contemporary social problems. This connection does not depend on formal translation, but stems from the continuous operation of meaning in different contexts. Therefore, I began to reflect on the limitations of the original method and tried to shift from “formal translation” to “meaning mechanism”.

2. From “historical materials” to “traditional stories”: attempts and limitations of narrative methods.

Based on the above reflection, I gradually shifted my research focus from specific historical images to “traditional stories”, trying to establish the connection between tradition and contemporary through narration. At this stage, I began to understand curation as a narrative organization. Although narrative enhances the readability of the exhibition, it still stays at the content level and fails to

explain why these stories continue to have an impact. This made me realize that the problem is not “what to say” but how the narrative is constantly reproduced. This corresponds to the operation mode of Barthes’ myth as a “secondary symbol system” (Barthes 1972). Therefore, the attempt at this stage further pushes me to ask new questions: Is there a deeper mechanism than “stories” that enables these narratives to span time and continuously influence reality?

3. From “story” to “myth”: the key change to the structural level

It is under the impetus of this problem that I shifted my research object from “traditional story” to “myth” in the middle of the project. This change marks the beginning of my understanding of myth as a continuous meaning structure. In Barthes’ theoretical framework, myth is a mechanism to naturalize historical construction, which makes a particular ideology seem “taken for granted” through repetition and dissemination (Barthes 1972). For example, “looking forward to one’s success” is no longer regarded as a simple cultural expression, but a mechanism for shaping behavior patterns and social expectations for a long time. In practice, I gradually realized that it is difficult to directly translate this concept into specific curatorial strategies, such as artist selection or space design. However, this turn also leads to the enhancement of concept and the decline of operability, exposing the fracture between theory and practice.

4. The introduction of Eryao’s works: from abstract theory to concrete mechanism.

This problem is embodied in Eryao’s work Wish Your Child Becomes a Dragon. It combines the traditional media of shadow play and the mythical image of “dragon”. However, in the process of communication with artists, I gradually realized that the core of this work is not to reproduce tradition, but to reveal how myths continue to play a

role in contemporary society. Digital communication has strengthened the continuous operation of images as a meaning structure (Cook et al. 2014). For example, it is not only a cultural language, but also shapes educational pressure, family relationships, and individual identity in reality. This understanding has made an important change for me: I began to understand “mythical animals” as a structural mechanism rather than a cultural symbol. Dragon is no longer just a “symbol of Chinese culture”, but a system that continuously produces social expectations. This node not only gives the theory a concrete fulcrum but also urges me to further expand my research to other mythical animals, thus laying the foundation for the subsequent cross-cultural development.

5. Pitch feedback: Cultural differences promote the adjustment at the audience level

In the pitch stage of the project, my curatorial logic was challenged again. Through feedback, I realized that the expression “Looking for a Dragon” has a direct cultural understanding path for the audience in China, but it is difficult for the audience with a non-China background to enter this context. This also made me realize that the audience is not a unified whole. Therefore, I began to adjust the method of exhibition, from “text interpretation” to “space experience”, which can also be related to Erika Balsom’s exposition of exhibition as a “temporal structure”, that is, the meaning is not directly conveyed through the text, but gradually generated during the audience’s continuous watching and moving (Balsom 2013).

Specifically, by designing oppressive spatial paths, narrow passages, and circular images, I make the audience feel power and pressure at the physical level, not just relying on language understanding. At the same time, I add relevant idioms and cultural background descriptions to lower the threshold of understanding. The change at this stage marks my shift from “explaining myths” to “letting the audience

experience the myth mechanism”.

6. From single culture to cross-cultural structure: the introduction of multiple mythical animals

In order to further respond to the audience differences, I began to introduce mythical animals with different cultural backgrounds, such as Ai Weiwei’s Zodiac Heads and Kiki Smith’s constellation. This adjustment has expanded the exhibition from a single cultural case to a cross-cultural structure. I have constructed a hierarchical structure from the individual, the country, to the whole world. Through this structure, mythical animals are no longer limited to a certain cultural context, but become a cross-cultural meaning mechanism.

7. Realistic limitation and method crisis: from “great artist” to media reflection

However, this cross-cultural program soon encountered practical limitations in the actual promotion. Limited by resources, it is difficult for me to cooperate with famous artists such as Ai Weiwei, and at the same time, I can’t bear the cost of transportation and exhibition of my works. Faced with this problem, I initially tried to replace physical work with images, such as playing videos about interviews or production processes.

However, after studying the exhibition Disappearance at Sea, I realized that digital media can’t replace the materiality and spatial influence of physical works, so this scheme failed. This failure became a key turning point, which made me start to reflect on my own choice logic: I chose these artists not because of their fame, but because their works can express the power structure through “animals”. This understanding prompted me to turn from resource dependence to

method reflection.

8. Method reconstruction: from artist fame to concept matching.

Based on the above reflection, I gave up the dependence on “great artists” and turned to “concept matching” as the selection criterion. For example, I chose Waeyen Song’s work on microorganisms, which further strengthened the concept of “animals” and the theme of “power is everywhere”. I finally decided that the theme of the exhibition was “When Animals Speak the language of Power.”

9. From exhibition deepening to audience reconstruction: public projects and barrier-free turn

In the later stage of the project, influenced by the collective curatorial experience, I began to realize the limitations of a single exhibition form, and tried to expand the project into a series of public projects, such as a dialogue with Eryao, a shadow play workshop and a book club, so that curation changed from “showing content” to “building a platform for discussion and participation”. At the same time, I further reflected on the audience problem and realized that the default audience was “a sound and understanding individual”, which was implicitly exclusive.

Access-centred practice emphasizes that accessibility is not a supplement to the existing structure, but a curatorial method that can reorganize the relationship between experience and society (MacBride 2025). Therefore, I began to introduce barrier-free design, such as visually impaired audio navigation, Braille materials and easy-read text, to respond to the needs of different audiences. The transformation at this stage marks my transition from “ideal audience hypothesis” to “diverse audience reality”, which makes curation

gradually move from conceptual design to more social practice.

Part II: JIJU Collective Practice

The group practice of JIJU Collective constitutes another important dimension of my curatorial learning, especially in the re-understanding of collaboration, authorship and meaning generation. The members of the group come from different backgrounds, and their common experience in Edinburgh has contributed to the concern about “non-belonging” and formed the “JIJU Collective”.

However, in the process of transforming this concept into an exhibition form, we have experienced several key changes. Initially, the group planned that each member would show his or her undergraduate works. This scheme emphasizes individual expression, but it soon exposes problems: on the one hand, this “collage” presentation cannot reflect the common experience implied by “sojourning”; On the other hand, the transportation and exhibition costs of some works are too high to be realized. Therefore, we began to reflect on whether it is necessary to shift from “individual display” to “co-creation”.

The original plan is to let each member share an object that can evoke memories of the member’s hometown, such as a tree, food, or animals. However, this method still stays too much in “recalling the past” and lacks connection with Edinburgh where we are now, and it is easy to become a personal narrative rather than a structural expression.

The real turning point comes from a concrete experience sharing. During the discussion, I mentioned that in my daily life in Edinburgh, I met a hotel with a very similar architectural appearance to that in Shanghai. This instant familiarity made me feel “at home” for a short time in a foreign land. Other members also realize that they have experienced similar moments in the city, such as finding the

corresponding relationship with their hometown in the street, food, or space atmosphere. Therefore, we have shifted the direction of curation from “presenting hometown” to “rediscovering hometown in a foreign land”, emphasizing the generation of relationships rather than the reproduction of memory.

Based on this change, the exhibition “Our Shell” gradually took shape. We transform each member’s experience into a set of image pairs: one from Edinburgh and one from his hometown, and establish a connection through visual similarity. However, in further discussion, we realize that only the juxtaposed images are still relatively thin and lack the expression of space and structure.

Therefore, I introduced a new method in space design, inspired by the use of “line” in Chiharu Shiota’s *The Key in the Hand*, and transformed the relationship between images into spatial structure. Specifically, we put the paired images on the walls on both sides of the exhibition hall and connect them with red lines, which form a network structure in space. This structure, composed of lines, not only connects images but also symbolizes the relationship between members, making the exhibition space itself a “shell” and reflecting the temporary ownership of the collective in different places.

This change from “image display” to “spatial structure” is one of the most critical method adjustments in this project. It makes the exhibition no longer just present the content, but generate meaning through the structure itself. At the same time, this process also made me realize that curation is not only a concept expression, but also how to concretize the relationship into a perceptible form.

At the same time, the collaborative process itself has also brought new critical understanding. Group decision-making needs constant consultation; the ideas of different members are not always completely

unified, and some concepts are weakened or adjusted in the discussion. This made me realize that collective curation is not an idealized equal cooperation, but a process involving compromise and power distribution. As Jean-Paul Martinon emphasized, curation is always an ethical practice, and its core lies in how to take responsibility in the relationship and deal with differences (Martinon 2020). Compared with the strong control in individual projects, I need to constantly adjust my role in the collective, from leading to negotiation.

In addition, my experience in designing exhibition posters and brochures in the group also made me realize the importance of publications in curation. These visual and textual materials are not only auxiliary information, but also directly affect how the audience understands the exhibition content. This experience was subsequently introduced into my personal project to make it more complete in audience communication.

Conclusion

The reflection of this project shows that curatorial practice is not only an exploration of concepts and forms, but also always embedded in a wider industry structure. From personal experience, the process of curating from “content presentation” to “meaning generation” is deeply influenced by the allocation of funds, the accessibility of resources and institutional conditions. For example, the adjustment of artist selection not only stems from theoretical reflection but also is directly limited by budget and execution conditions, which reveals the close relationship between curatorial judgment and realistic structure.

At the same time, audience positioning is no longer an abstract

setting, but a practical issue that needs constant consultation between cultural differences and accessibility. In the contemporary context of curation, with the increase of cooperative modes and the development of barrier-free practice, curation has gradually changed from author-centered expression to a process of generating meaning in multi-party relations. Therefore, this study not only reflects the change of personal methods, but also points to the overall trend of contemporary curatorial continuous adjustment between system, audience and production conditions.

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Project Summary

written by Luosijie Ding | 19 April 2026



1) Project Title, Time, Description of the Lead Image

Project title: When Animals Speak the Language of Power

Time and duration: 11 June – 18 June 2026, open to the public)

Lead Image:

The main drawing of this project selects the image fragment form in the artist Eryao's work "Wishing Your Child Becomes a Dragon": the dragon spliced by shadow puppetry materials keeps breaking, recombining, and moving in the picture. Its body presents an unstable and mechanical repetitive state, which not only retains the visual characteristics of traditional movies, but also transforms into the time structure in dynamic images. This circular and non-starting movement makes myth no longer exist as a fixed narrative, but as a power structure that is constantly copied and internalized in contemporary society.

2) Curating Narrative Texts

There is a moment, perhaps too small to notice, let a story stops being just a story.

This exhibition begins from such a moment.

A dragon that never quite stabilises. A constellation brought down to the ground. Microscopic life imagined as gods.

Rather than approaching mythical animals as cultural heritage or visual symbols, this exhibition considers how they continue to operate as invisible structures that shape perception, behaviour, and belief in contemporary society.

Drawing on Roland Barthes¹ ' understanding of myth as a system of communication, the exhibition takes the phrase "wishing your child becomes a dragon" as its point of departure.

Here, the dragon is no longer simply an image of success or authority, but a social mechanism— that is repeated across generations, shaping how identity, body, and future are understood.

Focusing on the stop-motion animation and installations of Eryao, the exhibition shifts myth from something to be observed into something to be experienced.

From touchable shadow-puppet materials to a gradually narrowing corridor, and finally into a looping black box space, the audience moves through a sequence where images repeat, fragment, and reassemble.

Rather than presenting tradition as something complete or fixed, this exhibition invites you to encounter it as something in motion—fragmented, reassembled, and lived in the present.

Myth, here, is not retold. It unfolds over time.

This temporal structure echoes Erika Balsom²'s idea of the exhibition

as a time-based form, where meaning emerges through duration, repetition, and movement.

As you move through the space, light shifts, images repeat, and time loops without a clear beginning or end.

You may enter at any point. You may leave without resolution.

If these animals seem unfamiliar, stay with them.

If they feel strangely close, stay a little longer.

The exhibition does not offer a conclusion, but an invitation: Are the myths we inherit still shaping how we imagine success—and how we imagine ourselves?

Perhaps somewhere in between, something begins to speak.

3) Artists and Works

• Eryao

Eryao is a young contemporary artist who pays attention to traditional media; her works often combine traditional materials with contemporary social issues. By reconstructing the traditional narrative, she transformed the myth into a contemporary expression about identity, family and social pressure.

The work reveals how the cultural expectation of “success” is repeatedly given a new context in the family structure through the continuously spliced and broken dragon-shaped images.

• Kiki Smith

Kiki Smith is an American contemporary artist. She has long been concerned about the relationship between body, nature and universe,

and her works span sculptures, paintings and installations.

Placing the stars idling on the ground makes the audience overlook the “universe” and reveals that human beings construct cognitive order through naming and classification.

• Raeyen Song

Raeyen Song’s practice pays attention to the ecosystem and micro-life, and constructs dynamic devices through organic materials and ceramics.

Take microorganisms as “gods”, construct a myth system of non-human scale, and show that power is generated as a relationship network.

The publications and archives in this project are presented as part of the exhibition structure, not as supplementary materials. Its contents include curatorial texts, summaries of interviews with artists, excerpts of mythological research documents and image materials, which form a “research interface” for reading and staying.

The exhibition will combine Chinese and Western theoretical frameworks, such as Roland Barthes’ exposition on “myth as a symbolic system” and Yuan Ke, Mao Dun and Ye Shuxian’s research on China’s mythological structure, and at the same time, it will be interspersed with North Island poems as a linguistic response.

These materials are presented in the form of pages, excerpts and images, so that the audience can not only watch the works, but also

enter the knowledge and narrative process generated by them.

4) Space and Location

Venue: Summer Hall Sciennes Gallery (including black box)

Spatial structure:

- The installation works of Kiki Smith and Waeyen Song are placed in **the right half**.
- A big glass showcase is placed between the two huge windows at **the junction of the left and right halves** to display relevant books and materials.
- **The left half** is a three-stage path:
 1. *Spot A (entrance)*: It is a natural light environment, how the shadow play dragon installation and text, the audience can touch and interact → “readable tradition”
 2. *Corridor (transition area)*: It is with fading light. Single-frequency images are projected to the ground, and there are related words and sentences on the wall. As we get farther and farther away from the window, the natural light becomes less and less, so the space feels compressed. → “myth in generation”
 3. *Spot B (black box)*: The stop-motion animation is played in a loop, and there is no clear beginning. The audience can watch from any frame at any time, which is very similar to the structure of myth.

The whole space adopts a semi-black box: combining natural light with artificial light, emphasizing time change.

5) Public Programme

1. Artist Talk

Theme: Contemporary Translation of Traditional Myths

Time: Day 2 of Opening Week, 60 minutes.

Venue: Summerhall Red Lecture Theatre

Target audience: Art students and the public.

Content: Artist Eryao shares movies and fairy tales, and discusses the cross-cultural context with the audience.

Person in charge: co-chaired by the artist and the curator.

2. Shadow Play Workshop

Theme: Body experience of light and shadow.

Time: 90 minutes on the weekend of the second week of the extension.

Venue: Summer Hall Anatomy Lecture Theatre

Target audience: family, children, and the public

Content: Participants make and operate movie devices and experience the relationship between “manipulation” and narration.

Person in charge: Artist Eryao leads and the curator assists.

3. Reading Seminar

Theme: myth and curatorial theory

Time: the third week of the exhibition, 60 minutes.

Venue: Summerhall Deans Office

Target audience: researchers (8 people)

Content: Discuss Barthes and other texts, and explore myth as a curatorial method.

Person in charge: hosted by the curator.

Note: the artist's remuneration and venue fees will be listed in detail in the budget part, so I won't repeat them here.

6) Curatorial Rationale

This project adopts the curatorial method of interdisciplinary and field response, and understands "myth" as a continuous cultural mechanism rather than a static narrative structure. Based on Roland Barthes³ ' mythological semiotics and the study of China's mythology, the exhibition transforms "Dragon" from a traditional cultural symbol into a structural framework for analyzing power, identity and social expectations.

The curatorial practice is based on the space conditions of Summerhall. It has the structure of a black box environment and natural light intervention, so that the exhibition can generate a temporal viewing experience between "controllable" and "uncontrollable".

The audience experiences the process of myth generation while moving, rather than passively accepting the established narrative. Image circulation and nonlinear time structure strengthen the social mechanism of "expected repetition."

This project transforms the curatorial process itself into one of the exhibition contents⁴, makes the knowledge production process visible through archives display and publications, and constructs a multi-

level understanding path. Public projects (lectures, workshops and reading groups) further transform the audience from viewers to participants, and jointly generate meaning in discussion and practice.

On the ethical level, by introducing the research framework of local myths in China, the exhibition avoids a single interpretation of other cultures with Western theories. At the same time, responding to the cognitive differences of different audiences through multilingual texts, audio descriptions and Easy Read materials, and transforming “accessibility” from a technical supplement to a part of curatorial methods⁵ ⁶. The project thus formed an open, critical and socially responsive curatorial practice.

7) Basic Budget

Expenditure

Item	Amount (£)
Venue hire (7 days per £200, Summerhall) https://www.summerhallarts.co.uk/hire/	1400
Artist fees (3 artists per £1436, based on Scottish Artists Union rates) https://www.artistsunion.scot/recommended-rates-pay-rop	4308
Artist travel and accommodation	900
Artwork transport and logistics (packing, shipping, local handling)	500
Installation costs (materials + technical support)	500
Equipment hire (projection/lighting)	venue support
Invigilation staff (2 staff × 7 days × £100)	1400
Publicity (printing, posters, etc.)	200
Publication (booklet, printed materials)	300

Public programme (workshops + talks)	300
Sub-total	9808
Contingency	192
TOTAL	£10,000

Income

Item	Amount (£)
Creative Scotland Open Fund	4000
City of Edinburgh Council Community Grant	3000
University support (cash or in-kind)	1500
Partner support (in-kind contribution)	1000
Fundraising	500
TOTAL	£10,000

The budget of this project is set within 10,000 yuan, taking into account industry standards, curatorial ethics and practical feasibility.

The artist fee is calculated according to the suggested standard of the Scottish Artists Union. Although the three artists have different experiences (Eryao is less than five years, and the other two have more than five years), they are paid according to a higher standard to avoid hierarchical differences based on seniority or curatorial importance and embody the principle of fair remuneration.

The exhibition is located in Summerhall and arranged in June (during the non-art festival), which effectively reduces the venue cost and is

more in line with the immersive viewing environment required by the project. The budget includes the transportation cost of the works (about 500 yuan), which is used for packaging, transportation and local handling to ensure the safety and realization of the devices and video works.

In-kind support is provided by the site to reduce the expenditure pressure. Other expenses, such as installation, personnel, publicity and public projects, ensure the smooth implementation of the exhibition and promote audience participation. The income is mainly funded by Creative Scotland and the City of Edinburgh Council, and the amount is set within a reasonable range. The overall budget structure is clear and enforceable, and includes reserve funds to deal with uncertain expenditures.

8) Publications

In this exhibition, publications are regarded as an extension of curatorial practice, not as an ancillary achievement⁷. Before entering the exhibition, the audience will get a guidebook as an entrance to help them understand the space and its conceptual structure. The manual is available in both standard and large formats to respond to the reading needs and accessibility of different audiences. Its contents include the exhibition plan, the location of the works and three kinds of “power structure” labels corresponding to the three core works, and are accompanied by curatorial texts, artist introductions, works images and public project information.

On this basis, the exhibition further developed a series of extended publications with the concept of “portable exhibition”, including postcards, bookmarks and related souvenirs derived from the images of the works, combined with curatorial texts, interviews with artists and excerpts from myth research. These materials enable the exhibition to continue outside the space, so that the audience can re-enter its narrative and thinking path after leaving the exhibition hall, thus

transforming curation into a continuous process of cultural communication.

Summary

When Animals Speak The Language of Power is a contemporary curatorial project with mythical animals as the breakthrough point, aiming to explore how mythology can continue to operate in contemporary society and shape individual identity cognition and social expectation as a hidden power mechanism.

The curatorial logic of the project gradually deepened: from “the translation of traditional media” to “myth as a structure” and finally implemented as an immersive image plus space curatorial project with “how mythical animals operate as a power mechanism” as the core. Under this framework, myth is no longer regarded as a static cultural heritage, but is understood as a system that continuously generates meaning.

Focusing on the puppets and stop-motion animation works of contemporary artist Eryao, the exhibition transforms “dragon” into an expectation mechanism that is constantly copied in the family and social structure through the cultural context of “looking forward to success”. At the same time, the works of Kiki Smith and Raeyen Song are introduced to build a multi-level power network that spans human and non-human scales, from body cognition, ecological relationships, to micro-generation.

On the spatial level, the project relies on the Sciennes Gallery in

Summerhall to construct a temporal path consisting of natural light, a transitional corridor and a black box space. The audience enters from the touchable traditional materials, gradually experiences the process of image generation, and finally finds themselves in a circular image without a starting point, thus transforming the myth from “the observed object” to “the experienced structure”.

In addition, the project will expand the exhibition into an open knowledge production platform through file display, publications and public projects (lectures, workshops and reading groups), so that the audience will change from passive viewers to participants.

On the ethical and methodological level, the project emphasizes the responsibility of curation in the cross-cultural context and avoids cultural simplification and single interpretation by combining Western critical theory with Chinese myth research. At the same time, through multilingual texts, Easy Read materials and multi-sensory paths, “accessibility” is transformed from an auxiliary strategy into a part of the curatorial structure.

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² Erika Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013).

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⁴ Paul O’Neill and Mick Wilson, “Curatorial Counter-Rhetorics and the Educational Turn,” *Journal of Visual Art Practice* 9, no. 2 (2010):

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⁵ Jean-Paul Martinon, *Curating as Ethics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020).

⁶ Maura Reilly, *Curatorial Activism* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2018).

⁷ Carolee Thea, *On Curating* (New York: D.A.P., 2009).

Art Works

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Metropolitan Museum of Art. “Sleeping Beauties.”

Summerhall. “Sciennes Gallery.”

Zhejiang Provincial Museum. “Shadow Puppets.”

Cincinnati Art Museum. “Accessibility & Audio Tours.”

Henry Moore Foundation. “Beyond the Visual.”

Disability Arts Online. “Dis_place Exhibition.”

REF Impact Case Studies.

Exhibitions Referenced in Developing *When Animals Speak the Language of Power*

Woven Histories: Textiles and Modern Abstraction – MoMA

Sleeping Beauties: Reawakening Fashion – The Met

The Children Are Now – Talbot Rice Gallery

The Dead Don't Go Until We Do – Talbot Rice Gallery

Disappearance at Sea: Mare Nostrum – Baltic Centre

Our Shell Exhibition Project – JIJU Collective

Beyond the Visual – Henry Moore Foundation

Dis_place Online Exhibition – Disability Arts Online

Week 13 | Beyond Accessibility: Towards Anti-ableist Curatorial Practice

written by Luosijie Ding | 19 April 2026



From Accessibility Strategy to Curator Ethics

In my curatorial thinking of *When Animals Speak the Language of Power*, I began to pay attention to “who can enter this public space”. In view of the repulsion caused by the extensive use of black box space, low-light environment, and image devices in the exhibition, I put forward a series of accessibility strategies, such as providing clear wall

texts and multilingual descriptions, designing portable printed materials, introducing Braille and audio descriptions, and setting up safe moving lines in the space.

link: [Braille & Tactile Tours in Cincinnati Art Museum](#)

link: [Exhibition Beyond the Visual](#)

At the same time, through the text and archival materials, it provides an understanding entrance for the audience who are not familiar with the cultural context of China. These practices respond to the key question in Week 3 curatorial ethics. However, the thinking at this stage still acquiesces that the exhibition structure itself is stable and regards “accessibility” as a supplement attached to it.

link: [Week 3 | Audience in curatorial ethics](#)

From accessibility to anti-ableist

In thinking about “anti-ableist”, as Fazeli, Taraneh, and Cannach MacBride put forward in *Means Without Ends*, “accessibility-centred practice” is not to repair the existing structure but to “learn to live in other ways” through practice. This means that accessibility is not a technical supplement but a method that can reorganise the relationship between experience and society.

Dis_place, an online exhibition of Disability Arts Online, does not focus on a single viewing experience but organises content around multiple perceptual ways. Among them, “Easy Read” text does not simply reduce the difficulty but reorganises the information by simplifying

sentence patterns, reducing terms, and combining images so that it can be understood under different cognitive conditions. This process urges curators to rethink what “necessary information” is, and to shift curators from content production to the redistribution of knowledge structure and understanding rights.

[link: I need to be more than a lesson you learned, the first exhibition for Disability Arts Online's online gallery, Dis_place](#)

Back to my exhibition plan, I began to adjust the way of curation: on the one hand, I optimised the spatial path; on the other hand, I established multiple access paths through publications, archives, and Easy Read texts so that the audience could participate without relying on a single sense.

Curation is not only about how to be watched, but also about how to be involved in many ways. Anti-ableist practice does not deny visual experience but refuses to take it as the only standard; accessibility should not only make people adapt to the exhibition but also make the exhibition adapt to different ways of existence.

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Fazeli, Taraneh, and Cannach MacBride. “Means Without Ends: Learning

How to Live Otherwise Through Access-centered Practice.” In *As for Protocols*, edited by Re’al Christian, Carin Kuoni, and Eriola Pira, 120–146. Amherst, MA: Amherst College Press, 2025.

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Week 12 | Beyond the Exhibition: Archive, Publishing and the Circulation of Meaning

written by Luosijie Ding | 19 April 2026



Beyond the exhibition: from archives to publication

Continuing the idea of “curation is translation” in Week 1 and the generation of “public” in Week 11, this week I began to reinterpret “archives” as an integral part of the exhibition structure, rather than an after-the-fact record. In space, using display cases to present text fragments, mythological documents, sketches, and image fragments in the research process is not simply to “supplement

information” but to transform the curatorial process itself into visible content. The audience can not only face the finished works, but also see how the works are constructed and rewritten in different theoretical and cultural contexts.

[link: Week 1 | Translation of traditional media](#)

[link: Week 11 | Reflection on curation: the construction from “audience” to “public”](#)

More importantly, this kind of file display has changed the audience’s viewing path: they no longer just enter from the “finished work” but can stay in the “generation process”. This structure makes the exhibition shift from a single narrative to the superposition of multiple times, including both the historical time of myth, the process time of making works, and the audience’s current viewing time.

[link: About the Exhibition History project. MOMA](#)

If exhibitions are the spatial organisation of works, then publications are another “exhibition form” of ideas. They are not affiliated but parallel structures.

Publishing as a Curator: From Space to Circulation

When archives are converted into booklets, postcards or printed materials, exhibitions begin to “overflow” from space. These materials are not only souvenirs but also a kind of “portable exhibition”, so that the audience can continue to touch the narrative and concepts

after leaving the exhibition.

This transformation means that curation is no longer limited to one-off space events but becomes a continuous circulation process. As discussed by Louise O'Hare in relation to Nick Thurston, publishing is not simply a tool for explanation but a form of practice that actively produces and structures knowledge. Through publication, the structure, image logic, and cultural discussion of mythical animals in the exhibition have been re-coded and entered a new viewing situation.

For example, the archival practice of the Barbican Art Gallery Archive shows how exhibition history is constantly re-read and reorganised through literature. This kind of "reproduction" makes the exhibition no longer closed but a resource that can be constantly called.

[link: Barbican Art Gallery Archive](#)

Therefore, I began to understand the current project as a dual structure: on the one hand, it exists in the space of Summerhall; on the other hand, it also enters a wider cultural circulation through publications, texts, and images.

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Week 11 | Reflection on curation: the construction from "audience" to "public"

written by Luosijie Ding | 19 April 2026



After Kirsteen's lecture on "Public and Public Programmes" this week, I began to re-examine the essence of the exhibition. It is not only a spatial structure but also an open platform jointly shaped by the public. As mentioned in the lecture, the public is not the audience that passively receives information but should be regarded as "the aggregate of practice, project, and output".

I realised that curating should break the hierarchical structure of traditional museums. Lectures and dialogues should not only be accessories of exhibitions but also the core of meaning generation. I decided to transform the public from an "observer" to a constituent advocated by MIMA and actively build an audience through participatory planning. According to the theme of this exhibition, I have planned the following three public projects, aiming at transforming Summerhall into a dynamic social and academic platform.

link: [week10□Starting from “Our Shell”: Practice Record of JIJU Collective Exhibition \(mentioned Visibility dilemma: Beyond the structural limitations of propaganda\)](#)

link: [MIMA ART](#)

link: [Rethinking Curatorial Practice and the Role of Museums through Art in Action](#)

The Dialogue between Artists and The Traditional Narrative in the Contemporary Context

Discuss the transformation of traditional myths in contemporary art with artist Eryao, focusing on critical dialogue. For art students, researchers, and contemporary art lovers.

It is recommended to be located in the Red Lecture Theatre in Summerhall.

The Shadow Puppet Workshop of “Light and Shadow Beasts”

Combined with material experiments and performances, participants personally made and operated shadow puppets to experience the vitality of intangible culture. Facing children, families, and interdisciplinary art lovers.

Suitable for the Anatomy Lecture Theatre in Summerhall.

A Reading Seminar on “Myth and Curation”

60 minutes of in-depth discussion based on selected literature, breaking the authoritative narrative. It is for a small professional group (8 people) that is interested in theoretical and cultural research.

It is suitable to be held in the Deans Office in Summerhall.

link: [Summerhall's Space hire](#)

Using the social logic in Helmsdale mentioned by Kirsteen for reference, the curator's subjectivity can be generated on the spot in the dialogue through knowledge exchange in the informal space.

link: [Timespan - Helmsdale](#)

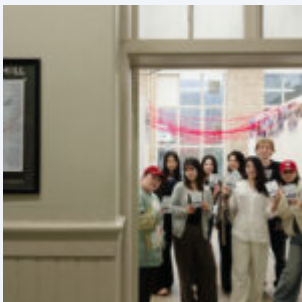
By prioritizing public programmes, I aimed to practice what Stefan Grammel describes as an ‘open’ curatorial form that does not ‘attempt to establish a definitive, closed-off, master narrative’. This approach acknowledges that the audience’s experience is ‘generated on the spot’ and is a product of the specific social situation rather than a pre-determined outcome. These projects not only expand the boundaries of the exhibition but also transform the ‘mythic animal’ from a mere visual encounter into a site of deep social connection, where meaning is co-produced through the active participation of diverse publics.”

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Week 10 | Starting from "Our Shell": Practice Record of JIJU Collective Exhibition

written by Luosijie Ding | 19 April 2026



Curatorial experiment and materialization of

identity

“Our Shell” is designed by JIJU Collective, which is not only a curatorial experiment but also a deep reflection on identity, belonging, and spatial adaptability. Using the metaphor of “hermit crab”, the exhibition discusses how overseas individuals construct temporary living spaces.

In this process, I acted as a curator for the exhibition *Our Shell* while simultaneously serving as the lead designer and a featured artist. I was responsible for the project’s visual identity—designing the posters, booklets, and exhibition signage—as well as the conceptual form and content of the primary installations. As an artist, I contributed my lacquer painting series FINDING MYSELF · LUCKY OCCASIONS COME IN RAPID SUCCESSION, bridging the gap between the exhibition’s curation and its creative execution.” This practice deepened my exploration in week 7, from focusing on “popularity” to excavating “core characteristics of works” and giving priority to cooperating with emerging practitioners. In *Our Shell*, meaning no longer depends on ready-made fame but is constructed through collaborative experiments.

link: [week6| Mythical Animals and Power Structures \(the design about the red line\)](#)

link: [week7| From research to situated feasible exhibition structure](#)

Visibility dilemma: Beyond the structural limitations of propaganda

In reflection, the limitation of audience number should not only be attributed to insufficient publicity but should also be regarded as a

structural dilemma of visibility. As a student curator as well as one of the JIJU Collective's members, I operate outside the established framework.

Due to the lack of institutional resources, the audience is mainly limited by personal social networks, and the vast majority of the audience are classmates and friends of JIJU Collective. This proves that visibility is not only determined by the subjective efforts of the curator but also strictly restricted by the resource allocation and platform inclusiveness in the art system.

This lack of visibility directly points to the initiative of an emerging curator. Although I can produce knowledge independently, I have limited rights to speak in mature systems, so it is difficult to decide who will see the exhibition, and it is even more difficult to enter the official institutional system. However, this inequality of power has stimulated productive tensions. As Wilson and O'Neill discussed the "curatorial turn", JIJU Collective's project is not on the edge but actively "feeding" the curatorial ecology. Through the lack of experimental energy in mainstream institutions due to inertia, we have produced a new method of exhibition production. Drawing lessons from Alistair Hudson, this practice-based exploration challenges the top-down authoritative logic.

As an emerging curator, I have contradictory conditions. I am not only doing the exhibition but also challenging the knowledge production and circulation system of contemporary curators through practice. Although "Our Shell" is temporary, it proves that in the gap of the mainstream system, new curatorial methods can still continue to grow through experimental collaboration.

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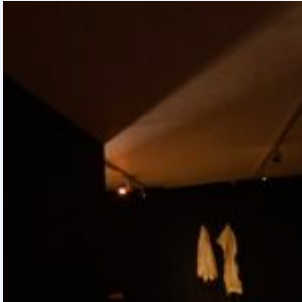
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Week 9 | Light, Space and Control

written by Luosijie Ding | 19 April 2026



Black box as a method