

Week6-From the Individual to the Collective: Reconstructing Curatorial Approaches at Summerhall

During this week's group discussion at Summerhall, my project underwent a structural adjustment. Previously, I had used the narrative framework of "maiden-mother-crone" to explore the social issues women face at different stages of life. However, group members pointed out that while the structural logic was clear, there was a lack of continuity between the issues, and the connection to "witches" was not strong enough. This feedback prompted me to reflect on how to make the theme more focused and how to transform the three-stage structure into a critical curatorial tool.

After reading *Curating as Feminist Organizing*, edited by Krasny and Perry (2023, p. 4), I realized that feminist curating does not simply revolve around "women's themes," but rather expresses political stances through forms of collaboration and collective action. They (2023, p. 223) emphasize that curating as feminist organizing implies that the process of knowledge production itself is inherently negotiated and relational. This made me realize that collective feedback is an integral part of the feminist approach: curatorial structures should emerge through dialogue rather than being unilaterally determined by the curator (Krasny and Perry, 2023, p. 238).

I have begun to rethink my current narrative framework. The three sections of my previous curatorial project were more

symbolic correspondences than a progression centered on a continuous theme. I should shift the project's focus to a more cohesive central issue: how social language has consistently disciplined and oppressed female identity. **Consequently, the three sections of the art exhibition are no longer thematically compartmentalized, but rather analyze how language operates at different stages of women's lives.**

This response also shifted the discussion toward intersectional feminism. Intersectional theory emphasizes that mechanisms of oppression manifest differently across various social positions; therefore, "women" cannot be represented by a single experience (Cho, Crenshaw and McCall, 2013, pp. 787–791). Through discussions within the collective, I realized that if the three-stage framework remained solely at the symbolic level, it would overlook the diversity among women and the complexity of social structures. By focusing on a single theme, I can more carefully consider differences stemming from diverse sociocultural backgrounds when selecting artists, rather than categorizing them solely by age group.

By incorporating collective feedback into my curatorial approach, this project has shifted from a personal concept to a more collaborative and critical framework. This shift has brought my art exhibition closer to the relational and structural thinking emphasized in feminist curation.



Group photo at
Summerhall

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Curatorial Pitch—Under the Witch Moon



[The final project differs significantly from the version presented in this curatorial pitch. The reasons for these changes are discussed in the later blog posts and critical reflection.]

My exhibition Under the Witch Moon centers on the theme of “witches,” using the iconic Triple Goddess symbol from Wicca and feminist mysticism as its narrative framework. I aim to weave together a female narrative that transcends time and space.

Triple Goddess: From left to right are the three phases of the moon: waxing, full, and waning. They also represent the three stages of womanhood: Maiden, Mother, and Crone. This symbolizes the past, present, and future



Triple Goddess symbol

This art exhibition begins with the imagery of the Triple Goddess, offering a retrospective on the historical fate of witches. It explores how Scotland's historical witch trials and persecution of women have permeated contemporary society, and how contemporary female artists respond to this legacy.

Moon worship is deeply ingrained among witches. To my mind, the moon's waxing and waning cycles symbolize the perpetual renewal of the female cycle and the enduring energy of life. This exhibition centers on linking the temporal and spatial symbolism of the Triple Goddess to the witch's destiny. Each lunar phase corresponds to a temporal and spatial slice in the witch's journey, mirroring the persecution and resistance women have endured at different stages of their lives.

The narrative begins with the waxing moon, symbolizing the Maiden. The featured artwork is Petra Collins' *24 HOUR PSYCHO*. This piece captures the sorrow and emotional turmoil experienced by young women. The author of *The Madwoman in the Attic* observes that within patriarchal narratives, women who fail to conform to the 'angelic' ideal are often confined to the attic, becoming 'madwomen'. This piece visualizes the sorrow and breakdown of a young girl, aligning with the theme of my exhibition space. It responds to the emotional predicament and counter-resistance of young women.



Petra Collins, Untitled #19 (24 Hour Psycho) Digital C-print. 65 x 43 inches. Edition of 2.

The full moon symbolizes the mother archetype. The featured work here is Jesse Jones' *Tremble Tremble*. This piece not only revisits the historical witch hunts but also addresses contemporary challenges faced by women, such as the denial of abortion rights, the undervaluing of domestic labor, and the lack of bodily autonomy. It reflects the real-life circumstances of women in motherhood and extends the power of "motherhood" from the individual to the collective.



Jesse Jones, Tremble Tremble, 2018, Project Arts Centre, L-R Susan Stenger (Sound Design and Composition), Jesse Jones (Artist), Cian O'Brien (Artistic Director, Project Arts Centre) and Tessa Giblin (Commissioner and Curator), photo by Photocall Ireland

The waning moon corresponds to The Crone. I selected Sarah Lucas's WINTER SONG, an artist I discovered through the Big Women exhibition. This showcase of midlife and older female artists resonates deeply with my curatorial vision. I aim to present women navigating the passage of time—bearing the traces of past oppression yet possessing an undeniable resilience.



Sarah Lucas, WINTER SONG, 2020, tights, wire, wool, spring clamps, shoes, acrylic paint, wooden chair, image courtesy of Sadie Coles HQ, London, © the artist, photograph: Robert Glowacki.

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Week 5-From historical witch hunts to digital landscapes: How contemporary media are reshaping the image of witches.

This week's class, themed "Media & Time," explored the "post-medium condition" of contemporary art. This reminds me of my solo exhibition on witches, where "witch" has become a highly glamorous consumer symbol in contemporary popular culture (Preston, 2018, pp. 150–159). From *Harry Potter* and *Maleficent* to *Agatha All Along*, and its entertainment-oriented settings in various games, witches seem to have shed the shadows of history.

However, this idealized image is vastly different from the brutal witch hunts of history.

Historically, witch hunts were bloody purges of women's bodies, knowledge, and economic autonomy (Federici, 2021, pp. 190-197). Contemporary film seems to have dissolved it into a harmless form of entertainment.

When these painful histories are transformed into high-definition digital consumer products, are we forgetting this history?

Are we erasing the radicalism of witches as rebels in history?

Through my literature review this week, I discovered a clash of viewpoints.

Jacob King argues that the UbuWeb makes fringe and avant-garde art accessible through digital distribution (King and Simon, 2014, p. 1). To some extent, digitization has allowed the marginalized image of witches to spread globally, drawing more attention to the issue. Scholar Silvia Bovenschen argues that the contemporary reinterpretation of witches, even with its entertainment value, is essentially a reclaiming of discursive power (1978, pp. 83-88). Bovenschen points out that the return of witches represents women no longer fearing the stigma imposed by patriarchal society, but instead transforming this identity into a tool for self-identification (1978, pp. 86-87). From this perspective, digital communication appears to be a liberation of women's power.

However, Chrissie Iles argues that the eyes and brains of the new generation are completely "mediated by technology," and that the oversaturation of images and the commercialized environment control our visual experience (Balsom et al., 2013, p. 4). In my view, this is a "digital witch hunt," where visual manipulation influences people's cognition, and the rebellious, authentic image of the witch is diluted by algorithms and entertainment.

Therefore, in my exhibition, I not only want to present the image of the female witch, but also to break down people's stereotypes about her. This is why I greatly admire Jesse Jones's *Tremble Tremble*, which uses a fusion of visual and auditory elements to reveal the buried history of witch hunts and the political significance of witches themselves. This work is massive and chilling, yet powerful, making it impossible to ignore the trauma and resistance of women.



Jesse Jones, *Tremble Tremble*, 2018, Installation view, Project Arts Centre, photo by Ros Kavanagh

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Week4 - Curating the Archive: Writing the Witch, Rewriting Women

My speculative curatorial project focuses on witchcraft and the persecution of women, a theme that bridges historical violence with contemporary struggles. Witch hunts were physical, being defined by records of trials and pamphlets that created the image of women as threats (Warburton, 2003, pp.97-110). The editing of these pieces will help me show that writing was created as an instrument of persecution, and that, through the lens of present-day art, it is possible to reinterpret these histories.

According to Louise O'Hare's account, Nick Thurston writes that writing is performative and is found as a material in artistic practice (O'Hare, 2012). This implies that documents on witch-hunts are not only historical artifacts to be curated but also aesthetic objects. In contrast, the *Collected Writings* by Bell and King emphasize the curator's power of editorial shaping (Preston, 2013, pp. 26-27). This dialogue raises a crucial curatorial question: Does meaning reside within the documents themselves, or is it constructed through curatorial mediation? This exchange guides my practice. By contrasting the original texts of witch-hunting with feminist reinterpretations, one can find out how the framing influenced the persecution of women.

This is reinforced by recent scholarship. Federici (2018) states that the witch hunts belonged to the mechanism of patriarchal repression, which associates witch hunts with current gendered violence. Yadav (2020) demonstrates that the problem of witch-hunting lives in India, which is associated with land claims and caste relationships. These works make my project go beyond Europe by making witchcraft persecution a global and current problem.

The criticism of interpretation, as delivered by Susan Sontag, encourages me to foreground the affective experience in interpretation rather than the reduction of meaning (Sontag, 1966, p. 7). This has challenged me to select materials that provoke fear, stigma, and resilience without collapsing them into a single story. Didion reminds us that writing is always political, obliging me to recognize my personal curatorial voice, informed by feminist issues of agency and justice (Didion, 1976).

My project has been enhanced through a comparative analysis of classic and current literature, which has led me to identify writing as a persecutory apparatus, a persuasive tool in the past, and a curative apparatus in modern times.

This will be followed by me trying to merge the witch-hunt texts with the reclaiming female artworks to establish a conversation between the historical silencing effects and the contemporary opposition. I plan to display archival documents from historical witch trials within my exhibition space. Opposite these documents, I intend to arrange contemporary feminist literary works such as *Invisible Women* (Criado-Perez, 2019) and *How to Suppress Women's Writing* (Russ, 1984).

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Week3-Distractions Beyond the Frame: The Game Between Art and Money



Recently I visited The Atelier gallery's latest featured exhibition—*Transient Moments: The City, The Sky, and the Space Between*. As I viewed the artwork, the price tag beside it immediately disrupted my experience. I was jarred out of my

appreciation of the painting and instinctively began judging whether the piece was worth the price listed.



Fee Dickson Reid, *Iridescent*,
76 × 76 cm. The Atelier
Gallery. Photograph by Anqi
Li, 31 January 2026.

This experience brought me to a theoretical crossroads. I encountered two distinct voices in the paper.

On the one hand, John A. Walker (1987, pp. 26–30) contends that works of art possess both a non-commodity cognitive dimension and commodity attributes, neither of which is mutually exclusive. Walker analyzed the commodity characteristics of artworks through Marx's "dual nature of commodities" in *Capital*, elucidating their use value and exchange value. From this perspective, the price tags beside artworks make their value transparent, acknowledging their commercial worth.

On the other hand, Stewart Martin (2007, pp. 15–25) presents a dialectical counterargument. Drawing on Adorno's theory, he critically contends that the autonomy of artworks is a product of capitalist commodity forms, yet the "uselessness" of artworks creates a contradiction with the logic of a commodity's exchange value. Martin believes that the core of "The Absolute Artwork" lies in its rejection of any practical function or utility value. Therefore, the price tag displayed beside the painting reveals the work's exchange value, thereby diminishing the artwork's autonomy to some degree.

In my view, I cannot resolutely endorse either side's perspective. Art exhibitions require market support, as financial revenue can reduce cost pressures. Yet curators must simultaneously uphold the integrity and critical nature of art.

When this question is applied to my curatorial project on "witches," it becomes particularly acute. Silvia Federici (2021, p.193) argues that the witch hunts were part of the process of capitalist primitive accumulation, with witches serving as victims oppressed by the capitalist system. Therefore, I don't want to see feminist artworks that depict female trauma become overly commercialized. However, if I completely disregard curatorial considerations and the commercial value of artworks, it could lead to the exhibition's costs spiraling out of control.

Therefore, I believe this is not simply a matter of "commercial versus non-commercial." As a curator, I need to explore a relatively balanced state that preserves the artistic value of the work while also considering its commercial value.

The eye-catching price tag made me realize how fragile this balance is. For my project, I currently cannot arrive at a definitive answer. But I recognize this is an issue worthy of attention, and I will continue to explore this topic in my future studies.

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Week1– Re-reading My Curatorial Practice Through SVAOs



After reading *Micro-Curating: The Role of SVAOs in the History of Exhibition-Making*, I began to rethink my previous curatorial practice. In the past, I often judged an exhibition by visitor numbers, online visibility, the number of artworks and overall scale. Because of this, I once felt that the two small exhibitions I organised in Shenzhen and Shaoxing were not successful enough. However, the discussion of SVAOs helped me understand that the value of small visual arts organisations is not only about scale. It also lies in how they create forms of viewing, participation and communication through flexible structures, collaboration and specific spaces.

The sex education exhibition I organised in Shenzhen in 2022 can be reconsidered as a small-scale and process-based curatorial practice. The exhibition did not have support from a large institution, but it brought together works by several artists and included interactive installations. These elements allowed visitors to engage with the body, sexuality, shame and sex education in a less pressured way. In the Chinese context, sexuality is still a sensitive public topic. Therefore, the value of this exhibition should not only be measured by visitor numbers. Its more important value was whether it created a relatively safe space where visitors could rethink bodily knowledge, intimacy and social norms through art.



Signage from the Shenzhen sex education exhibition I Asked Many People About You, 2022. Image courtesy of Maylove.



Group photograph of myself and other core

organisers of the Shenzhen sex education exhibition I Asked Many People About You, 2022.

In 2025, I organised another exhibition in a private bookstore in Shaoxing. This exhibition focused on female trauma. At first, I saw the bookstore space as a limitation because it was not a professional gallery. However, through the idea of SVAOs, I now understand this informal space differently. The bookstore had a smaller and more intimate scale. It allowed visitors to read, pause and spend more time with the works. For artworks dealing with female trauma, this space reduced the distance often created by institutional settings and made it easier for viewers to approach the artists' personal experiences.

This reflection also made me aware of the limits of small exhibitions. Intimate spaces are not automatically open, equal or effective. Without enough explanation, public communication or documentation, they may still limit audience understanding. My earlier projects had this problem. I focused on the exhibition atmosphere, but did not fully record audience responses, spatial decisions or curatorial choices.

Therefore, I no longer understand curation only as selecting artworks and organising exhibitions. I now see it as building relationships between artists, audiences, spaces and social issues. Through SVAOs, I realised that small-scale curating does not need to imitate large institutions. Its value lies in developing more flexible, ethical and community-connected curatorial methods.

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