

# Curating Magic: Abstracts and Speaker Biographies

Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> October 2022, 9am-4.30pm BST | Online

One in a series of 15 British Art Network supported seminars for 2022

Keynote: *Curating 'Surrealism and Magic': From Concept to Implementation*,  
Gražina Subelytė and Daniel Zamani

This paper addresses the curatorial decisions that informed the genesis and implementation of the exhibition *Surrealism and Magic: Enchanted Modernity* – a large-scale international loan exhibition that came to fruition as a cooperation between the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice and the Museum Barberini in Potsdam. Delivered by its two curators, the presentation gives insights into the decision-making behind all stages of planning for the show and its accompanying publication – from the first draft of the exhibition précis to the final installation of the works. In addition, the presentation gives insights into the tools for education and outreach that accompanied the show in Venice and Potsdam and highlights some of the major challenges in trying to make this complex topic accessible to the general museum-going public, while adequately teasing out its complexities and nuances.

Gražina Subelytė completed her PhD at the Courtauld Institute of Art, London, in 2021. She is Associate Curator at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, where she curated or co-curated the exhibitions *Surrealism and Magic: Enchanted Modernity* (2022), *1948: The Biennale of Peggy Guggenheim* (2018), *Rita Kernn-Larsen: Surrealist Paintings* (2017), *Peggy Guggenheim: The Last Dogaressa* (2019–20) and *From Gesture to Form: Postwar European and American Art from the Schulhof Collection* (2019). Currently, among other projects, she is organizing the exhibition *Peggy Guggenheim in London: The Story of Guggenheim Jeune, 1938-39* (2026). She has published and lectured widely on modern art.

Daniel Zamani received his PhD from the University of Cambridge in 2017, with an AHRC-funded thesis on the interplay of occult and medieval themes in the work of André Breton. In January 2018, he was appointed curator at the Museum Barberini in Potsdam. Exhibitions he curated or co-curated include the shows *Matisse – Bonnard: Long Live Painting!* (2017), *Color and Light: The Neo-Impressionist Henri-Edmond Cross* (2019), *Monet: Places* (2020), *The Shape of Freedom: International Abstraction after 1945* and *Surrealism and Magic: Enchanted Modernity*. Dan has also widely published in the field of 19th and 20th-century painting, especially Surrealism.

*Alchemy: The Ancient Art of Transformation*, Gillian McIver and Hanya ElGhamry

Curators Gillian McIver and Hanya ElGhamry collaborated on an exhibition on the theme of 'Alchemy'. The exhibition brought together sixteen artists, some serious practitioners of alchemy and magic and others who found the ideas inspirational. Many of the sacred images in ancient Egypt are alchemical – that is, they embed occult (secret) meanings in their visual symbolism. What happens when contemporary artists take on alchemical themes? We will discuss how we took on the challenge of mediating the materiality of art practices to include magical concepts and address how the exhibition included two different directions: creating magical objects and creating art influenced or inspired by esoteric traditions,

both Western and Eastern. With such an international group of artists, the show raised the issue of transnational and decolonial approaches to magic and art. Among these questions, we considered the role of appropriation of Egyptian imagery in Western art in the work of video artist diz\_qo and how abstract art (Marwan El Gamal, Tarek Eleissy and Cathy Ward) expresses magical ideas in a transnational way.

Art historian, filmmaker and writer, Dr Gillian McIver has curated many projects in the UK and internationally, and is the author of *Art History for Filmmakers* (Bloomsbury Press) and the forthcoming *Between Realism and the Sublime* as well as numerous critical articles and essays. She is currently researching the impact of Egyptomania on British and Egyptian art since the 19th century and also the magical practices of 18th-century London painter Philip James de Loutherbourg.

Hanya ElGhamry is an artist and curator who has worked extensively in Cairo, curating the *Forever is Now* Giza Pyramids 2021 exhibition and many other projects as Senior Assistant Curator for Art d’Egypte. She received her BA from the American University of Cairo and recently completed her MFA at Central St Martins.

#### *The Magical Logic of Voodoo Aesthetics*, Shareed Mohammed

The magical logic that resides within the Voodoo *objet d’art* (object of art) incites possession and demands the spectator to participate in the experience of a bewitched reality. Voodoo aesthetics therefore transforms an audience into magical thinking. This research demonstrates that magical reality fosters a mutual engagement between the *objet d’art* and spectators through close analysis of paintings done by three Haitian artists: Hervé Télémaque, Salnave Philippe-Auguste and André Pierre. This research also questions, what strategies do curators use to foster such magical engagement? And what is at stake when spaces of artistic engagement activate magical thinking? This paper will be guided by Claude Levi-Strauss’s anthropological theory of magic and Krzysztof Ziarek’s aesthetics which perceive art as an event that affects change upon its spectator. This presentation reveals that the magical elements found in Haitian paintings stimulate magical thinking in spectators and result in a transformation of conventional artistic discourse.

Shareed Mohammed is currently a PhD candidate in the Literatures in English programme at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus, Trinidad and Tobago. His PhD thesis aims to demonstrate that Wilson Harris’s shamanistic quantum imagination results in the creation of a revisionary and cross-cultural poetics. His most recent E-publication entitled “The cry of Merlin: The self-confessional and self-judgemental lament for dismembered landscapes, riverscapes, skiescapes, and oceanscapes in the language of Wilson Harris’s fictional narratives” was presented at the More Just, More Sustainable Futures Artistic Research 2021 Online Symposium for PhD students (University of Plymouth, UK).

#### *Curating Spiritual Landscapes*, Anna Milon and Claire Slack

Places of contemporary Pagan worship are often highly contentious spaces where varied spiritual practices, accessibility, heritage significance, visitor experience, and environmental conservation need to be balanced. Pagan practice amongst these places can range from simply connecting with sacred

landscape through meditation to complicated group rituals and deposits of things like coins, ribbons, symbolic crafted items, or food and drink. Focusing on the Avebury landscape in Wiltshire and St Nectan's Glen in Northern Cornwall, this paper explores how contemporary pagan practice interacts with heritage and environmental conservation of these two sites. The paper invites its audience to contribute to questions of how contemporary pagan ritual deposits should be treated and interpreted within a heritage context, and what kind of relationships can be fostered between pagans, other visitors and the sites' custodians.

Anna Milon is working on her PhD thesis at the University of Exeter, focusing on the Horned God as an environmental figure in esoteric writing and fantasy fiction. Her work appears in *Folklore*, *Hellebore*, and the forthcoming edited collection *Antikenrezeption in der Horror*.

Claire Slack is currently undertaking her doctorate in Heritage at the University of Hertfordshire where she is exploring Pagan interactions with historic sacred spaces in Britain. She also works as Heritage Officer for a historic cemetery in East London, focusing on engagement, interpretation and conservation.

*Sisterly Spaces: The Magic Circle as Curatorial Method*, Aaron Lister and Chelsea Nichols

Rosaleen Norton and A. Lois White were two modern female artists born in New Zealand in the early 20th century, who both placed the sensuality of the female body at the centre of their work. Although these two artists did not cross paths in life, the upcoming exhibition *Sisterly* at The Dowse Art Museum in 2023 aims to re-examine the similarities in their work and their entwined legacies as women cast out of the New Zealand canon for reasons intimately bound up with sexuality, female power and unconventionality. Drawing on the notion of the magic circle—a salt or chalk circle marked out to denote sacred spaces and offer magical protection—this paper offers a case study in a disruptive mode of curatorial practice which honours Norton and White's sacred position outside the conventional art historical canon. Inviting contemporary artist Jen Bowmast to enter into an artistic and spiritual dialogue with their work, *Sisterly* will use the physical thresholds of the gallery to create a magically protected space where new connections between their work can play out across dimensions. Positioning Norton and White as active participants in this exhibition rather than passive subjects, this paper will explore the magic circle as a curatorial method used to forge a spiritual sisterhood between the artists in *Sisterly*.

This paper is co-presented by the Curator of Screams – an ongoing collaborative project by New Zealand-based art historians/curators Aaron Lister and Dr Chelsea Nichols, which aims to open up connections between contemporary art and horror through a series of exhibitions and publications. In his day job, Lister is the Senior Curator of City Gallery Wellington, where notable projects have included *Occulture: The Dark Arts* and organizing the blockbuster New Zealand presentation of Swedish artist and mystic Hilma af Klint. Nichols is the Senior Curator at The Dowse Art Museum and writer of *The Museum of Ridiculously Interesting Things*, whose recent exhibitions include *The Truth Is Out There*, examining contemporary artists' explorations of UFOs and paranormal phenomenon.

*Domestic Dioramas of Magic: Intimacy and the Home as a Curatorial Approach to Magic in Museums,*  
Marisa Karyl Franz

Building upon Carol Duncan's theory of museums as ritual spaces, I expand upon her idea to consider how magical rituals are staged within museums. I contrast the public religio-secular rituals of Duncan's work with Marcel Mauss' interpretation of magical rites as "private, secret, mysterious and approach[ing] the limit of a prohibited rite." [Marcel Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, (London: Routledge, 2001), 30.] In particular, this paper focuses on the dioramic displays of magic in three museums to see how the recreated landscape of the home functions as a ritual space to contextualize what magic is to visitors. The three sites that this paper considers are the Wise Woman's Cottage at the Museum of Witchcraft and Magic in Cornwall, the parlour at the Salem Witch Board Museum in Massachusetts, and the Yakut Healing Ceremony at the American Museum of Natural History in New York. What unites these displays, is the representation of domestic space set apart from the larger public space of the sanctioned museum ritual. The recreation of the home in these displays provides an interpretation of magic practice as a part of an everyday mundane domestic landscape where things such as herbs and cats can become potions and familiars. However, it also sets these things outside of the public ritual of the museum; the visitor steps off the guided pathway and into someone's parlor, into the private and mysterious shadowed space of the magical rite.

Marisa Karyl Franz is a Clinical Assistant Professor of Museum Studies at NYU. She holds a PhD in religious studies from the University of Toronto. Her research examines the intellectual history of ethnographic collection and display of magical and religious material culture. She has published on the role of ghosts and haunting in museum interpretation, shamanic displays in ethnographic museums and museum cataloguing.

*The Fairy King's Grimoire: How to make a spellbook,* Alexander D'Agostino

I am an artist working with queer histories and images, through performance and installation. I feed my brain queer culture and history and become "possessed" by feelings and stories I imagine when I create my work. Using ritual and performance to activate my installations creates new collective moments surrounding the research. I will talk about my current work as an Artist Research Fellow at the Folger Shakespeare Library where I am reimagining the magic and rituals outlined in *V.b.26(1), The Book of Magic with instructions for invoking spirits, etc.*, while considering needs and beliefs of LGBTQ people today. This book presents Oberon the Fairy King, a central figure that links this manuscript to literary and theatre culture including Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*. I will expand upon this intersection of Magic and queerness during my talk. I will present images of the book I am creating, and a short video from a new performance ritual I presented this summer at Asbury Park, NJ through Siren Arts. I will discuss the magic and rituals I employ from my practice as a Witch, and how they inform the work I am creating through my Folger Fellowship and performance art.

Alexander D'Agostino is an interdisciplinary artist and teacher based in Baltimore, Maryland. He graduated from the Maryland Institute College of Art in 2009 with a BFA in painting. He investigates the queer and otherworldly through dance, ritual, teaching, and visual art. His work has been presented at Vox Populi in Philadelphia, VisArts in Rockville, the Center for Contemporary Art of Afghanistan in

Kabul, the Baltimore Museum of Art, Chashama's summer performance series in Manhattan, Itinerant Performance Art Festival at the Queens Museum, the Walters Art Museum, Transformer DC, Arlington Art Center's 2022 Solo Exhibitions, and most recently Siren Arts in Asbury Park, NJ. He is currently Artist Research Fellow at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington DC.

*Curatorial Practice as Spellcasting: Defying Post-colonial Constraints in Ukraine through Contemporary Art Exhibitions*, Oksana Gryshchenko

From 2009 to 2013, an independent art curatorial institution Doroshenko Gryshchenko Clinic operated in Kyiv, Ukraine, producing several exhibitions which expanded the conceptualization of magic in art. In this seminar, I analyze four exhibitions that reflect magic's importance in art both in the production of art and in the curatorial practice. *Mavka or Ukraine Has Not Died Yet* (ZEH Gallery, 2009), *Insectoid Reptiloid*, an exhibit at the Philosophy of Law Conference (Beijing, 2009), *Inner Light* (National Art Museum of Ukraine, 2010), *Visionaries* (National Taras Shevchenko Museum, 2013). This presentation will convincingly demonstrate that the introduction of magic as epistemological strategy into curatorial practice facilitates the creation of new and unexpected contexts, promotes deeper levels of communication with the viewer and assists in establishing more open-minded discourse of complicated and even controversial themes within society.

Oksana Gryshchenko is a molecular biologist, economist, politician, art curator and scholar of Western Esotericism. Throughout her many professional incarnations, she has enjoyed implementing magic on some level, either symbolic or practical. From 2009-2013 she was cofounder and curator of curatorial private organization Doroshenko Gryshchenko Clinic, based in Ukraine. This organization realized a series of international projects, among them: AUT (dedicated to autism and its influence on the society) and Chinhizidy of Ukraine (2009). Oksana has curated exhibitions *Mavka or Ukraine Has Not Died Yet* (2009) and *Visionaries* (2013).

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*Curating Magic* is organised by Tor Scott, Helen Bremm and Emma Sharples and supported by the British Art Network (BAN). BAN is a Subject Specialist Network supported by Tate and the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, with additional public funding provided by the National Lottery through Arts Council England. The Network promotes curatorial research, practice and theory in the field of British Art. Its members include curators, academics, artist-researchers, conservators, producers and programmers at all stages of their professional lives.

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