

Course Code	HR2009
Course Title	Contemporary Curating
Pre-requisites	
No of AUs	3

Day : Tuesday 12 August
 Time : 01:30 to 4:20
 Venue : LHS-TR+31 (Hive)

Course Instructor: Iola Lenzi, PhD, SoH

Contact information: iola.lenzi@ntu.edu.sg

Course Aims

This course will introduce you to the basic precepts of contemporary curating. You will learn about the history of exhibitions, compare museum and independent curatorial approaches, and examine contexts/conditions specific to the curating of contemporary art, particularly in Singapore and the Southeast Asia region. This course is a foundation for further studies in curating practice and museum studies.

Intended Learning Outcomes (ILO)

By the end of the course, you should be able to:

1. Identify key issues in contemporary curating.
2. Write a basic exhibition proposal and author exhibition-related texts.
3. Apply exhibition-making concepts and display techniques to a practical curatorial project.
4. Present and discuss proposals, research relating to curating and exhibition-making, and finished projects, in a clear and cohesive manner.
5. Critique peers' and team-member's proposals and exhibition projects in a constructive manner.

Course Content

What is contemporary curating

You will learn about the different types of exhibitions, approaches to curating and the various roles involved in exhibition-making. You will be introduced to different types of spaces, institutional vs independent, white cube, site-specific, etc. There will be discussions of special issues such as art commissions, documentation, and use of archives.

History of Exhibitions

You will learn about how international curating and exhibition practices have changed over the decades, as impacted by trends such as globalisation and participatory art practices. Important case studies of contemporary art exhibitions will be highlighted and discussed.

Writing an Exhibition Proposal

You will learn about curatorial narratives, and how to write a basic exhibition proposal, including concept, budget, and timeline.

Writing about Art in an Exhibition Context

You will learn about various forms of art writing for exhibitions, from artwork labels to catalogue essays. You will be familiarised with the styles and formats through writing exercises.

Curating Practice

You will work in small teams to put up a mini exhibition. You will be introduced to the practical aspects and basic functions of exhibition organising and gallery management through this process.

Class assignments

Various presenting, writing, and curating assignments, including writing an exhibition review; drafting an exhibition proposal; designing an interview for an artist; organising an in-class mini exhibition with documentation. These will be developed through class exercises, discussions, presentations exercises and peer/instructor feedback sessions.

In this course, generative AI is generally not applicable or encouraged. Students who see a need to employ it should check with the instructor first and be specific about how and why it will be used. As stated above (point 1), proper citations are required per the selected style guide (MLA, Chicago, or APA). See the APA website on how ChatGPT should be cited: <https://apastyle.apa.org/blog/how-to-cite-chatgpt>

Assessment (includes both continuous and summative assessment)

Component	ILO Tested	Programme LO	Weighting	Team/
Individual:				
Continuous Assessment Art writing exercises such as writing a critical, reasoned Exhibition Review of 2500-3000 words, deconstructing and analysing an exhibition, or writing an exhibition proposal.	1,4	--	50%	Individual
Practical Project: Group project: curate a mini exhibition and provide a written dossier compiling project documentation (exhibition 15%; written dossier 15%)	2, 3, 4	--	30%	Team
Continuous Assessment: Participation	5	--	20%	Individual

Reference Bibliography (other texts may be assigned as class readings)

1. Altshuler, Bruce. *Salon to Biennial*. London; New York: Phaidon, 2008.
2. Altshuler, Bruce. *Biennials and Beyond*. London; New York: Phaidon, 2013.
3. Bennett, Tony. "The Exhibitionary Complex". In *Thinking about Exhibitions*, edited by Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, and Sandy Nairne, 58-80. London; New York: Routledge, 1996.
4. Bishop, Claire. *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*. London: Verso, 2012.
5. Bishop, Claire. "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics". *October*, Vol. 110 (Autumn 2004): 51-79.
6. Bourriaud, Nicolas. *Relational Aesthetics*. Dijon, France: Les Presses du Réel, 2002.
7. Ciric, Biljana (ed.). *From a History of Exhibitions Towards a Future of Exhibition-Making: China and Southeast Asia*. New York: Sternberg Press, 2020.
8. Flores, Patrick D. *Past Peripheral: Curation in Southeast Asia*. Singapore: NUS Museum, 2008.
9. Gardner, Anthony and Charles Green. *Biennials, Triennials, and Documenta: The Exhibitions That Created Contemporary Art*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2016.
10. Gardner, Anthony and Charles Green. "Mega-Exhibitions, New Publics, and Asian Art Biennials". In *Art in the Asia-Pacific: Intimate Publics*, edited by Larissa Hjorth, Natalie King, & Mami Kataoka, 23-36. New York; London: Routledge, 2014.
11. Greenberg, Reesa. *Thinking about Exhibitions*. London; New York: Routledge, 1996.
12. Ho, Oscar. "Under the Shadow: Problems in Museum Development in Asia". In *Contemporary Asian Art and Exhibitions: Connectivities and World-Making*, edited by Michelle Antoinette and Caroline Turner, 179-198. Canberra: ANU Press, 2014.
13. Ho, Oscar. "Curatorial Work as Collective Fabrication". In *InFlux Contemporary Art in Asia*, edited by Kavita Singh, Parul Dave Mukherji, Naman P. Ahuja, 225-231. London, LA, Singapore etc.: Sage Publications, 2013.
14. Hoffman, Jens. *Ten Fundamental Questions of Curating*, Milan, Italy: Mousse Publishing, 2013.
15. Hoffman, Jens. *The Next Documenta Should Be Curated by An Artist* (ed.). New York: e-Flux and Revolver, 2004.
16. Hou, Hanru and Hans-Ulrich Obrist (eds.). *Cities on the Move*, exhibition catalogue. Ostfildern-Ruit: Gerd Hatje, 1997.
17. Marincola, Paula. *What Makes a Great Exhibition?* Philadelphia, PA: Philadelphia Exhibitions Initiative, Philadelphia Center for Arts and Heritage, 2006.
18. Marstine, Janet, Oscar Ho, "Curating as a relational practice". In *Curating Art*, 1-6. London: Routledge, 2022.
19. Morin, France, Apinan Poshyananda, Mari Carmen Ramírez, Caroline Turner, Igor Zabel and Valerie Cassel. "Beyond Boundaries: Rethinking Contemporary Art Exhibitions". *Art Journal*, vol. 59 (1) (January 2000): 4-21.
20. Obrist, Hans-Ulrich. *A Brief History of Curating*. Zurich, Switzerland: JRP Ringier, 2008.
21. Poshyananda, Apinan. *Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions/Tensions*. New York: Asia Society Galleries, 1996.
22. Sabapathy, T. K. and Ahmad Mashadi. *Writing the modern: selected texts on art & art history in Singapore, Malaysia & Southeast Asia, 1973-2015*. 2018.
23. Steeds, Lucy, et al. *Making Art Global (Part 2): Magiciens de la Terre 1989*. London: Afterall Books, 2013. (Steeds, Lucy. "Magiciens de la Terre' and the Development of Transnational Project-Based Curating", 24-93).
24. Turner, Caroline. "Cultural Transformations in the Asia-Pacific: the Asia-Pacific Triennial and the Fukuoka Triennale Compared". In *Eye of the Beholder- Reception*,

Audience, and Practice of Modern Asian Art, edited by John Clark, T.K. Sabapathy, and Maurizio Peleggi, 221-243. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006.

Assigned readings will be provided from week to week on the class TEAMS page.

Weekly Schedule, Tuesdays 1:30-4:20*

*Subject to change according to public holidays and unforeseen circumstances.

Week 1 (12 August 2025)

Class 1: Introduction to contemporary curating (Tuesday 12 August 2025)

Course overview; teaching methodology; organisation and plan for the; the Asia/Southeast Asia focus of this course; how theory and practice are integrated in HR2009; student curating and writing projects, explanation of course assignments and written dossier.

Survey of historical development of exhibitions over centuries and implications for contemporary curating.

Class activity. Watching and analysing a video curation (2021) of early 1990s performances by two pioneer performance artists.

Class 2: Fundamental issues of contemporary curating

The emergence of the 'professional' curator, a heterogenous skill set: exhibition spaces (non-traditional; institutional, and so on); approaches to curating; different participants in exhibition-making; museum/gallery operations; audience & reception; cultural contexts; budgets, commercial & non-commercial; exhibition texts & support documents.

Exhibition case studies.

*Group work with instructor guidance: **Beginning to plan your mini-exhibition** by working together on an exhibition checklist: artworks and concept; curatorial writing, learning to write about and for exhibitions, proposals, reviews, curatorial essays, wall-texts; artist interviews. Mapping individual semester writing assignment.*

Class business: choosing field-trip exhibition.

Readings: See Teams under "Readings" & EXHIBITION CHECKLIST under "Class Materials". Checklists, class materials, and readings will be augmented in the course of semester.

Class 3: Roles of the contemporary curator: educator, mediator of context & ethics
specificities of curating Asian/SEA art; exhibitions and social engagement.

Case studies: Documenta 15 curated by Jakarta collective ruangrupa; The Philip Guston retrospective, Tate, London.

Group work with instructor guidance: work on your exhibitions, with focus on ethics in the Singapore context in relation to your selection of artworks, concept, audience. Considering discourse, exhibition support documents, and scholarly afterlife.

Class Business: fixing date for the field trip, visiting a Singapore exhibition.

Readings: See Teams under "Readings".

Class 4: Exhibition narrative and curatorial & exhibition typologies: thematic exhibitions; biennale models; art fair & commercial gallery curation.

Function and type of exhibitions; formats; themes, topics & issues; art genres; spectacle; curatorial and exhibitionary narrative; discourse; market; why some shows become 'canon'; context and audience (redux!)

Exhibition case studies: we will look at some real exhibition proposals on Teams for consultation.

Group work with instructor guidance: working on your exhibition proposal and beginning to think about exhibition writings by developing a questionnaire for participating artists.

Readings: See Teams under "Readings".

Class 5: The Artist Curator in Southeast Asia: art, the collective condition, collectives, and public space

Recalling the exhibition-building mantra; considering artist self-curation as the default; the place of collectives in SEA curatorial practice; curatorial utilization of public space, advantages and drawbacks.

Case studies of artist collectives and curatorial ambits, focus on Vertical Submarine, Singapore.

Home assignment: students to prepare interview questions for artist/curator who will give guest lecture in Week 6. This exercise is not graded, but is compulsory as a teaching opportunity for students who learn artist interview methods necessary for curating and curatorial writing.

Readings: See Teams under "Readings".

Class 6: The Artist-Curator: interactive session with an established regional artist/curator* on zoom, or live (16 September, 2025 or later date TBD) presenting on the topic:

The Artist-Curator in Southeast Asia: contemporary art and the collective condition

**past guests have included Dinh Q. Le, F.X. Harsono, Justin Loke of Vertical Submarine.*

Guest Speakers *slide-supported presentation of their artist-curated exhibitions, elucidating details of budget, production, topic choices, and so on in various institutional, cultural, and temporal contexts.*

Lecturer and Guest Speaker engage in discussion focused on teasing out methodologies of self-curation.

Students have prepared questions for speaker that Lecturer has pre-vetted. Session is interactive as students pose their questions and discussions ensue in participative Q & A format. Instructor may pose further questions for student learning benefit.

Readings: See Teams under "Readings".

Class 7: Building an Exhibition: commissioning new works, writing proposals

Deconstructing the commissioning of a new artwork and following its progress in collaboration with the artist. Considering space, budget, audience, context and so on.

How to write a proposal, methods, variations.

Commissioning case studies and a selection of proposal typologies will be examined.

Group work with instructor guidance: working on commissioned pieces for your mini-exhibitions; considering floor plans, physical space, sight-lines; working on proposals.

Readings: See Teams under "Readings".

Class 8: Visiting and deconstructing an exhibition: how to write a review as a teaching method for exhibition building (this class is conducted off-site, on a Saturday, at either Singapore Art Museum, National Gallery Singapore, or another, TBD, visited and deconstructed in a practical session with Lecturer).

Students must prepare this class with **Exhibition Analysis check-list on Teams (reviewed in class before the visit)**.

This class will provide a practical opportunity for students to learn how to analyse an exhibition and write a review. Deconstructing an exhibition is a central learning tool for acquiring skills for building exhibitions. Students may prepare a worksheet after the visit applying notions learned in class to the real exhibition.

Reading Week: individual consultations for semester projects and writing assignments. Students strongly recommended to provide outline for their individual written assignment for instructor feedback and guidance.

Class 9: Curating for audiences: Participative, Participatory, Relational Aesthetics, guerrilla action in public space, non-traditional spaces

Geographic/cultural variations and social norms; contexts and datelines; aesthetics of necessity VS aesthetics of novelty; aesthetics in the patrolled, controlled public space; focus on the Southeast Asian curatorial context after 1970.

Exhibition case studies.

Group work with instructor guidance: work on your exhibition and individual assignment.

Readings: See Teams under "Readings".

Class 10: Exhibition discourses and the curatorial text: The Art Historian-Curator and publishing for posterity

Concept, discourse objectives, art history, scholarship. Juggling exhibition and discourse needs.

Engagement & aesthetics; research shows & communicating art histories (which art histories?); communicating discourse issues; archival material; art or document?

Exhibition case studies.

Group work with instructor guidance: writing about and for exhibitions. Peer review and discussion, instructor comments for progressing with individual semester writing assignment.

Readings: See Teams under "Readings".

Class 11: Curating Asian and Southeast Asian art for global audiences

Questions of perspective; cultural translation; risk; institutional identity; private or public funding; using and abusing archival material.

Exhibition case studies.

Group work with instructor guidance & preparing the physical space for mini exhibitions.

Readings: See Teams under "Readings".

Class 12: Presentations of curatorial projects with peer feedback (4 November, 2025)

Class 13: Presentations of curatorial projects with peer feedback (11 November, 2025)

ASSESSED ASSIGNMENT DEADLINES:

Exhibition dossiers of all groups submitted a day after the last Tuesday of the semester, **11 November**; **individual written assignments** to be submitted at the end of week 14, **23 November, 2025.**

Provisional