The Garage Journal’s Advisory Board on Doing Research in Art Institutions

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What is the role of collaborative research in contemporary museum practice? How can an art institution support research in the arts and humanities? These are some of the questions that were sent to a panel of interlocutors—among them multi-disciplinary researchers, curators, and art managers. Their responses are presented in the form of a discourse about contemporary art institutions and research; its focus is on how art institutions can generate knowledge, support research, and build inclusive environments. Offering insights from different contexts, experiences, and disciplines, their discussion serves as a manifesto for research in the museum in general, and in The Garage Journal in particular.

Keywords: access, art institution, collaborative, contemporary, international, journal, publications, research

I reached out to members of the journal’s advisory board with two questions:

1. Do you think it is important for an art institution to support research in the arts and humanities? How would such support help to advance new methodologies and to produce new conceptualizations? How could a research journal published by an art institution help to achieve these goals?

2. In museum practice, there has recently been a lot of emphasis placed upon access and inclusion. How does this translate into collaborations among artists, curators, visitors, and other stakeholders? What is the role of collaborative research in contemporary museum practice?

The members’ responses contribute to an exciting discussion about the role of art institutions in generating knowledge, supporting research, and building inclusive environments. Offering insights from different contexts, experiences, and disciplines, their discussion serves as a manifesto for research in the museum in general, and in our journal in particular.

Vlad Strukov
1. For art institutions, it is all-important to support research on the arts and culture. Undoubtedly. It is crucial. Especially if an art institution has its own collection and archive, in which case it is possible to produce serious academic publications that combine visual and documentary materials. All this is understood. For a museum, the main thing is to collect, store, and exhibit works of art. Moreover, if we are talking about contemporary art, the point is to make exhibitions that are timely, allowing viewers to correlate today’s history with its interpretation in art. Broadly speaking, exhibitions really are the starting points for new theories that allow us to revise or to clarify interpretations of archival documents and biographies, and to refine aspects of ‘cultural studies’ through the publication of articles in journals and catalogues.

However, even an exhibition hall that has no collection or archive is quite capable of assembling a curatorial team to create an exhibition that will address a contemporary topic and shift previous academic ideas. Therefore, the main word in your question is in the verb ‘supports.’ A policy of supporting research in the liberal arts helps to ensure that culture is not only stored in a ‘warehouse’ of smart thoughts and significant images but that it also develops society and fosters its intellectual activity. The journal usually registers the flow of artistic life, but it can also impact its course through various kinds of problematizing publications.

2. Almost all museum projects are acts of cooperation between numerous art historians, collectors, restorers, archivists, designers, and so forth. It is very important that the project team, on the one hand, consists of like-minded professionals, so that each can specialize in their own field and have a determined role, but, on the other hand, that the team preserves some flexibility in its actions—for example, by retaining the ability to involve an outside consultant. There has been a tendency, evident for some time in exhibition catalogues, not only to publish works of art but also to present an intellectual ‘map’ of a certain historic period; such maps involve thinkers from diverse professional orientations, who are not directly related to the museum. These catalogues are often more important than the exhibitions themselves, just as the lecture programs that accompany the exhibitions can also spark further research.

Ekaterina Andreeva

Ekaterina Andreeva (Andreyeva) (PhD) is a multidisciplinary researcher, curator, and cultural practitioner based in St. Petersburg, Russia.
1. I think all cultural institutions that hold collections—not only art institutions but also historical and natural historical institutions, medical collections, and so on—should support research in the arts and humanities. In my opinion, collections should be opening up more and more to instigate a creative dialogue between the objects and art, and this dialogue should be led by research in the collections. I feel that responding to collections through art and creativity elevates the narrative and the stories that are revealed by the objects, and creates a bridge between the collections and audiences. Artists can offer different readings and interpretations through their research into institutions by generating new concepts and meanings, and by contextualizing the collections within a wider frame. A research journal published by an art institution can provide a stimulus in this direction by challenging the art institution that supports it, and by providing a platform to showcase the work of other institutions.

2. Recently, I have been following, with great excitement, a lot of initiatives in the cultural sector that aim to widen access and inclusion and to foster collaborations by inviting artists to research collections; these expand museum practice in a creative and collaborative way. There are more funding opportunities for those museums and galleries who have a collection to collaborate with artists and to commission new work by artists of African and/or Asian and/or South American descent. It makes me happy to see how these new opportunities develop in a collaborative way, as many of these projects support curatorial development or mentorship with an emphasis on access and inclusion. This path of collaborative research can transform curatorial practices around commissioning and collecting within museums and galleries by creating more representative and democratic collections. It will also bring in new audiences to museums and galleries by creating displays that more visitors can relate to.
1. Collaborative practices of research that bring together the arts, academia, and activism matter a great deal for continuing to advance new critical responses to the neoliberal restructuring of various sectors, including universities. The revised performance metrics introduced into the new systems of university managerialism pave the way for a further precarization of researchers who specialize in arts and humanities. Precarity, here, comes with the increasingly debatable value of the researchers’ expertise in terms of sectoral/industrial impact, innovation, public engagement, and employability.

In such a climate, a potential revalorization of humanities research may be achieved by discovering and pursuing creative forms of cross-sectoral mobility. Moving from precarity to resilience, these mobilities should produce alternative spaces of collaborative knowledge production, where critique, innovation, and impact are sought not within but across institutional boundaries. Aren’t queer, feminist, and postcolonial frameworks perfect examples of how the arts, academia, and political activism cross-fertilize and collectively produce new conceptualizations that go beyond sectors, disciplines, and geographies? Isn’t a curatorial practice comparable to the methodological and structural design of an academic study informed by theory?

In a similar vein, a research journal published by an art institution, with the support of a diverse group of practitioners, has the potential to facilitate an exciting platform that attends to the possibilities of inter- and transdisciplinary modes of knowledge production.

2. I have always struggled to align myself with institutional frameworks of diversity and inclusion that appropriate identity categories and extract value from them, laying claim to an entitlement to ‘empower’ them. The ways in which value and voice are assigned to an identitarian visibility in international and intersectional contexts of cultural production have to be questioned, not taken for granted. Neoliberal forms of identitarian visibility can corrode the radical foundations of queer, feminist, and/or postcolonial critique. We often see this in how LGBTQ tolerance, gender equality, and decolonization work as commercial branding tools. How can a critical institutional practice authenticate its subjects of inclusion and diversity? The political economy and the national-sectoral context within which cultural institutions operate help to shape the discourse.
about inclusion and diversity. The main advantage of the cross-sectoral and multi-disciplinary collaborations within academic research and art practice is that such collaborations can more effectively reflect on, critique, and transform—or even avoid or evade—institutional values and professional/disciplinary attachments to rigid conceptual frameworks of inclusivity, diversity, empowerment, and vulnerability.
1. I think if the art institution is open to being decisively reconsidered by its public, it has to create the conditions for this interested, if not invested, public to propose ways for the institution to be made more responsive to the demands of reciprocal critique—or at least to an interlocution or any form of inter-subjectivity. One way to do this is to foster research in ways that neither mimic the logic of academic practice nor reject academic knowledge as altogether ‘immaterial.’ The institution, through its journal, can be the entry point into this research agenda thanks to its ability to rework research through a wider citational universe and archive of methods. It should encourage writerly explications, experimental field work, affective annotations, and the exploration of idiosyncratic material through equally idiosyncratic problematics. In other words, it should be a research poetic that animates the lifeworld of the subject being written along with. In this regard, research as a practice must be fundamentally re-intuited, cutting through academic protocols and self-fulfilling prophecies, from imperialism to empiricism. With this critique of the economy of research, the art institution can be instrumental in generating insights and further convergences. The word ‘conceptualization’ is key here, because research takes its early steps in the procedures of sensing and thinking, aware of both the untranslatabilities and the desires that impact our investigation. The poetic or aesthetic, therefore, can furnish the frisson, the excitement, or the excitation for other procedures to unfold and can offer inspiration and persuasion, rather than neat explanations.

2. Research should be inherently collaborative, that is, generous in terms of sharing experiences and sensibilities. Because research is collaborative, it is not extractive. Instead, research is reciprocal, vulnerable, and open to and enthusiastic about critique, with the view of proposing a third moment beyond hegemonic and dialectical structures. Collaboration, however, is not easy to achieve. It requires patient deliberation and rehearses the difficulties of a democratic ethic. Collaboration is a painstaking process, but one that must persist in and permeate the everyday life of institutions. The museum should be a site for collaborative convergences because its nature is transdisciplinary; the erstwhile cabinet of curiosities should take consolation in the term ‘curiosities.’ This is the starting point for inquiry, attentiveness, fascination, and exceptional affiliations across materials, objects, and ideas.
Collaboration enhances the contemporaneity of the museum, not its impulse to accumulate. Collaboration allows the museum to self-identity as ‘contemporary’ and to benefit from the financialization of cultural capital. Most importantly, collaboration compels the museum to be committed to the promise of the contemporary. As a result, collaborations change the structure of the museum’s governance, or how the institution of the museum is disciplined through its bureaucracy and curatorial authority, which should be de-sedimented and disseminated. Curatorial opportunities should be redistributed so that a wider scope of intelligences can inform the museum’s collections and activities and also the habits of its workers.

Collaboration may also question the privileged status of specialization and expertise, replacing the hierarchical or linear mode of gathering knowledge with a mode that is horizontal or lateral, and, as a result, is more organic, less systematic, but nevertheless robust and complex, and in effect ‘truer’ to an ever-evolving milieu.
1. Artists that really stand out in art history are those who consider themselves to be researchers, or whose work of art is research-based. Research is not only at the heart of creative and knowledge production; it is at art institutions that it makes a real difference. In fact, research has been an intrinsic element of any art institution with an important mission.

Modernity is gone. Worldwide shutdowns due to pandemics are here to stay forever. Functional and constructive modernity was based on a well-defined structural system. Emancipatory and liquid modernity diluted that system, allowing for experiments in the institutional realm that had never happened before. Museums and art exhibitions, such as biennials, started to invest not only in research but in new ways to perform museums. They became hybrid platforms.

Research and critical thinking are, more than ever, not only central to those institutions that are willing to understand their roles in contemporaneity but also to those willing to imagine and develop a new design for postmodern and post-pandemic times. By operating as an observatory/lighthouse of the museum, and so as its think tank, The Garage Journal will foster original debates, leading to the development of new methodologies and new conceptualizations.

2. The emphasis on access and inclusion still resides more in the realm of discourse than practice. The outcomes of the French Revolution, such as human rights and the right of access to culture and knowledge, are still not universal; they are, in some cases, in jeopardy. Museums remain top-down structures, whilst becoming increasingly global and contextual. This is something of a paradox, but this paradox has kept museums alive and more dialogical. Museums are resilient devices, so long as they develop the means to mutate and evolve. So, museums need to continue to invest in experimentation and unorthodox operations, making use, on the small scale, of collectivity and permanent interaction with their constituent elements and with their surroundings, and, on a larger scale, with the planet and society in general.
Katya Inozemtseva

Katya Inozemtseva (PhD) is a senior curator at Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, Moscow, Russia.

1. It is quite difficult for me to imagine how an institution can exist without large-scale and varied research programs. Aside from honest research, what else could guarantee, so to speak, the legitimacy of exhibitions, publishing, public and other programs of the museum? The contemporary museum initiates and supports research projects, gives them the resources for their continuation, yet at the same time does not expect a guaranteed result: this is how the scientific environment is shaped, how new agendas are introduced, and, finally, how a new academic generation is formed. In addition, any academic formation needs a print house. The journal becomes a territory of dialogue, an approbation of various approaches, an accumulator of various practices and experience.

2. Inclusion, or the figure of including a wide variety of experiences, spectators, and practices into the museum seems to be one of the most healing and liberating ‘procedures’ that have happened to exhibition institutions over the past 10 years. The museum itself has changed, ceasing to be a specific place and a building and instead becoming a center, a hub, a part of various communities, a point of circulation of various energies. For the first time in over 70 years, it is obvious that the social dimension has returned to the museum agenda; not in the mode of delayed effects, but in literal, daily changes that are carried out not only for posterity and culture but for every person who lives in Moscow, New York City, Turin, Seoul, or wherever you are now in 2020. Interaction has become live and direct and less formal; it is changing artistic practice itself, which increasingly turns not to a community of experts but to a wide variety of people.
1. Art institutions rarely support research, considering that their goal, if they are collecting institutions, is acquisition and de-acquisition, and museum display. Already, seeking funding and the logistics of collections and collection-based exhibitions comprises most of the work that such museums do. Non-collecting art institutions, too, often emphasize institutional processes, administration, logistics, and display, but overall very few museums have or collect archival materials and libraries or hire full time researchers. I will not comment on how corporate global art galleries are engaging in these processes, as their work revolves exclusively around art sales. Thus, within the museum’s daily operations, bureaucratic processes are prioritized over research and artistic processes. Art institutions today need research teams that could expand the institutions’ focus, breaking the standard trajectories of art history in the Western world.

2. To speak of my own experience as a curator, I would say that collaboration has been the standard for my overall approach to the practice. The driving question for collaboration is knowledge and know-how. Artist-curators, scholarly curators, administrative curators, and art historians each approach curating differently. Administrative curators typically focus on institutional processes. Thus, collaborative curatorial practice offers a shift. However, my issue is with both knowledge and authorship. It seems that the exhibition is always credited to a single author, and similarly to a single body of knowledge, or to a single source. I wonder how and why this is the case, given that there are many contributors to the exhibition process. Collaborative research should engage multiple perspectives. We often attribute the outcomes of research to a singular genius, when in fact all the researchers working as a team are responsible for them.
1. Should an art institution support research in arts and humanities? I do not think this is a very common thing to do, but I do not see why this situation should not be changed. We know that research was traditionally associated with people who have a particular kind of knowledge (the so-called ‘experts’). We also know that verification of this knowledge has to be done publicly—predominantly, in journals and books that can be circulated outside the immediate community of the experts who produced that knowledge. Can an art institution become a platform that could bring together various researchers? Absolutely. Can an art institution popularize the knowledge produced by these researchers? No doubt.

Yet, I find it difficult to imagine how a research journal in the arts and humanities could succeed outside academic networks. Not because academic networks are better suited to doing research, but mostly because they have an already established system of reviewing and vetting ideas and methods. Most influential U.S. journals in this field, say, October or Critical Inquiry, are influential precisely because they are run by university professors. Such journals, then, are only the tip of a much larger iceberg, a link in a larger web of people and ideas. A research journal published by an art institution could only succeed by becoming a key actor in a similar network. To put it differently, it is not enough to coin a concept in a journal article; the concept has to circulate in a community of scholars; it has to be tested and debated, it has to be proven and disproven. Otherwise, it would remain an empty discursive exercise.

A research journal, in other words, is impossible without a community of researchers. The difficulty is that a research journal cannot ‘create’ researchers. But it can bring them together; it can amplify their debates, stimulating professional dialogues and conceptual inquiries.

2. My recent experience has demonstrated that in order to be generative, access and inclusion should be specified and operationalized, targeting concrete audiences and aiming to employ clearly defined sets of ideas and/or methods. By themselves, access and inclusion are not enough. As I see it, the goal of collaborative practices and projects is to foreground voices, approaches, and views that have not been heard or seen. The aim is to expand the scope and the depth of dialogue. Access and inclusion, in other words, are necessary conditions for an intellectual conversation, but they are not a substitution for it.
Research in Art Institutions

Beatrix Ruf

*Beatrix Ruf is a freelance curator and institutional advisor based in Amsterdam, the Netherlands.*

Research, as an institutionally integrated discipline, is an important tool for each institution, through which it can rethink and reshape its modes of production. As with continued experiments in models of thinking and doing, questioning and revisioning, research is crucial to all the activities of institutions and to institutions as living bodies; it prevents the affirmation and confirmation of that which is known and prevents us from standing still.
1. In a world of global crises, pandemics, and social upheavals, institutions need to redefine themselves in order to respond to the changing needs of society; otherwise, they can expect to become redundant. The new world requires institutions to reform themselves by collaborating with each other to build resilience, approaching traditional epistemologies with criticism, and involving a wider range of previously under-represented participants. Approaching practice as research is quite important for art institutions, as research offers open-ended questions and widens the outreach of institutions. Research-led practices are open to encounters and dialogues, which are impossible in contexts in which practices are determined by metrics of delivery and achievement. As such, research-led practices should be defined as those that are the subject of discourse, methodologies, and audiences-in-the-making. Rather than accepting pre-established and dominant forms of knowledge, research should seek new methodologies, experiment, and recognize a multiplicity of knowledges. Establishing new support systems between researchers and art institutions is advantageous for both the sides. These support systems may include spaces for presentation and public programs. Institutions may benefit from the critical and creative approaches of researchers, while researchers may become involved in new networks and get access to new areas of research.

2. The future museum, like other public and semi-public institutions, will be something completely different from just a place that one visits to view objects. I imagine a future in which museums and universities have been radically transformed in order to remain relevant for society. They will be spaces for research, providing wider, participatory opportunities for both the professionals and the community. They will be places of democracy in action, where publics, researchers, artists, curators, and other stakeholders will be able to meet on more equal terms in order to think and work together.

In a period of pandemics and lockdowns, we have understood that museums are much more than places to see collections and/or attend events. Online platforms have been asked to provide access to museums collections and events. Yet none of these have been able to replace the unexpected encounters, the informal happenings, the unforeseen conversations and debates, all of which usually interact with the more formal spaces and programs of institutions. Nor do these online platforms respond well
to the needs of collaborative work. Of course, collaboration benefits from spaces that can be shared and that offer safety and equality. However, this may not be enough in the future, as we put increasing emphasis on openness, locality, accessibility, freedom, and cultural accumulation.
1. For an institution based on the concept of research and the preservation of cultural artifacts, it is especially important to support academic projects, among them journals, newsletters, and online platforms. Any of these formats enable the institution to become a place for the production of new, free knowledge, new meanings, and historically significant research journals with an academic status help all this work to become sound and grounded. For its exhibitions and publishing program, the museum of contemporary art makes use of a range of research methods, which can be employed in new, experimental ways within the framework of a research journal. An academic journal provides a unique opportunity for researchers to rethink that which was radically relevant at the exhibition just yesterday, and to ‘clothe’ it in articulated academic statement. Due to their routines of work, curators and researchers often lack the opportunities or the resources to critically rethink the cultural product that they reproduce; many materials go ‘into the drawer,’ so to speak. In this sense, the scientific journal largely helps to realize the ambition to formulate new research methods and theories.

2. From a research point of view, collaborations are the most interesting format for a museum project; their boundaries are so blurred that they can involve very different subjects in the process, from museum staff to visitors and external experts. In this sense, the project Co-Thinkers, shown at the Garage Museum in 2016, is very indicative.

The creation of the exhibition involved four Garage visitors with different disabilities. They became the co-thinkers who helped form the final list of exhibits, and even the architectural design of the exhibition. Their participation produced the emergence of special interactive modules that could help a person with any form of disability to perceive a work of art easily, using typographical comments and the presence of tactile models. Later on, friendly institutions became co-thinkers of the project. In 2017, Co-Thinkers was reconstructed at the Yeltsin Center in Yekaterinburg, but with slightly different exhibits. Through the works of Maurizio Cattelan, Cindy Sherman, and Neo Rauch, information about art was made available to viewers with disabilities.

The next co-thinker was the NCCA in Nizhny Novgorod, where, in 2019, the project evolved into a new iteration, thanks to works from the collections of the Garage patrons. In addition, the museum team conducted
a series of trainings on understanding inclusion for our Nizhny Novgorod colleagues.

In light of this experience, it becomes clear that a tremendous amount of work goes into collaborative research: developing a methodology, organizing the preparation and implementation process, and further work on archiving and analyzing the project’s results.
1. It is important for arts institutions to support research in the arts and humanities. This is already an established convention, to varying degrees, in most institutions. However, the more salient question for me is: what is the nature of this support, and how do art institutions function to define and frame the research they are choosing to support? The idea and quest for ‘newness’ is also not a ‘new’ aspiration. It has played a crucial role in the development of art history and its canon. New methodologies and conceptualizations do not necessarily mean better, fairer, or more inclusive ones. However, the rise of contemporary art—its challenge, and in many cases rejection or refusal to maintain an engagement with canonical and modernist trajectories—along with its embrace of more thematic concerns that resonate beyond the gallery ecosystem, have produced art practices and research that do offer a more dynamic and potentially transformative approach and understanding of these important issues.

Situating a research journal within an art institution can provide a place or opportunity to bring together research that has the capacity to develop new methodologies and conceptualizations, due to the close relationship between artists and their work, exhibition making practices, and academic research within this context. Ideally, such an opportunity would enable artists, curators, arts and humanities researchers, and public programming and marketing teams to develop exhibition and journal ideas and frameworks together. The key factor in enabling this kind of relationship and facilitating greater inclusion and access for artists, researchers, and audiences, is the ability and capacity of those involved to not only seek to create new research but to also commit to ensuring that it is driven by an inclusive and transformative vision.

2. As a Pacific art historian, my experience is that this is no recent thing. Museums practices have, for many decades, sought to develop collaborations with indigenous artists to work with collections (the majority being outside of the Pacific: in Europe, the U.K., and the U.S.) by either restaging or exhibiting their work alongside their often vast collections; as a statement or gesture towards access and inclusion. To me, the issue is not the collaboration between artists, researchers, visitors, and stakeholders, but the nature of this collaboration and its underlying intentions. I would like to see collaboration understood as a relationship that art institutions and researchers take responsibility for over time, not just for the duration of a particular
exhibition and its public programming. This collaborative approach and the research that it engenders should aspire to create embedded and systemic cultural changes and transformations within arts institutions that enable inclusive experiences for artists and visitors.

Diversity, like newness, does not necessarily result in equity. Given the fraught histories of many museum collections, this research collaboration should be transparent and should not shy away from addressing colonialism and its legacies, patriarchal hegemonies, and binary heteronormative mindsets that had set the course for many collections and curatorial practices. In doing so, we will increasingly open the door of institutions to a wider range of artists, audiences, and researchers.
Research in Art Institutions

Galina Yankovskaya

Galina Yankovskaya (PhD) is a researcher and museum practitioner based in Perm, Russia, where she is a professor of History at Perm State University.

1. Nowadays, art is being increasingly interpreted as a sphere of knowledge production. ‘Research, research is everywhere’—this would describe a significant part of projects related to contemporary art, as well as the texts about them. On the one hand, the specificity of artistic research erases the outlines of the activity described by this term, so any step the artist takes in collecting and systematizing information (even a one-time trip to the library) could be described using research categories. On the other hand, artists use methods and techniques of obtaining information that are familiar to researchers from the humanities—qualitative interviews, participatory observations, archival work, experiments, collecting material evidence, seminars, round tables, etc.

Against the background of the ‘research turn’ in the art world, perhaps the most important programmatic task for any art institution is to support the research ‘tone’. First, this involves the build-up of its own resources due to the involvement of ‘non-standard’ experts in the process of reflection. Second, it involves the ability to respond flexibly to a changing social context and artistic and academic agenda. Finally, systematic and ‘long-term’ support for research would allow for the discovery of new objects of study, experimentation with languages and concepts for describing artistic phenomena, and the creation of a communicative environment for those involved. Much depends on the institutional rules of the game, according to which an art institution launches projects such as a ‘research journal.’ For example, which standards of academic ethics will this journal prioritize?

2. The word ‘collaboration’ has complex shades of meaning that are perceived acutely, especially among historians. There is a negative political interpretation—deflection under circumstances, ideological or forced cooperation with those who have deprived you of your freedom of independent action. This is always a vertically asymmetrical relationship and forced cooperation.

Therefore, in modern practice there are more appropriate expressions such as ‘participatory creativity,’ ‘dialogical art,’ or ‘community art’ (and similar terms). I see them as a much more accurate description of a situation that involves different actors in museum activities and artistic practices. ‘Moving the viewer’ into the position of a curator, designer, and exhibitor seems to have become the new norm when the viewer comes to a museum, a master class, or an art residency. This new norm can revi-
talize and create civil communities, but equally, it can become just a new standard for the free time/work matrix of ‘cultural consumption.’ In this regard, research (no matter how differently museum workers and artists use it) is not only a new horizon of opportunities (for all parties involved), but also a challenge: cooperation can turn into imitation.