

**TRANSCURATORIAL SOCIAL PRACTICE: DEFINING AN ON-GOING,
COMMUNITY-ROOTED EVOLUTION IN CONTEMPORARY CURATORIAL
PRACTICE**

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation proposes a new framework and term for understanding an emergence within contemporary curatorial practice in which practitioners are applying curatorial thought and approaches to lead on-going, community-rooted projects, initiatives, and organizations, extending beyond exhibition-making and other traditional curatorial modalities, and functioning as a methodology for creatively contributing to arts and cultural infrastructure through unique forms of access, connectivity, knowledge production, and support for creatives.

By conducting case studies and informal interviews with curators leading these sorts of efforts at different scales, this research will define this emerging mode of curatorial work, identify types of knowledge and community strengthening produced through these initiatives, as well as pinpoint approaches, methodologies, and philosophies essential to this work.

This research articulates a working typology for what I call *Transcuratorial Social Practice* (TSP). By framing the TSP as a conceptual framework, this research aims to illustrate this practice as a strategic, alternative model for cultivating more connected, human-centered arts ecosystems that contribute to arts and cultural infrastructures at different scales.

AI USE STATEMENT

For this dissertation, Google's Gemini Tool was used to transcribe the interviews conducted for the case studies. The transcriptions were checked against my own notes to ensure accuracy. Additionally, OpenAI's ChatGPT was used to proofread the section "ESTABLISHING TRANSCURATORIAL SOCIAL PRACTICE" and suggest synonyms for repeated words. The prompt used was: "Please proofread this section for typos and grammar as well as identify repeated words and suggest synonyms." All suggestions were reviewed and modified to ensure my voice was properly represented.

IMAGE LIST

Figure 1. Naoko Mabon (2023) ‘Dye tree with textile leaves from EcoCreative Cluster’

[Instagram]. 28 February 2023. Available at:

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CpMGbrcpIxq/> (Accessed: 10 October, 2025)

Figure 2. James, T. (2025) ‘Curator, Wells Fray-Smith giving the Brothers in Art (and their family and friends) a private tour of the Noah Davis retrospective exhibition at the Barbican’ [Photograph]

Figure 3. ArtNoir (2021) ‘Editorial interview and portrait of former resident in the Guide to the Meatpacking District document’ [Screenshot] Available at:

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5fbb3a400e7bd4508082099c/t/612abbe4a8c398243f752135/1630190570945/MTPK_TheGuide.pdf (Accessed 10 October, 2025)

Figure 4. Nyampeta, C. & Collaborators (2015) *How to Live Together – A Blackboard*.

[Mixed Media]

<https://theshowroom.org/projects/christian-nyampeta-how-to-live-together-a-blackboard>

(Accessed 10 October, 2025)

Figure 5. Black Blossom (2021) ‘Richard Rawlins (top left) teaching *Britain's Caribbean Artists Movement (1966 - 1972)* online while being joined by artist Errol Lloyd (bottom center) and Bolanle Tadu-gee’ [Screenshot] Available at:

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CUuleLDIFdF/> (Accessed 10 October, 2025)

Figure 6. Hardaway, D. (2023) *Lift As You Climb Symposium & Retreat, Cohort 1 recorded conversations* [Photograph]

Figure 7. Cadiz-Ferguson, E. (2025) *Small pieces created by Elan Cadiz-Ferguson while using the 3D paint pen* [Photograph]

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	2
AI USE STATEMENT	3
IMAGE LIST	4
TABLE OF CONTENTS	5
INTRODUCTION	6
POSITIONALITY STATEMENT	6
DEFINITION & RESEARCH QUESTIONS	8
LITERATURE REVIEW	10
METHODOLOGY	12
CASE STUDY #1: THE LOCAL	13
NAOKO MABON	14
IKENNA MALBERT	17
LISON MUSSET	21
LARRY OSSEI-MENSAH	24
LOUISE SHELLEY	28
BOLANLE TUJADEE	32
CASE STUDY #2: FROM LOCAL TO NATIONWIDE	36
LIFT AS YOU CLIMB SYMPOSIUM & RETREAT	37
ESTABLISHING TRANSCURATORIAL SOCIAL PRACTICE	45
CONCLUSION	52
BIBLIOGRAPHY	54

INTRODUCTION

Positionality Statement

I identify as a Black American man hailing from a middle-class household in the DMV (DC, Maryland, Virginia) area. Growing up, I was immersed in the beautifully mundane existence of Black communities in which economic empowerment, education, and a quiet yet ever-present diasporic pride formed the cultural backdrop of our everyday lives.

My interest in arts and culture is rooted in my upbringing in which I was surrounded by movers and shakers within the DMV's cultural fabric – from my cousin playing in a locally-famous Go-Go band – *Uncalled 4 Band* to playing basketball in the same world-renown system that led to the development of NBA players such as Kevin Durant and Quinn Cook to being enamored by local fashion brands such as All Daz and We R One worn by everyone from local celebrities to my friend's parents. This understanding of what shapes a particular cultural landscape helps me make sense of the world.

My career in the arts and cultural field has taken me to many unexpected places, where I've been inspired by how the work of others can shape, inform, and expand my own. This has framed the sort of questioning that guides my practice – What's the point of all this? How do we push our work further? How do we make it real for people outside of our 'bubble'?

I find Transcuratorial Social Practice (TSP) to be an important emerging practice within contemporary curatorial practice, because it helps me answer these questions. I've participated in experiences – a think tank in Austria, a closed-door meeting with some of New York's leading cultural producers – and I've been the only curator in the room. This unsettling reality motivated

me to develop the language and create the categorization necessary to properly position TSP as an exercise of curatorial thought and a tool for the advancement of arts and cultural ecosystems. I believe the practitioners engaged in TSP are vital to the success of new strategies within the arts and cultural field, and it is their work that has inspired this research.

Definition & Research Questions

Through my research, I was introduced to Raq Media Collective's word creation exercise, known as *lexical conceit* (2013) – that inspired me as I attempted to create a new, distinct sort of evolution in curatorial practice, what I'm calling: *Transcuratorial Social Practice* (TSP).

Through my research, I have come to define this practice as:

An extension of contemporary curatorial practice, in which practitioners are applying curatorial thought and approaches to lead on-going, community-rooted projects, initiatives, and organizations, extending beyond exhibition-making and other traditional curatorial modalities, and functioning as a methodology for creatively contributing to arts and cultural infrastructure through unique forms of access, connectivity, knowledge production, and support for creatives.

The term itself can be broken down into two parts: 'transcuratorial' and 'social practice'. Similar to how 'transdisciplinary' is used to describe artistic practices involving multiple disciplines, 'transcuratorial' is used to describe curatorial practice that moves across skillsets, philosophies, and structures that have led to a necessary evolution for some curators. The second part of the term, 'social practice', refers to 'socially engaged practice'. Written about and understood through the scholarship of critics and historians such as Claire Bishop and Grant Kester, I wanted to explore what socially engaged practice meant for curators who still maintain exhibition-making as a modality for public interactions, but also engaged in a different type of public intervention – one that does not have to include paracuratorial programming tied to an exhibition, but still utilizes curatorial approach and thought, both personal as well as the principles of contemporary curating defined by other leaders in the field.

This inquiry led me to form the following research questions:

1. *What type of philosophies and aims anchor the activities and curators, themselves, that are engaging in Transcuratorial Social Practice?*
2. *How does Transcuratorial Social Practice not only align with trends and values within our documented understanding of contemporary curatorial practice, but push the boundaries and ideas forward?*
3. *How does Transcuratorial Social Practice lead to new and impactful pathways for community engagement?*
4. *How can Transcuratorial Social Practice create an alternative source of knowledge production?*
5. *What types of contributions does Transcuratorial Social Practice make towards cultural infrastructure that positively affect both creative communities and citizens at large?*

Literature Review

Seeking answers, my research drove me towards multiple texts that helped formalize my framework.

Thinking Contemporary Curating by Terry Smith and *The Curatorial* edited by Jean-Paul Martinon were examined for their foundational, and comprehension, renderings of frameworks that guide contemporary curatorial practice today.

Many new topics have emerged as cornerstones of current curatorial interests since the publication of Terry Smith's book in 2012. These include topics such as digital platforms and other technological affordances post COVID-19 pandemic, as well as environmental concerns including the climate crisis and sustainability in art-making, and in-turn, exhibition-making and logistics. Nonetheless, this text is still a bedrock of information to explain and emphasize how curators are increasingly engaging with questions of social change, and political urgency, innovation, and institutional critique (2012).

Similarly, Jean-Paul Martinon's *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating* calls attention to the philosophical underpinnings of the field (2013). The collection of essays was used to explore the limits and possibilities curatorial practice holds to ultimately disrupt and shift dominant epistemologies that have influenced university programs (such as University of the Arts London's Master's in Culture, Criticism, and Curation program), organizations focused on cultivating the curator's role in the arts ecosystem (such as Independent Curators International), and professional development seminars (such as the Unschool of Curating). Furthermore, it was used in defining a structure for 'knowledge production', from scholars like Irit Rogoff, as the

dissemination of knowledge that creates new forms of creativity and theoretical frameworks that differ from traditional education models (2013).

Since my research focused on curatorial practices and approaches that are rooted in community, I examined Megan Johnston's *Slow Curating: Re-thinking and Extending Socially Engaged Art in the Context of Northern Ireland*, Yaël Filipovic's *Necessarily Cumbersome, Messy, and Slow: Community Collaborative Work within Art Institutions*, and Maura Reilly's *Curatorial Activism* to build a framework for participatory curatorial practices. Each gives first hand accounts of curators challenging deeply rooted hierarchies and inequities that exist with the arts and culture field in relation to community building, access, and collaboration. They were also used to examine how relational approaches to curating and rethinking representation can expand the arts canon in equitable ways (Johnston, 2014; Filipovic, 2013; Reilly, 2018).

Lastly, I examined *Culture is Not an Industry* by Justin O'Connor, specifically Chapter 5, "Cultural Infrastructures" where he extensively describes the functionalities of *soft infrastructures*. In the context of art and culture, these are defined as: arts organizations, creative workspaces, performance venues, festivals, music schools, radio stations, training and education classes, etc. He writes about the need for them to exist as well as be accessible to citizens, and describes strategies for reversing divestment and increasing their impact (2021). I use this information as a framework when describing Transcuratorial Social Practice's contributions to cultural infrastructures and how the activities build, and operate as modes of access to, this vital infrastructure.

Methodology

In order to define Transcuratorial Social Practice, I carried out two case studies that examined curatorial practitioners that are applying TSP at scale. I informally interviewed eight curators, including myself, based in London, England, New York City, NY, Baltimore, Maryland, and Oban, Scotland. Interviews were either held in person or using Google Meet, and were each recorded and transcribed using Google's Gemini feature.

These interviews were used to understand the curators' backgrounds and the experiences that led them into the arts and cultural field, as well as to examine their approaches, philosophies, methodologies, and the aims, operations, and success metrics of their initiatives.

After interviewing the participants and studying the texts, I conducted a keyword and thematic analysis, mapping out the concepts and insights from each source, and arranging them in relation to existing frameworks of curatorial practice. In doing so, I was able to identify TSP's alignment with current discourse, as well as where it diverged from similar activities and socially engaged practices previously defined in contemporary text.

CASE STUDY #1: THE LOCAL

The following case study illustrates how Transcuratorial Social Practice operates within local arts ecosystems. Each segment contains synthesized information and quotes from the interviews with the curators, providing an overview of their practice. I move on to positioning the ways in which aspects of their practice extends into TSP, then dissect how these unique facets create powerful forms of connectivity and knowledge production, and ultimately offer impactful contributions to arts and cultural infrastructures.

Naoko Mabon

Oban, Scotland

Being Useful to the Planet

Born in Japan, now living in Scotland, Naoko Mabon's global perspective is apparent in the approach she takes in her practice. With artworks from artists stretching across Taiwan, the Balkans, and as far as South Africa, her curation of the exhibition *We Move as a Murmuration* intertwined global voices in a conversation regarding the unsettling separation between humans and nature. In the same way, her concern for climate change is rooted in her foundational philosophy, “[climate change is] urgent to anyone on this planet. I am a citizen of this planet [...] to work as a creator and doing my creative practice, I want to go beyond my own benefit as much as possible to contribute to the wider discussions [and] more urgent issues in the world” (Mabon, interview, 2025). This thinking has led to actions including partaking in the *On Tidal Zones Residency* with Climavore in which she worked with local communities in Oban, to address issues facing the Highlands of Scotland's intertidal zones (ATLAS Arts, n.d.). With the help of five local women, she created ‘intertidal cushions’ from tweed, and designed them to be portable and usable in wet conditions – a project that explored how local communities can combat global issues of space. Scrutinizing this issue led to her questioning sustainability and advocating for both artists and institutions to think about the “afterlife or second life” of their art objects (Mabon, interview, 2025).

In more on-going fashion, since 2021, Mabon has co-lead the *EcoCreative Cluster* – a natural dye garden, at The Rockfield Centre in Oban – with textile artist Deborah Gray. This garden was formerly an abandoned site facing the possibility of demolition until the garden project was proposed in early 2021 (WAGON, 2023). Since then the site has forged a cooperative community

around dyeing, provided access to dyeing workshops and classes, and created dyed objects using upcycled materials with both decorative and practical functions (Deborah Gray Textiles, n.d.).

While Gray leads the on-site, instructional aspect of the dye garden, Mabon leads the virtual portion. Grounded in solidarity, Mabon facilitates regular meetings online with a group of 15 artists across 13 countries who use natural dyeing to address local issues and believe natural dyeing practices can be used as a tool for social change. By approaching her role as “network weaving”, Mabon is able to ignite and transform relationships between practitioners (Mabon, interview, 2025). Through skill-sharing workshops and online conversations, her work furthers global-to-local conversations around ecology and the practice of natural dyeing. Additionally, through organizing small-scale, collaborative art-making projects, she brings virtual relationships into the physical.



Figure 1. ‘Dye tree with textile leaves from EcoCreative Cluster’, @naokomabon (2023) [Instagram]

Pictured in Figure 1, in 2022, each member of the group contributed woven, naturally dyed textiles, in the shape of a leaf, that were then fastened to a found branch to create a ‘dye tree’ and displayed in Oban. (Naoko Mabon, 2023; WAGON, 2025). These sorts of collaborations lead to shared information amongst group members, but also exposes the community of Oban to global ideas, histories, and technologies that encompass different natural dyeing practices, creating a global ecosystem of knowledge production.

“Because this is an ancient practice, we can instantly connect. It doesn't matter where you're from, it can suddenly open up discussion that ‘oh yeah yeah my granny did this I'm doing this or my mom did this.’ [...] Sometimes if you ask [someone else's] cultural background sometimes [it can be] quite confrontational, but if you have something quite tactile or some small activities, I think people can instantly connect; then that touches very personal memories, but at the same time collective memories as well, or wider heritage discussions [and] more personal stories.” – Naoko Mabon (interview, 2025)

This work meaningfully contributes to the local arts ecosystem of Oban. The dye garden creates accessible, communal space for citizens in which they can meaningfully participate in a sustainable practice (pun intended) (O'Connor, p. 166-175). From its inception, this site reorganized the city's priorities (demolition for the space) and created something that accommodates both local and global demand. This site is now a third space for both connectivity and solace.

Furthermore, the virtual group supports artists such as Malian artist Aboubakar Fofana, who is establishing a farm and school for Malian textile art to preserve traditional practices and provide job opportunities for young people (Mabon, interview, 2025; Textile Center, n.d.). This shows the power of Mabon's Transcuratorial Social Practice to affect another local arts infrastructure halfway around the world.

Ikenna Malbert
London, United Kingdom

Noah's Dream

After studying History at York University, and before becoming the Associate Director of White Cube Gallery in London, Malbert began his career working as Assistant Curator at Black Artist Network Dialogue (BAND) – a non-profit organization in Toronto, Canada. Described as a community-based space and gallery, BAND serves as a cultural hub for the Black community. There, Malbert was part of an array of programming that brought creatives like chefs and musicians into conversation with exhibiting artists (interview, 2025). This is where his philosophy around representation and accessibility to arts and culture was cemented.

“[BAND] had that kind of feeling of, ‘I can see myself here’. I can see a portrait, I can see a painting, I can see an artist that looks like me, that feels like me. That was one thing that was really cool; being in that space and having a young artist coming up to me and being like, ‘Oh, could you look at my portfolio?’ And [I] just [felt] an obligation to help out the community. [...] That was a big moment for me – experiencing what that felt like in real time” – Ikenna Malbert (interview, 2025)

Since shifting to the commercial art field, his community-focused programming has also pivoted into more informal organizing. Malbert plays a major, yet casual, leadership role in the London-based, *Brothers in Art* (BIA) affinity group. BIA is an informal collective of Black-male artists and cultural workers focused on fellowship and collaboration. They are active both digitally, via WhatsApp, and in-person through group critiques, discussions, and events for members to meet and engage with one another (Malbert, interview, 2025). Many groups such as this are created during times of inspiration, but have a tendency to subside once the initial spark fleets. In order to endure and keep its members meaningfully engaged, groups like this require

people, like Malbert – an organizer willing to leverage his prominent positionality within the field, while approaching BIA’s grassroots efforts as a non-hierarchical collaborator.

BIA’s connectivity spawns from trust and comradery. Although there is not a formal vetting process, members are essentially inducted into the group through someone else giving them a metaphorical stamp of approval. This creates an unspoken expectation of shared values and engagement with other group members. As a catalyst for group member activities, Malbert creates key touch points that connect active cultural workers with one another. When members of the group meet each other and have the ability to say, “I’m from the BIA group”, a powerful sense of familiarity and credibility is created. This disarms concerns around extraction experienced by many people who identify with belonging to a marginalized group. Additionally, it combats the exhausting concerns about belonging to a non-active group that only exists out of convenience (Malbert, interview, 2025).

The group’s activities produce speculative results from access and collaboration. In line with his philosophy, Malbert is creating pathways for members of this group, and their families, to access opportunities they otherwise wouldn’t have. For instance, he organized a private tour of the Barbican’s *Noah Davis* retrospective exhibition with curator Wells Fray-Smith, pictured in Figure 2 (James, 2025).



Figure 2. Curator, Wells Fray-Smith giving the Brothers in Art (and their family and friends) a private tour of the Noah Davis retrospective exhibition at the Barbican. James, T. (2025)

This intimate, rare opportunity for first-hand insight, stories, and other moments of learning from the curator provided an access to this expertise and detail about an important Black male artist like Noah Davis. The power of gathering, and seeing and experiencing this program while being amongst a community of peers (including both industry-insiders and those that are not) provides inspiration for those who see themselves represented in the work. It has the potential to aid in producing new ideas for projects, artworks, and beyond.

*“Something that I really love was the power of being in the Noah Davis exhibition. Thinking about the Underground Museum that he built in LA, and being in this space at the Barbican and then having the curator who took her time out of her day to [give us a tour] – that’s the same spirit that Noah would have wanted, right? That’s the same sh*t*

that he actually was trying to achieve with his [work].” – Ikenna Malbert (interview, 2025)

By listening to the needs of his community, Malbert was able to collaboratively establish a support group for active cultural workers whose communication channels serve as a soft infrastructure. BIA serves as an affinity group that shares moments of professional development, solidarity, and education (O’Connor, pp. 164-182). Additionally, members also provide recommendations for trusted contractors, vendors, and translators for biennale programs, events, and exhibitions – providing cultural workers with more avenues to generate income.

*“Artists are really good at being like ‘yo, I’m going to do **this** on this side [commercial], but I’m always going to have **this** side [grassroots]’; and I suppose that’s what I’m trying to continue – I’ve got **this** side [White Cube], but I always want to have **this** side [BIA].” – Ikenna Malbert (interview, 2025)*

Lison Musset

London, United Kingdom

Doing Something About It

Early in her career, when she was transitioning from a successful retail salesperson into a full-time cultural worker, Musset rented space at a local community center to conduct art-making workshops for vulnerable peoples including children experiencing poverty, transpeople, sex workers, and ex-convicts. These social prescribing workshops focused on expressing feelings through art-making. Seeing a need and yearning for accessible arts programming within her community of Greenwich, in 2021 she took it upon herself to curate an exhibition titled, *Black in Full Color* featuring 26 Black artists. It was that same year that she and her now business partner, multidisciplinary artist Joseph Ijoyemi, started The Collective Makers (TCM) – a membership-based collective now comprised of over 450 creatives from a variety of creative disciplines including painters, printmakers, sculptors, soundscape, installation, etc (Musset, interview 2025).

Since its inception, TCM has partnered with organizations to facilitate on-going residencies at institutions in London including ArtHub Studios, Somerset House, and the National Maritime Museum. Launching TCM is where Musset marks her becoming as a curator. Since then, she has curated seven exhibitions including the National Maritime Museum's first contemporary show and TCM has gone on to win multiple awards including the University of the Arts London's Creative Enterprise Award (Musset, interview, 2025; University of the Arts London, 2022).

Her work with TCM is driven by concerns of burn out and care. Musset approaches her work as an unselfish connector who believes that meaningfully extending one's network with

like-minded people is “spiritual work” (interview, 2025). She recognizes the need for artists of marginalized groups, who face the anguish of constantly feeling isolated without the opportunity to break cycles of trauma, to regain power through group fellowship. Her primary objective is to provide a network of support and sense of relief amongst creatives having similar experiences. She works to actively create avenues for TCM’s members to interact with one another while also being introduced to wider audiences.

*“[I’m] always telling artists that they’re the sh*t. Also, [communicating] that they need us – commissioners, institutions, universities, they need us more than we need them at the end of the day. That’s how it works.” – Lison Musset (interview, 2025)*

By letting “the community guide [her] practice”, Musset allows others to inform her of what they need, are interested in, and/or concerned about (interview, 2025). This sort of knowledge guides her decision-making and influences the sort of opportunities she pursues. For example, TCM partnered with the British Council to facilitate a fellowship at the 2024 Venice Biennale. This granted artist Tonye Ekine the opportunity to pursue underexplored research on traditional Venetian masks and examine how they relate to rituals and other cultural symbols globally (The Collective Makers, n.d.). Furthermore, through a partnership with Royal Museums Greenwich, TCM facilitates *The Ocean Residency* at National Maritime Museum. With opportunities to explore performance, sound, and film, artists such as Bleu Smith have produced research focused on stories of memory, grief, and resistance in relation to water (Musset, interview 2025).

In order to accomplish these endeavors Musset decided to begin attending her local arts council meetings. There, she advocated for the Black artists in her area, which eventually led to her identifying potential partners for TCM’s projects (interview, 2025). This demonstrates the importance of local voices asserting themselves into positions that come with decision-making

power over arts funding (O'Connor, p. 189). Taking this type of initiative has led to the infrastructure and opportunities TCM has created for their local arts community.

Through its awards winning program, TCM has become a stamp of approval for members. They are able to provide instances of progress and/or stability such as recommendations for employment, meaningful mentorship, assistance for obtaining visas, and providing portfolio building opportunities (that have been used to help members receive admission to graduate school programs) (Musset, interview, 2025). Initially, Musset set out to create space for People of Color, but after building a reputable organization that benefits the local arts infrastructure in a plethora of ways, she has exceeded those goals in the most beautiful way.

Larry Ossei-Mensah

New York City, USA

The Plug

Larry Ossei-Mensah is a prolific independent curator whose work spans from commercial spaces to traveling museums exhibitions. His vast practice takes him all over the world and puts him in conversation with an abundance of creatives from all types of mediums and backgrounds. About five years into his career, he and an informal group of art enthusiasts determined to build a community around contemporary art discourse, began to travel to exhibitions together. Then, in 2015 their affinity group officially became an established non-profit organization, known as *ArtNoir*, transitioning them from hobbyists to impactful programmers (Ossei-Mensah, interview, 2025).

Led by Ossei-Mensah, the organization now organizes and facilitates residencies and fellowships, regranteeing programs, and exhibition-adjacent programming such as informal, public exhibition tours with artists and curators. Embracing a philosophy that art should be more accessible, in 2021 ArtNoir partnered with New York's Meatpacking Business Improvement District to activate the neighborhood by way of a cross-disciplinary program titled, *From a Place of a Place* (ArtNoir, n.d.).

ArtNoir was guided by four pillars to rethink how the voices of one's community can interact with local artists:

1. Gathering galvanizes possibility.
2. Imagination expands identities.
3. Liberation unlocks possibility.

4. Borders define history.

It consisted of five activations:

1. An open call exhibition featuring 20 emerging, community-based artists
2. A large-scale, public sculpture in Gansevoort Plaza.
3. A series of performances from movement-based performers, musicians, and storytellers
4. On-site story collection from residents past and present, co-facilitated by Hudson Guide – a partnering community agency.
5. A publication providing a "Guide to the Meatpacking District", through the interview series mentioned above. Now available digitally, Figure 3 showcases the guide with portraits of storytellers and quotes from their interviews (ArtNoir, 2021).



Figure 3. 'Editorial interview and portrait of former resident in the *Guide to the Meatpacking District* document'. ArtNoir (2021)

All of these aspects created a dynamic, site-specific activation that led to artistic voices coming together for the purpose of storytelling *with* community members.

“Growing up in New York, the Meat Packing District is where I used to club in my 20s. Obviously it's changed. If you grew up in New York like the '80s, 90s, that's kind of like the epicenter of where you kind of came of age. So there's a history there that I think a lot of people aren't aware of [it]. And so I think, in its transition and evolution some people will define as gentrification, a lot of those things get erased and it was like ‘all right well how can we kind of actively excavate the history, one, but then, two, bring voices that normally wouldn't be active in those spaces. We have resources now, why not plug in the community? ... because now the Meat Packing District is not necessarily a place you go and chill unless you're going to the Highland or the Whitney. It's a place you're moving through. And so, what does it mean to invite people to kind of take a pause, you know?’” – Ossei-Mensah (interview, 2025)

Gathering in a familiar place, reactivated through an array of creative mediums, initiated an opportunity for connectivity and reflection. This sparked storytelling that existed in the collective memory of the Meatpacking District's past residents. A woman who visited the site gave the following response: “our yearly reunions, that's what we miss. All the old timers get together to talk, socialize, dance, play the old music [and] do the different dances from back then... That's one of the things we miss. [...] I take what's happening now and I keep on going – gotta keep fighting” (ArtNoir, n.d.a).

Applying arts and cultural events as a device to prompt stories from visitors proved to be very impactful. It allowed participants to see, hear, feel, and reflect upon their own personal experiences to then educate others as to what this almost unrecognizable place meant to them – documenting historical records in order to allow a community to tell its own stories about its norms, establishments, and happenings is a form of decolonized knowledge production.

Moreover, ArtNoir's major focus on infrastructure extends from public access to arts and cultural programming to directly supporting artists financially. Each year, on a rotating city-to-city basis, they partner with Sotheby's to offer \$300,000 in unrestricted grant funding for artists (\$5,000 each) through their *Jar of Love* program (ArtNoir, n.d.b). In line with Justin O'Connor's suggestion for cultural workers to participate in the decision-making process for arts' funding, ArtNoir's commitment to meaningfully supporting artists through the redistribution of resources is vital (O'Connor, p. 189). This adaptive approach permits them to constantly seek and secure new opportunities with mission-aligned partners to aid artists to continue their work and present it to the public.

Louise Shelley

London, United Kingdom

The Pedagogical Matchmaker

Driven by philosophies around collective work and liberatory practices, Louise Shelley is constantly asking “what happens when we work together?” (interview, 2025) In past roles, she has worked as the curator at Art on the Underground, leading display projects including Joy Gregory’s ‘A Taste of Home’ commission that included 24 billboards of cyanotypes, monoprints and poetry that were results from many conversations and connections with asylum seekers (Joy Gregory, 2024). Likewise, while she was curator at Cubitt Artists – an artist-run co-op space with a non-profit gallery and artist studios – her *Structures that Cooperate* program explored varying models of organizing and non-hierarchical decision making (Shelley, interview, 2025).

Shelley’s practice is an example of how Transcuratorial Social Practice can function from within an institution (or a counter-institution). As the inaugural Collaborative Projects Curator at The Show Room, in London’s Marylebone neighborhood, she led the *Communal Knowledge* program – a series of collaborative projects that explored new ways of connecting artists to community stakeholders through workshops, events, and other gatherings. This required her to become a ‘matchmaker’ of sorts. By meeting members of her immediate community, whether that be local educators, organizers, or other residents in the area, she developed a research bank of peoples and activities within The Show Room’s vicinity. This enabled her to understand relevant concerns and interests of the community (Shelley, interview, 2025).

As Deputy Director of Metroland Cultures, in Brent, North West London, she uses collective pedagogies to lead this multidisciplinary space (Shelley, interview, 2025). Housed in a former health clinic, Metroland Culture's year-round public program is free to the public spanning exhibitions, events, workshops, residencies, artist development, and a biennial festival across the neighbourhood (Metroland Cultures, n.d.a).

Both of these instances represent Shelley's Transcuratorial Social Practice involving listening, gathering, and, of course, matchmaking. The research bank she developed determined the artists that aligned with the community's needs. In this participatory approach, residents indirectly had a hand in choosing the artists they would engage with. In-turn, they were able to access, and experience, working with established artists for the purpose of enrichment.

Taking influence from practitioners like Augusta Bal and Paulo Ferrari, her work on Communal Knowledge also created new ways of producing knowledge (Shelley, interview, 2025). Her relational approach produced programs such as Christian Nyampeta's *How to Live Together: Prototypes* in which the artist worked in solidarity with the neighboring residents, through conversation and experimental making, to reimagine the design, usage, and sharing capabilities of tools such as sandals, teapots, and community bulletin boards (The Show Room, n.d.). An array of illustrations representing a collaborative brainstorm of ideas created during this program can be seen in Figure 4.



Figure 4. *How to Live Together – A Blackboard*. Nyampeta, C. & Collaborators (2015)

This framework is also reflected in Metroland Culture’s intentional community building of long-term residents. Integrating multidisciplinary artists such as Adam Farah-Saad with the UK-based collective The British Arab Writers Group creates space to examine what happens when community-based creatives and organizers are rooted in a single place of exchange.

“I think, quite often, it’s about supporting artists and then finding an external community group and the artist going to the community group. And the exciting thing about Metrolands is that in this building is both.” – (Shelley, 2025)

In similar fashion, Metroland Cultures conducts programs such as *Curators in Residence*, which brings international curators to learn from and with residents and greater-community to explore Brent’s history of community resistance (Metroland Cultures, n.d.b). This collaborative, interactive research and pedagogy focused on how visual culture interacts with political and

community movements further expanding Metroland Cultures' and Shelley's commitment to collaboration, exchange, and legacy-building.

In Brent, Shelley's work is contributing to the area's cultural infrastructure as Metroland Cultures prioritises artists and cultural workers who are building and sustaining the community's arts infrastructure, and ensuring cultural production remains embedded in the local contexts. Programs such as *Peer-to-Peer* directly supports 10 Brent-based artists with professional development, mentor support, and a peer group that actively meets for sessions in which they meet to solve intersecting issues such as visibility, financial support, and the completion of creative projects (Metroland Cultures, n.d.b). Furthermore, the organization operates as a hub maintaining a gallery, printing press, and radio station open to both artists and community members. This provides a significant level of access to Metroland Cultures' resources, exemplifying infrastructure building. Not only does this create an opportunity for a more well-connected neighborhood, but the ability for citizens to utilize and benefit from what the creative arts can offer allows for a higher level of participation and impact (O'Connor, pp. 182-186).

Bolanle Tujadee

London, United Kingdom

“A Theory Girl with a Streak of Naughtiness”

Bolanle Tujadee is a curator, gallery owner, and educator with a history of challenging the inequities she witnesses around her. While studying at University of the Arts London, she started a movement called ‘UAL so White’, which examined UAL’s curriculum and advocated for more diverse voices to be included. This was almost a foreshadowing, because in 2015 she founded a more formal organization called *Black Blossoms*. This ‘expanded curatorial platform and online art school’ is a creative platform that employed Black Feminist Theory to host short courses and in-person events focused on telling Black diasporic stories and histories from an academic lens, with a counter-institutional approach (Tujadee, interview 2025).

Tujadee believes art can be a catalyst for change on three levels (interview, 2025):

1. **Personal:** Providing elements of healing and transformation.
2. **Micro:** Used to discuss important issues such as political and social issues faced by marginalized groups.
3. **Marco:** Bringing systematic and/or institutional change.

Although she expressed skepticism about art’s ability to enact systemic change, and that profound change primarily occurs at the personal and micro levels, she believes that when the three interact, a true societal change can happen (Tujadee, interview, 2025). This philosophy guides Black Blossoms and Tujadee uses her endearing vision of the platform’s longevity to inch closer to that overarching change.

Over the 10 years of its existence, Black Blossoms has been a space where like-minded people have been able to find each other. Its main audience has been People of Color, many of which are former university students that felt a void in their education. During our interview she told me, “I remember someone said ‘this is what I thought uni was going to be like’” (interview, 2025). Finding a community of learning partners, excited to study material representative of their interests and experiences, has led many of the platform’s attendees to start their own online communities both London-based as well as globally. Tajudee has even found that some participants have started a hashtag on social media #IMissMondays, referring to Black Blossoms’ Monday classes (interview, 2025).

Originally started as somewhat of a passion project after spending time in the Chelsea College of Art’s archives studying the Black British Arts Movement, Tajudee wanted to create community space in which different subjects and modalities of learning could be explored. The need for non-Western perspectives to be valued and utilized as the vehicle to produce new forms of knowledge became clear. Born from these ideals, courses such as *Britain's Caribbean Art Movement (1966-1972)*, and *Art and Revolutionary China* were offered to participants (Black Blossoms, n.d.).

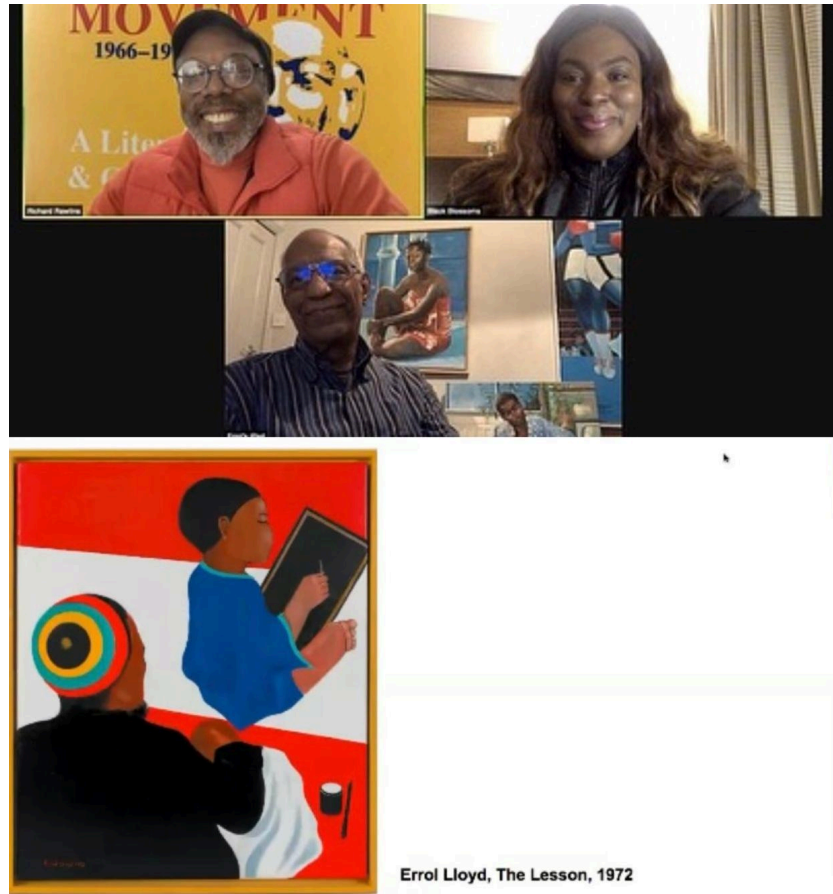


Figure 5. ‘Richard Rawlins (top left) teaching *Britain’s Caribbean Artists Movement (1966 - 1972)* online while being joined by artist Errol Lloyd (bottom center) and Bolanle Tadjuee’, @blackblossoms.online (2021) [Instagram]

Over time, Black Blossoms has partnered with institutions like TATE Britain and Orleans House Gallery for lectures and other public activations. Bringing these teachings to new audiences and environments provides accessibility for their community to interact with scholars and cultural workers face-to-face. In 2022, they partnered with Art on the Underground, to create a course titled *Black to the Future: Afro-Futurism as Archival Practice* in response to Larry Achiampong's PAN AFRICAN FLAGS FOR THE RELIC TRAVELLERS’ ALLIANCE (UNION) commission (Black Blossoms, n.d.). Following contemporary curatorial approach, these courses allow for new information and perspectives to enter the lexicon sparking more research, documentation, and creativity that can challenge traditional art canons.

Equally important to collaborating with well-established institutions, the platform's digital space provides a different type of access to information. It allows for citizens who may not be able to attend in-person happenings for whatever reason, to participate in arts and cultural programming. This is an attempt to address inequalities and give communities a new path to practice self-actualization through education. In accordance with Justin O'Connor's sentiment that access to arts and culture within one's household is a 'pillar of livability' (2021, pp. 164-170), Tajudee's vision for Black Blossoms moving forward has the potential to do just that:

"my dream would be for families to be able to sit down on a Monday evening with their children and watch the art courses and learn about the arts and learn about their identity. That would be the global impact [and] it could reach people who weren't [already] interested in the arts." – Bolanle Tadjee (interview, 2025)

Although she will one day hand the organization off to someone else, the structure she has created will permit the organization to live on beyond her.

"I just want people in the future to understand that my work is just trying to support an ecosystem of People of Color, Black [people] mainly, production of knowledge, art production, thought production, [etc.]... I'm just trying to do what I can to support that in the ways I know how." – Bolanle Tadjee (interview, 2025)

CASE STUDY #2: FROM LOCAL TO NATIONWIDE

This section examines a program that highlights the cross-disciplinary, community building nature of Transcuratorial Social Practice from a national perspective. This case study incorporates autoethnographic elements, as I examine *Lift As You Climb Symposium & Retreat: Achieving Growth, Sustainability, and Impact for Black Cultural Workers* (LAYC) – a program, created in partnership with Tiffany & Co.'s *Tiffany Atrium* program, I co-organized in 2023 with curator, artist, and educator Gerald Leavell II. At the time, I was serving as Executive Director and Leavell as Program Director at The Last Resort Artist Retreat (TLRAR). I selected this case for its scale, structure, and the diverse range of creatives it convened.

Taking place over two 5-day periods, the program had two iterations, both retreat-style convenings with cohorts of six Black creatives and cultural workers from around the United States. Participants represented US cities including New York City, New Orleans, Milwaukee, Pittsburgh, Omaha, Dallas, and Baltimore.

For this research, I conducted a one-to-one interview with Leavell, focused on the intentions, structure, and facilitation of the program, preceding an interview with five of the participants including Jade Rogers (historian, educator, and founder of House of Afro Capes and Curls), Elan Cadiz-Ferguson (visual artist and arts educator), Toccarra Thomas (former Director of the Joan Mitchell Center and currently Executive Director of Santa Fe Art Institute), Fatima Laster (artist and owner of 5 Points Gallery), and Muhammad Najee-Ullah (tech entrepreneur and founder of FullBlast STEAM). This interview focused on reflection and gaining insight into how they felt about the care they received, what was produced, and how LAYC influenced their practices since the program took place.

Lift As You Climb Symposium & Retreat

Baltimore, USA

“Relationships are Now Gateways”

The Last Resort Artist Retreat (TLRAR) is an artist residency in Baltimore, Maryland founded in 2020 by artist Derrick Adams and led by – yours truly – curator and inaugural Executive Director, Thomas James. Housed in a three-story, single-family home nestled in a charming, yet sometimes unpredictable, neighborhood, the space focused on rest, relaxation, and rejuvenation for creatives and cultural workers. With programs such as monthly dinners, film screenings, and morning yoga, TLRAR was designed to find a balance between private and public programming that brings together artists, cultural workers, political figures, administrators, educators, and anyone else who has any sort of interest in the creative arts. Private programs such as dinners and 4-week long residencies were meant for intentional, non-transactional, human-centered connectivity between creatives and other members of the arts ecosystem. To facilitate this, the house was equipped with a full-sized kitchen; living room with card games, play dough, and a record player; a lounge area with a large sofa and wall mounted television; and a library with art and poetry books. Public programming such as film screenings, open hours in our courtyard, together with musical performances, panel discussions, youth and adult workshops, and the occasional exhibition in the multipurpose space provided multiple entry points for engagement (T. James, 2025, personal experience).

This intentionality reflected consistent methodologies within the curatorial practices of Leavell and myself – both interested in cross-disciplinary approaches in order to activate space and enhance conversations around art through different disciplines. While working as Director of Visual Arts at Creative Alliance, I enjoyed doing these programs such as *Storytelling Through*

Chocolate-Making – a program I organized during an exhibition focused on contemporary Black diasporic storytelling through portraiture. Similarly, during Leavell’s time as Curator at the African American Museum of Dallas, he hosted programs that focused on storytelling of the building’s architecture through a musical performance (T. James, 2025, personal experience; Leavell II, interview, 2025).

“I was trying to think about how other art forms could enhance the conversations around the art. A lot of my friends, especially people that I grew up with... the art world is somewhat distant to them and so I think a lot about what are ways that you can bring people to the art.” – Gerald Leavell II (interview, 2025)

This led to our intention to establish LAYC as a one of a kind, utopian yet terrestrial experience, centered on the spoken and unspoken needs of creatives. With aspirations of this program being regenerative, expansive, and fellowship-driven, much consideration was given to how the cohorts would interact with one another and the space, before, during, and after their stay. We designed the program to facilitate and find a balance between ‘something and nothing’ for the two groups, six participants each (Leavell II, interview 2025).

We handled logistics such as coordinating and paying for their travel as well as hiring a chef to cook meals while they were on-site. We also organized structured activities in order to stimulate both practical and speculative knowledge production through presentations and recorded conversations. Additionally, events such as a tour of Baltimore City, museum visits, yoga, and nature walks were conducted to engage participants in activities outside of the residency setting. Unstructured time accompanied this to encourage more autonomous moments of connectivity. We believed that this model of artist care would lead to a version of connectivity that these participants had not experienced before (T. James, 2025, personal experience).

In response to this model, the home acted as a non-transactional space where everyone was on a level playing field. Additionally, the diversity within the cohorts made it so that there wasn't a competitive nature – this made it very generative and supportive. This indeed produced a connectivity that felt foreign to some participants. Tocarra Thomas said, “it had been a long time since I had been in community with folks who weren't seeking either a resource or trying to get a need met. [The] power dynamics of my life, as my career has continued to evolve, have really shifted. And I think that what I am looking for now in my work place and how we make decisions is trying to return it to a more mutual space in terms of the power dynamics. But I think that I did not realize how much of a break I needed. I don't want to be dismissive about people advocating for themselves and asking for what they need, but sometimes it's not a very generative experience, and having an opportunity to be around folks where, yes, we were sharing resources, we were sharing experiences, we were sharing perspectives, but the idea was that it was mutually beneficial, you know, feeding into each other in different ways” (Group interview, 2025).

Fatima Laster called it a “love fest” and mentioned that it made her feel “less-lonely” because everyone was very supportive (Group interview, 2025). Multiple participants felt affirmed after being in a space where people were inquisitive. On this, Jade Rogers added, “[LAYC] brought a lot of clarity – being around people that see your vision. Especially when you're working very locally, you're around people that just see what you're doing and they're not as appreciative of that” (Group interview, 2025). Furthermore, it was said that all the considerations TLRAR staff took into consideration before their arrival, in addition to the flexible, generous, human-centered approach allowed them to open up.

“I’ve never been so cared for. [It] felt like summer camp [in which] I wanted to talk to my friends even though I have to go to sleep.” – Jade Rogers (Group interview, 2025)



Figure 6. ‘Lift As You Climb Symposium & Retreat, Cohort 1 recorded conversations’, Hardaway, D. (2023)

We wanted groups to interact in interesting ways with people we believed could feed into each other’s practices. So, between the two cohorts there were cultural workers in professions including: visual artists, writers, curators, historians, community developers, tech entrepreneurs, and clinical professionals. In order to produce tangible knowledge, we used an informal symposium model – the physical layout and format of which are illustrated in Figure 6 – to facilitate and document conversations between participants. The three areas of focus were growth, impact, and sustainability and conversation topics including:

- **Experimenting with new media as a means of resistance and affirmation** – a conversation held between Jess Garland, Dallas-based musical and educator, and Elan Cadiz-Ferguson. They discussed how they navigate showing up as their authentic selves when interacting with students and their families – creating inclusive pathways for others

to embrace themselves and contribute to their community in meaningful ways. Also, Cadiz-Ferguson talked about using strategies of ‘ease’ as a methodology to deliver high levels of impact for part-time employment (The Last Resort Artist Retreat, 2024, archived webpage, personal drive).

- **Modern vs. ancient technologies to aid the body and mind** – this discussion between Dr. Jamil Smith, DACM, L.Ac., an Eastern medicine practitioner (acupuncturist) and Muhammad Najee-Ullah concentrated on growth within Black communities through the adoption of differing technologies. During this exchange, Najee-Ullah spoke about the potentials for STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, Mathematics) learning aimed at African-American youth and using upcycled technology hardware to create new tools such the 3D paint pens his company developed – now used by many artists and creatives to create objects like Figure 7. Smith delivered information about acupuncture’s accessibility and history of usage for social justice causes (The Last Resort Artist Retreat, 2024, archived webpage, personal drive).



Figure 7. ‘Small pieces created by Elan Cadiz-Ferguson while using the 3D paint pen’, Cadiz-Ferguson, E. (2025)

- **Pedagogical approaches to critically analyzing arts programming** – Participants, Kilolo Luckett, curator, historian, and founder of the AlmaLewis Artist Residency, and Jade Rogers partook in this conversation regarding what to keep vs. what to throw away when running an arts organization. Together they talked about legacy and what it means when the community no longer needs their programming. They also talked about

continuously reframing their work with Rogers adding, “its about listening to the community and if people aren’t engaging with [the programming] the same way over time, then it's time to change the 'thing'" (The Last Resort Artist Retreat, 2024, archived webpage, personal drive).

During my interview with past participants, they talked about how important it has become for them to have this new network of people to provide them with different experiences and show them what is possible. Cadiz-Ferguson called this experience a “think tank” that gave her an “awareness of avenues.” She also added, “what I've realized is those relationships are now gateways into worlds that I don't have, [but] I don't have to worry because I have those experts available.” She also mentioned that this experience inspired her to create a new body of work that will be exhibited at a show curated by Luckett (Group interview, 2025).

Najee-Ullah expressed the regenerative power the experience brought to his work, saying, “it has definitely been a reference as to what can happen in some of my future endeavors... that element of creators being able to relax and chill so that they can perform better [and] recharge.” Laster mentioned that the conversations she had during the program made her consider new ways of working in order to make her organization more sustainable long-term. Ultimately, it made her comfortable to pivot and create a hybrid business model with both commercial and charitable aspects. Lastly, Thomas reported that this experience reaffirmed her yearning to lead organizations through collective pedagogy. The program’s design, bringing an array of creatives together, made her “bring other people to the decision-making table” and what she experienced at LAYC has become the “North Star” (Group interview, 2025).

Much like the other examples of Transcuratorial Social Practice, much of the knowledge production comes in the form of access. LAYC's commitment to alleviating hurdles in order for creatives to join together in this fashion allowed for these ideas to permeate and create lasting effects for these participants.

"Many of us came to this program needing 'something else' for their work, whether we knew it or not and now you have someone that can produce that." – Jade Rogers (Group interview, 2025)

This network building created support for the work each of the participants undertake within their respective arts and cultural infrastructures. Since the program's completion, cyclical nourishment has taken place amongst participants. Leavell and Najee-Ullah (both based in Baltimore) attended, and helped set up for, Rogers' organization's annual Steam Punk Tea Party in Omaha, Nebraska. Rogers and Leavell also collaborated to create the concept for a board game about African Mythology. Furthermore, Rogers and Cadiz-Ferguson both bought 3D pens from FullBlast STEAM for their students and family members, and Laster brought Kleaver Cruz (another participant) to Milwaukee for their (pronoun) book launch. Laster also returned to Baltimore after the program to conduct studio visits with artists she met while attending LAYC. In turn, she ended up hiring a Baltimore-based photographer to conduct a photoshoot for her back in Milwaukee as well as introducing a Baltimore-based mixed media artist to a future patron (Group interview, 2025).

The goals of LAYC also extended to the participants' introduction and interaction with Baltimore's arts and cultural infrastructure. This came in the form of programs such as a city tour with historical sites, a nature walk at a Druid Hill Park, and on-site yoga and mindfulness programs all led by Baltimore-based practitioners. This also included multiple meals at local

restaurants, and an onsite celebration in which we invited Baltimore-based cultural workers whose work we thought would interest the participants. We also provided a list of places such as bars and vintage shopping sites they may want to visit during their free time (T. James, 2025, personal experience).

We worked from the ethos that when creatives are supported, they bring their growth and ideas back to their communities. This led us to approach our work with the question in mind: *when everything else is taken care of, how can we focus on the mission at hand?*

ESTABLISHING TRANSCURATORIAL SOCIAL PRACTICE

To establish Transcuratorial Social Practice as a term and a significant evolution in curatorial practice, this section synthesizes and categorizes key aspects of the practitioners' work presented in the preceding case studies. Each category aligns with recurring themes in the texts and illustrates how Transcuratorial Social Practice's emergence both intersects with and advances these ideas – demonstrating this shift and clarifying TSP's evolution.

- **Building Independent Platforms and Counter-Institutions**

Many of the practitioners studied in this research have built their own platforms independent of traditional institutions. These initiatives emerge from a range of motivations centered on the on-going challenges of contemporaneity and the non-art factors shaping curatorial practice today. Their responses reflect the demands of the time – calling for approaches that are more holistic and expansive than what institutional frameworks typically permit.

The urgency driving Transcuratorial Social Practice requires flexibility and autonomy that surpass institutional limitations. As Tajudeen explained, the work depends on having the “freedom to respond [quickly]” to pressing social issues (interview, 2025). Like Black Blossom's online school, Ossei-Mensah's ArtNoir and Mabon's EcoCreative Cluster create soft infrastructural networks, both online and in person, that enable sustained, responsive engagement. In contrast to paracuratorial programming, these platforms are designed to provide long-term, self-sustaining systems of support.

A key concern for these curators is creating opportunities for artists and thinkers who need visibility or support beyond transactional interactions. Musset's work with TCM arose from an urgent need for Black artists to find comradeship that fosters both tangible outcomes, such as financial opportunities, and intangible ones, like a sense of community and belonging. By prioritizing spaces free from code-switching pressures or cultural insensitivities, Musset intentionally integrates mental health considerations, mentorship, and community uplift into her practice (interview, 2025). These efforts combat structural inequities and strengthen morale and empowerment within marginalized communities.

Similarly, The Last Resort Artist Retreat (TLRAR) functions as a counter-institution prioritizing non-transactional interactions among artists, cultural workers, and others adjacent to arts and cultural practices. It represents a new model of artist care grounded in connection and hospitable treatment. Scholars such as Megan Johnston, Yaël Filipovic, and Stefan Nowotny have written about the increasing role of care within participatory practices and institutional frameworks (Johnston, 2014; Filipovic, 2013; Nowotny, 2013). However, there are limits to what can be provided by institutions without addressing forms of wrap-around support. Counter-institutional spaces like TLRAR bridge this gap by fostering genuine community, informal knowledge exchange, and environments where artists' pragmatic and emotional needs are met.

These platforms also grant curators the freedom to address social justice issues more directly. For instance, Shelley's political alignments inform her curatorial interests, readings, and collaborations – endeavors that might not find traditional institutional support or fit within conventional structures. Through Metroland Cultures' model, she

has been able to find support to integrate her beliefs around collective pedagogies (Shelley, interview, 2025).

As Kate Fowle writes, “curating today should creatively address timely artistic, social, cultural or political issues” (2007, p.16). Many of these issues are human-centered, and practitioners of Transcuratorial Social Practice have found that they cannot be adequately addressed through traditional means.

- **Commitment to Decolonized and Non-Hierarchical Approaches**

Among the participating curators, approaching their work through a decolonized lens emerged as an essential aspect. Ossei-Mensah described this as “crucial for creative freedom,” a belief evident in his curatorial projects (interview, 2025). ArtNoir’s exhibition-adjacent programming invites community members who may not feel comfortable being in art spaces to gather and be in direct conversation with artists. Their residencies, and fellowship programs concentrate on artists whose practices are working through a non-Western lens. As well, *From a Place of a Place*, extended this approach by creating a space for residents of New York’s Meatpacking District to tell their own stories rather than be spoken for. This desire to present more complete narratives is also seen in the work of Musset and Bolanle, whose courses and residencies generate new research and amplify underrepresented voices.

As a strategy for retelling history and creating a more representative art canon within institutional spaces, Reilly calls for rethinking the Eurocentric canon and highlights the curatorial strategies making strides towards this shift (2018). Likewise, in her essay, *An Exhausted Curating*, Leire Vergara notes the necessity to “reassess any contemporary

mechanism that may entrap a cultural practice” (2012, pp. 74-77). This refers to a need for disruptive experimentation becoming imminent in order to combat the continuous erasure that exists in the art world’s procedures. While this retelling can occur through exhibitions and objects, Transcuratorial Social Practice addresses it through infrastructural-forged initiatives – residencies, courses, and dialogues between artists and non-artists. Shelley exemplifies this through Metroland Cultures, where conversation and community between artists and non-artists becomes an integral part of the building’s functionality.

Shelley also employs non-hierarchical, collective pedagogies – a recurring trend among TSP practitioners. This counter-approach redefines how curatorial endeavors are structured, from Malbert’s non-hierarchical collaborations used to build trust and credibility to Mabon’s “intention of invisibility,” used at times to ensure participants have the space to engage fully when in conversation (Mabon, interview, 2025). Such adaptive, collaborative methods reposition curators as co-collaborators, and align with the broader goals of Transcuratorial Social Practice.

- **Non-Transactional and Relational Social Engagements with Creative Communities and the General Public**

Echoing Johnston’s and Filipovic’s writing on socially engaged practice, Musset’s commitment to allowing community needs to inform her practice, alongside Shelley’s concept of ‘research banks’, positions their work as relational, based on mutual exchange rather than extraction. What distinguishes Transcuratorial Social Practice is that audience engagement is purposeful, but is not contingent on any type of tangible output. For many

of these curators, being stewards of information, also known as connectors, within their communities is central. Their work begins with understanding who their community is, what they care about, and how to respond meaningfully through tailored programming. Crucially, the goal is dialogue and connection, in which community members are not responsible for producing outcomes – the exchange remains non-transactional.

This applies both to creative communities and the general public. Initiatives such as TCM and BIA exemplify this approach, offering sustained support to greater-London’s creative communities without expectations of production or formal participation. Although production can become a natural byproduct, in order to participate in the group, the only (informal) requirement is an openness to engaging with the other members. Conversely, although there was production in the form of recorded conversation, projects like LAYC further illustrate how a commitment to spending quality time engaging with peers can strengthen creative ecosystems through non-transactional collaboration.

Furthermore, when production does occur, it is often rooted in accessibility both logistically and contextually. Black Blossoms’ online platform provides access to courses that represent the interests of the Tadujee’s community. It also extends access to global participants unable to attend in person happenings.

Similarly, From a Place of a Place brought art directly into community space and activated an underutilized public site. Ossei-Mensah noted that part of the inspiration behind the project was to “just do something fly,” highlighting the importance of play, joy, and aesthetic experimentation as core elements of TSP (interview, 2025). This ethos

of doing something cool, chic, and cross-disciplinary has proven to be a powerful entry point for engaging people who might otherwise remain outside traditional art spaces.

- **Unique Contributions to Soft Cultural Infrastructure**

Itir Rogoff notes how the curatorial field is expanding and practitioners are now able to push boundaries and explore the limits of their practice with the goal of having a greater impact (2013). Moreover, Milevska writes, “the curator is rather assumed to be an active societal agent that contributes towards a cross-referential understanding of art between different artistic, cultural, ethnic, class, gender and sexual camps and works, moreover towards the improvement of society in general” (2013, p. 69). These ideas highlight the potential curators have via their platforms, access to information and resources, and the knowledge they ultimately produce. Not only does this question the responsibilities of curators, but it places contemporary curators in a position of boundless potential for change.

Transcuratorial Social Practice serves as a method to build upon and contribute to arts and cultural infrastructure. This extends beyond the notion of “infrastructural activism,” in which curators nurture art ecosystems through exhibitions and other traditional modalities (Smith, 2012). It also moves past participatory curating, where collaborations with communities primarily serve as avenues for political engagement and/or exhibitions and paracuratorial programming.

TSP deepens these frameworks by fostering inclusivity within counter-institutions through collaboration and spearheading experimental programming like Shelley’s Communal Knowledge that situates artists in accessible, civic dialogue with the public

with no required outcome. Programs like LAYC and ArtNoir's Jar of Love provide access to the redistribution of resources through partnerships that prioritize creative communities beyond any mode of production. Similarly, TCM and BIA, cultivate networks of fellowship and support that, in turn, generate new and alternative cultural experiences for both creatives and non-artists.

Furthermore, Black Blossoms and EcoCreative Cluster create opportunities for learning using both digital and physical mechanisms. EcoCreative Cluster and Metroland Cultures also create third spaces providing access to alternative arts and cultural consumption for those who may not otherwise engage.

Lastly, each of these practitioners has positioned themselves as decision-makers within their ecosystems – amplifying the work of underrepresented artists and researchers, leveraging their influential positions to provide access for others, and creating spaces in which social justice drives artistic engagements. By centering human connection, and prioritizing groups that have traditionally been left out of consideration from many infrastructures, TSP expands participation in arts and cultural programming bringing creative and educational activities into new neighborhoods and digital spaces, meeting audiences where they are and providing more access to the creative arts. These unique contributions demonstrate both the sustained effort and the potential to advance and strengthen cultural infrastructures through curatorial thinking and approaches.

CONCLUSION

There is a vastness to the make-up of Transcuratorial Social Practice. From affinity groups to counter-institutions, this research demonstrates how TSP can be adapted and applied across the many facets making up the curatorial field. Emerging trends such as platform-building and decolonized pedagogies have reimaged what curatorial practice can become for both new generations developing their positioning as a curator and for established curators aiming to deepen their impact within their community.

Tadujee and Musset found gaps in access to knowledge and funding for marginalized cultural workers and responded by founding Black Blossoms and TCM. Through gatherings and cross-disciplinary programming, initiatives such as ArtNoir's From a Place of a Place and Metroland Cultures' transformation of a former health clinic into a community arts hub, expand public access to diverse forms of arts and cultural production.

Similarly, Lift As You Climb Symposium & Retreat focused on strengthening creative communities, offering reprieve and care that allowed them to fully embrace diverse perspectives and contemplate new ways of working. Mabon and Malbert extend this ethos by connecting creatives both physically and digitally, strengthening morale and support amongst creatives, while also facilitating the potential for meaningful collaborations.

Ultimately, TSP emerges as an impactful contemporary curatorial framework – one that reconfigures established principles to extend accessibility, applies innovative pedagogies to generate a spectrum of knowledge, and prioritizes connectivity as fundamental to progress. In doing so, it reimagine the relationship between curators and cultural infrastructures, affirming the potential of curatorial practice to be a transformative, community-rooted practice that

provides new forms of support for creative communities and broadens community engagement with the creative arts.

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