

Letter to a young curator.

Pete Driessen/8/31/2016

Dear Aspiring Curator.

The following tips and professional advice may prove to be important for you to sustain a valid and exciting career in the glamorous field of contemporary art and museum curation.

Presentation:

Move away from the white cube.
Do not curate art fairs.
Do not curate/jury large biennials and triennials.
Do not island hop curation jobs.
Do not seek fame or fortune from curating for the man.

Education:

Do not go to Bard or Yale or Goldsmiths.
Do not learn about western art history.
Do not get a degree in Art History, Museum Studies, or Arts Criticism.
Be an independent continuous learner.

Employment:

No free (unpaid) internships at well endowed galleries or museums.
No free (unpaid) work/study at college galleries or university museums.
No free (unpaid) curatorial assistant jobs at commercial galleries or nonprofit institutions.
Politely ask the Director and the Chairman of the Board of Trustees for a living wage. Follow up in two weeks. If they haven't agreed quit.
Look to junk stores and thrift stores and music stores and used bookstores libraries and for ideas and income.

Presentation:

Do not over engage. Humans have a mind and let them use it.
Do not over educate. Humans have a mind and let them interpret.
Do not over entertain. Humans have a mind and let them entertain themselves.
Do not over market or over develop. No need to one up the other crappy museums.
Unfinished is okay and successful curation happens prior to opening day.

Spatiality:

Think beyond the white cube. White cubes are for republicans.
The blank walls are only a starting point. Do not use them if possible.
Keep didactics to a discreet minimum. Do not use "curated by."
Do not put the introductory slide show at the beginning.
Space is not perfect so don't treat it that way.
Straight lines and perspective doesn't exist.
Two-dimensional squares are for the anal-retentive.

Variables:

Don't print a big hardbound book with your show and name on it. Art show catalogs, art anthologies and museum coffee table books are rampant and the fragile worlds ecological resources are very limited. Your self-bragging can be done online.

Don't use Helvetica on everything.

Look to your childhood. The dolls, stamps, and baseball card collections begin your frame of reference. How did you decorate your bedroom walls? How did you secretly design your clothing dresser or your closet?

No Warhol's, Picasso's, Murakami's, Hirst's, Wei Wei's, or Koon's. Everyone has them.

No corporate gallery names. The curator and the museum/gallery are not for sale. No upper crust bribes. Treat everyone the same. Invite the custodians and urinal cleaners to the vernissage. Fuck the rich bitches.

Seek art, ideas and artists where other curators do not seek them.

Do not job hop from one gallery/museum to the next, and then show the same friends work over and over again.

Look to nature. Be quiet rather than loud. Everyone hates a pompous gallery and art market. The market is economics and economics is an art not a science. Know-it-all art scenes and populous art markets falsely dictate and jealously placate. Leave them behind.

Career:

Do not give a book tour. Instead, curate a curation tour.

Do not go on lecture circuit. Instead, re-circuit lectures from the lecture circuit in a new way.

Motel rooms are more interesting than the large convening conferences.

Do not join CAA, ADA, NADA, AHA, or AMA.

Do not accept the U.S. Presidential Medal for the Arts.

Ask direct questions of those in power.

Be generous and have gratitude.

Take a motorcycle trip to the Badlands.

Hope to see you soon!

With appreciation,

pete