

# The Art Curator and Curation in The Works of Modern Researchers

Larisa Ivanovna Nekhvyadovich<sup>1</sup>, Lidiya Vasilyevna Balakhnina<sup>2</sup>, Irina Valeryevna Chernyaeva<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Altai State University, Barnaul, Russia

<sup>2</sup>Tyumen State University, Volodarskogo Street, 6, Tyumen, 625003, Russia

## Abstrac

The article presents an analytical review of the scientific literature on the topic of “curator” and “curation” in the art of the 21st century. Two directions are identified: the works of Russian and foreign researchers. The authors of the article analyze and systematize monographs and research articles by curators, art historians, art critics, and researchers: B. and G.D. Lord, H.-U. Obrist, J. Rugg, M. Sedgwick, P. O’Neill, T. Smith, K. Schubert, M. Bhaskar, E.E. Prilashkevich, A.V. Karpov, V. Miziano, N.N. Suvorov. It is concluded that in the period from 2000 to 2017, researchers published numerous materials, devoted to the main concepts of the development of curation, the first manifestations of curation as an essential factor in the development of contemporary art, and the functions and forms of modern curation. Moreover, researchers investigate value orientations forming the main principles of the curator’s choice and the issues related to the study of an art project as the subject of research in contemporary humanitarian knowledge.

Keywords: curation, art curator, art market, contemporary art, exhibition space.

---

## El curador de arte y la curación en las obras de los investigadores modernos

### Resumen

El artículo presenta una revisión analítica de la literatura científica sobre el tema de "curador" y "curación" en el arte del siglo XXI. Se identifican dos direcciones: los trabajos de investigadores rusos y extranjeros. Los autores del artículo analizan y sistematizan monografías y artículos de investigación de curadores, historiadores del arte, críticos de arte e investigadores: B. y G.D. Lord, H.-U. Obrist, J. Rugg, M. Sedgwick, P. O'Neill, T. Smith, K. Schubert, M. Bhaskar, E.E. Prilashkevich, A.V. Karpov, V.Miziano, N.N. Suvorov. Se concluye que en el período 2000 a 2017, los investigadores publicaron numerosos materiales, dedicados a los conceptos principales del desarrollo de la curación, las primeras manifestaciones de la curación como un factor esencial en el desarrollo del arte contemporáneo, y las funciones y formas de curación moderna. Además, los investigadores investigan las orientaciones de valor que forman los principios principales de la elección del curador y los problemas relacionados con el estudio de un proyecto de arte como tema de investigación en el conocimiento humanitario contemporáneo.

Palabras clave: curaduría, comisaria de arte, mercado del arte, arte contemporáneo, espacio expositivo.

### 1. Introduction

At the turn of the 20th-21st centuries, new artistic techniques, which incorporate innovative information technologies, are being synthesized. Art is penetrating the transcendental sphere; creators are forming the essence of artistic activity, in which they find sources for their creations. At the same time, a new generation's system of criteria for artistic evaluation is being formed. Its main conditions are the ability to see and evaluate (critical activity), identify and research, generalize and analyze (scientific activity), set a goal and determine the result (projective activity), and present and act according to one's own position (representative activity). The key role in this activity is performed by the art curator.

The purpose of the research is to identify and systematize by chronological and thematic principle publications devoted to the curator and the analysis of their professional activity at the beginning of the 21st century. The historio

graphic review of curation is relevant in the context of studying the complex issues of interaction between the artist, curator, and gallery owner (collector).

## 2. Methods

The main theoretical and methodological approaches were historical-systematic and complex. The chronological method allowed us to identify historiographical sources and present them in chronological order. This helped to set priorities in the problem statement and the continuity process in its research. The problem-chronological method contributed to the determination of research problems in the field of curation depending on a certain period in the development of curation. One of the research methods is a critical analysis of scientific literature devoted to curation in contemporary art.

## 3. Results

The relevance of the research is complemented by the fact that upon analyzing the terms “curator” and “curation” in the sphere of art it was found that definitions, which could accurately reflect the essence of the terms, have not yet been formulated. For example, the art historian, philosopher, writer, and publicist B. Groys defines the curator as a person engaged in the analysis of existing works of art, selection of the most significant ones among them, and their presentation, however, this definition does not fully reveal the meaning of the term (Groys, 2009). The curator-practitioner H.-U. Obrist believes that the curator is not just a performer of a given program, they are an intermediary balancing between different forms of artistic activity, as well as a catalyst, building bridges of understanding of art by various audiences (Obrist, 2012). The presented characteristics do not fully reflect the essence of the diverse nature of curation in the art of the 21st century.

Of course, the works of researchers in the second half of the 20th century were devoted to the origin and features of curation as well: starting from the 1960s – abroad and from the 1980s – in Russia. However, the present article concerns the review and analysis of the research at the beginning of the 21st century.

The Russian authors E.E. Prilashkevich, A.V. Karpov, V. Miziano, N.N. Suvorov and foreign researchers B. and G.D. Lord, H.-U. Obrist, J. Rugg, P. O’Neill, T. Smith, K. Schubert, M. Bhaskar devoted their works to the theoretical understanding of curation. They published monographs, textbooks, scientific articles and articles in periodicals, focusing on the nature of modern curation and the fundamental aspects of its functioning.

The works by the foreign authors B. and G.D. Lord, H.-U. Obrist, J. Rugg, M. Sedgwick, P. O’Neill, and T. Smith are devoted to the issues of the development

of contemporary art and the processes of management and organization of cultural institutions. The scientific basis and management experience in museology, the tasks of museum management, and the structure and management methods of museum organizations are presented by the authors B. Lord and G.D. Lord in "The Manual of Museum Management" (2002). The curator, critic, art historian, and director of the Serpentine Galleries in London H.-U. Obrist in the works "A Brief History of Curating" (2012) and "Ways of Curating" (2016) formulates an original view of the history of contemporary art. The author publishes interviews with leading art critics, curators, and directors of museums around the world, transmitting personal experience, which is a unique source for studying the problems of contemporary art. Moreover, the issues of curation of contemporary art and performance are discussed in the book by J. Rugg and M. Sedgwick "Issues in Curating Contemporary Art and Performance" (2012).

The independent curator and artist P. O'Neill puts the curator and cardinal change of their functions at the center of his research entitled "The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)" (2015). The book presents a detailed analysis of the development of the modern curation discourse since the late 1980s (the emergence of the term "curation"). The art historian, art critic, and curator T. Smith successfully solved the problem of uniting the reflections of curators, art critics, and art historians around the world on curation, functions of modern museums, and work in the sphere of art in his research "Thinking Contemporary Curating" (2015).

Of particular interest is the monograph "The Curator's Egg: The Evolution of the Museum Concept from the French Revolution to the Present Day" (2016), in which the German art dealer, publisher, and writer K. Schubert traces the evolution of the western museum and its concept from the appearance of the first public art collections at the end of the 18th century and to the recent opening of Tate Modern in London. The main topics discussed by the author are the interaction of the museum with the cultural, political, and economic spheres, as well as the status and functions of the curator, changing over the period under study.

In "Curation: The Power of Selection in a World of Excess" (2017), M. Bhaskar analyzes the controversial ways of using the term "curation". The author considers the phenomenon of curation in the era of the information tsunami and overproduction when only careful decisions in all spheres of life can protect a person from surfeit and reveal what is really important and necessary. A similar decision is necessary for the modern recipient when identifying and applying the criteria of artistry in diverse visual art.

Thus, in modern research, foreign authors determine the role and functions of the curator in art and the methods of management of cultural organizations, often transmitting their personal experience of curation. It should be noted that abroad,

theoretical development of the issue has been going on for several decades; in Russian science, the phenomenon of curation attracted the attention of researchers only in the 21st century.

At the beginning of the 21st century, Russian researchers (N.N. Suvorov, A.V. Karpov, E.E. Prilashkevich), curators, and art historians (V. Miziano) addressed the issues of the formation of the foundations of curatorial activity.

The candidate of culturology A.V. Karpov in the book “Art market: Questions of theory, history, methodology” (2004) considers the concepts of art market and art business in the cultural, historical, psychological, organizational, and practical aspects in the context of humanitarian knowledge and characterizes the fundamentals of business activities in various fields of artistic culture.

Candidate of art criticism E.E. Prilashkevich considers the issues of the formation in Russian art of the 19th – beginning of the 20th centuries of a qualitatively new form of mediation activity (“The role of curation in the modern art process” (Prilashkevich, 2007)). The researcher concludes that modern curation, regardless of the previously performed roles, is related to three directions of activity: appraisal (primary and secondary qualitative valorization of an artist’s work), constructive (development of the conceptual structure of an artistic project and the context of its understanding corresponding to the chosen problem), and performative (practical realization of an art project by consistently following the methods of the corresponding strategy).

The issues of organization of artistic culture, as well as the forms and methods of the curator’s work with artists, collectors, and journalists, are discussed by the doctor of philosophical sciences, professor, member of the Artists’ Union of Russia N.N. Suvorov in the book “The gallery business: Circulation of works of art” (2015).

In addition to scientific publications of famous Russian researchers, curator-practitioners make an invaluable contribution to the study of the issue as well. For example, the book of the famous art critic and curator V. Miziano “Five lectures on curation” (2014) is the first attempt at the theoretical description of the practice of curation in Russian. The author considers curation in the context of the system of art and through the relationship between global and local processes. Miziano forms the theoretical basis for understanding the essence of the profession, relying on both works on curation and the sociology of art and personal experience in Russian and international projects.

#### 4. Discussion

The analysis of periodicals shows that they consider the phenomenon of curation as well. Topical articles and interviews with curators are published in such

Russian journals as “Muzei”, “Dialog iskusstv”, “Iskusstvoznanie”, “Logos”, and “Iskusstvo”. In 2012, M. Oganesyants published a material devoted to the description of the curator and their role in the formation of the strategies of creation and development of the museum fund in the journal “Iskusstvoznanie”. The subject of the study is the curation of the heads of the Department of Contemporary Art of the State Russian Museum in the 1920s-30s (N.N. Punin) and in the 1990s-2000s (A.D. Borovskiy) (Oganesyants, 2012).

In the period from 2013 to 2016, a number of articles on the topic of “art curator” and “curation” was published in the scientific-practical journal “Muzei”: an interview with A. Hoffmann, the commercial director of Bucerius Kunst Forum in 2013 (Hoffmann, 2013), an interview with the director of the State Tretyakov Gallery, art historian, and curator of international museum exhibitions Z.I. Tregulova in 2015 (Tregulova, 2015), articles and an interview with V. Miziano “Ethics of curation” (Miziano, 2015a; 2015b), articles by the candidate of culturology, senior lecturer of the Moscow International University, founder and chief editor of the portal about art and culture ArtandYou.ru E. Kartseva (2015), the Croatian scholar and internationally recognized specialist in the field of museology T. Šola (2015). In 2016, the same journal published an original article by the professor of anthropology of the University of Denver C. Kreps “Indigenous curation as intangible cultural heritage” (Kreps, 2016), in which the author, denying the approach to the museum as a phenomenon of exclusively Western culture, considers the non-Western models of museums, methods of curation, and concepts of cultural heritage preservation, using the term “indigenous curation”.

In the period from 2012 to 2016, a number of articles and interviews with curators was published in the journal of the Moscow Museum of Modern Art “Dialog iskusstv”. In 2012, L. Adashevskaya published the article “The system effect of ‘Documenta’” (2012), in which the author describes the work of the curator C. Christov-Bakargiev on the concept of the world exhibition of contemporary art “DOCUMENTA-13”. In 2013, the interview of V. Khan-Magomedova with the art historian, the first female curator of the 5th Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art C. de Zegher (2013) was published in the journal. In the same year, the article “Caravan-manage” (Kulik, 2013) by the art critic, lecturer of the Institute of Contemporary Art, and author of numerous publications concerning contemporary art, cinema, and music I. Kulik was published in the journal, in which particular attention is paid to the work of C. de Zegher as the curator of the 5th Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art. The article “The city and the biennale” (Bubnova, 2013) by the art historian, curator, and art critic Ya. Bubnova, who was the co-curator of the European

Biennale of Contemporary Art “Manifesta-4” (Frankfurt, Germany), is devoted to the problems, arising during biennales of different levels. In 2014, the article “Temporary inactivity” by the member of the Association of Art Critics of Russia, art critic, and publicist M. Yaralova was published (2014), in which the author describes the project “Boundaries of action” of curator-graduates of the School of Contemporary Art “Free Workshops” of the Moscow Museum of Modern Art. Moreover, in 2015, the journal published four topical articles devoted to the problem under study: “Fair fair” by the journalist, architectural critic, and lecturer of the MARCH Architecture School M. Fadeeva (2015), devoted to the 14th Venice Biennale and the work of its curator R. Koolhaas, “Moscow art diary” by V. Ledenev, an art critic and employee of the Science Department of the Garage Museum of Contemporary Art (Ledenev, 2015), “The secret of history” by S. Khachaturov, Russian art critic, theorist, curator, and art historian (Khachaturov, 2015), “At the crossroads of the present” by the artist, theorist, candidate of philosophical sciences, and member of the European Network for Avant-Garde and Modernism Studies N. Smolyanskaya (2015). In 2016, the journal published the article “Trusting relationship” by A. Maslyaev, an employee of the Exhibition Department of the Moscow Museum of Modern Art (Maslyaev, 2016) concerning the relationship between the curator and the artist.

In 2015, an article devoted to one of the first independent curators H. Szeemann entitled “Harald Szeemann: The same discoverer as we all” (Shcherbakova, 2015) was published in the philosophical and literary journal “Logos”.

The Russian journal “Iskusstvo” is devoted to the study of contemporary art in Russia and abroad. In 2013, an issue of the journal was published, which included two articles on curation: by the curator of the 55th Venice Biennale M. Gioni (“My project, of course, is not about occultism or spiritualism” (2013)) and by the Indian art critic and curator G. Kapur (“Curating Across Agnostic Worlds” (2015)).

The conducted analysis of periodicals shows that in the first decade of the 21st century, Russian journals began to actively publish articles, reviews, and interviews on curation and contemporary art in Russia and abroad. Publications in periodicals, including those devoted to the review of the features of functioning, as well as the conditions of creation and organization of exhibitions, make a significant contribution to determining the impact of curation on contemporary art.

## 5. Conclusion

Upon studying the history of the problem of the formation and development of

curation, the analysis of exhibition concepts, and the role of the curator in contemporary art, we conclude that at the beginning of the 21st century, a number of Russian and foreign authors investigated the topic under study. The analyzed works are of theoretical (scientific generalization) and practical (factual material collection) nature. In the period from 2000 to 2017, researchers published materials, which can be categorized into the following directions:

- identification of the main concepts of the development of curation;
- analysis of the first manifestations of curation as an essential factor in the development of contemporary art;
- definition of the terms “curator” and “curation”, study of the functions of curation;
- typology of contemporary models of curation;
- comprehension of value orientations forming the main principles of the curator’s choice;
- study of an art project as the subject of research in humanitarian knowledge.

Despite numerous studies, most of the issues related to the elaboration of the conceptual apparatus, development of Russian regional artistic practices, and systematization of the accumulated experience have not yet become the subject of scientific analysis.

## References

- Adashevskaya, L. 2012. Sistemnyi effekt “Dokumenty” [The system effect of “Documenta”]. *Dialog iskusstv*, 5, 98-103.
- Bhaskar, M. 2017. Printsip kuratorstva: Rol vybora v epokhu pereizbytki [Curation: The Power of Selection in a World of Excess]. Moscow: Ad Marginem Press.
- Bubnova, Ya. 2013. Gorod i biennale [The city and the biennale]. *Dialog iskusstv*, 6, 14-17.
- de Zegher, C. 2013. Ya stremilas sdelat prostranstvo domashnim [I wanted to make space home]. *Dialog iskusstv*, 5, 8-13.
- Fadeeva, M. 2015. Spravedlivaya yarmarka [Fair fair]. *Dialog iskusstv*, 4, 104-106.
- Gioni, M. 2013. “Moi proekt, konechno, ne ob okkultizme ili spiritualizme” [“My project, of course, is not about occultism or spiritualism”]. *Iskusstvo*, 2, 72-89.
- Groys, B. 2009. Kurator kak ikonoborets [The Curator as Iconoclast]. *Khudozhestvennyi zhurnal*, 73-74, 33-34.

- Hoffmann, A. 2013. "Idealnoi modeli muzeya ne sushchestvuet..." ["The ideal model of the museum does not exist..."]. *Muzei*, 12, 22-25.
- Kapur, G. 2015. *Kuratorstvo v protivoborstvuyushchikh mirakh* [Curating Across Agnostic Worlds]. *Iskusstvo*, 3, 84-105.
- Karpov, A.V. 2004. *Khudozhestvennyi rynek: Voprosy teorii, istorii, metodologii* [Art market: Questions of theory, history, methodology]. Saint Petersburg: SPbGUP.
- Kartseva, E. 2015. "Pozvolte mne pokazat vam to, chto ya vizhu" ["Let me show you what I see"]. *Muzei*, 10, 17-22.
- Khachaturov, S. 2015. *Sekret istorii* [The secret of history]. *Dialog iskusstv*, 3, 8-11.
- Kreps, C. 2016. *Tuzemnoe kuratorstvo kak nematerialnoe kulturnoe nasledie* [Indigenous curation as intangible cultural heritage]. *Muzei*, 10, 62-66.
- Kulik, I. 2013. *Karavan-manezh* [Caravan-manage]. *Dialog iskusstv*, 6, 8-13.
- Ledenev, V. 2015. *Moskovskii art-dnevnik* [Moscow art diary]. *Dialog iskusstv*, 2, 140-141.
- Lord, B., Lord, G.D. 2002. *Menedzhment v muzeinom dele* [The Manual of Museum Management]. Moscow: Logos.
- Maslyayev, A. 2016. *Doveritelnye otnosheniya* [Trusting relationship]. *Dialog iskusstv*, 6, 60-62.
- Miziano, V. 2014. *Pyat leksii o kuratorstve* [Five lectures on curation]. Moscow: Ad Marginem Press.
- Miziano, V. 2015. *Etika kuratorstva* [Ethics of curation]. *Muzei*, 10, 31-34.
- Miziano, V. 2015. *O perspektivakh muzeinogo kuratorstva v Rossii* [On the prospects of museum curation in Russia]. *Muzei*, 10, 8-13.
- O'Neill, P. 2015. *Kultura kuratorstva i kuratorstvo kultur(y)* [The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)]. Moscow: Ad Marginem Press.
- Obrist, H.-U. 2012. *Kratkaya istoriya kuratorstva* [A Brief History of Curating]. Moscow: Ad Marginem Press.
- Obrist, H.-U. 2016. *Puti kuratorstva* [Ways of Curating]. Moscow: Ad Marginem Press.
- Oganesyants, M. 2012. *Muzeinoe kuratorstvo kak faktor aktualizatsii sovremennogo iskusstva: Na primere deyatel'nosti Otdela noveishikh techenii Russkogo muzeya* [Museum curation as a factor in the actualization of modern art: On the example of the activities of the Department of the Contemporary Art of the Russian Museum]. *Iskusstvoznanie*, 3/4, 599-610.
- Prilashkevich, E.E. 2007. *Rol kuratorstva v sovremennom khudozhestvennom protsesse* [The role of curation in the modern art process]. In *Mezhdunarodnyi*

khudozhestvennyi biznes v kontekste globalizatsii: Materialy Vserossiiskoi nauchno-prakticheskoi konferentsii, 25 yanvarya 2007 [International Art Business in the Context of Globalization: Materials of the All-Russian Scientific and Practical Conference, January 25, 2007]. Saint Petersburg: SPbGUP, 34-37.

Rugg, J., Sedgwick, M. 2012. Issues in Curating Contemporary Art and Performance. Intellect Ltd.

Schubert, K. 2016. Udel kuratora: Kontseptsiya muzeya ot Velikoi frantsuzskoi revolyutsii do nashikh dnei [The Curator's Egg: The Evolution of the Museum Concept from the French Revolution to the Present Day]. Moscow: Ad Marginem Press.

Shcherbakova, E. 2015. Kharald Zeeman: Takoi zhe pervootkryvatel, kak i vse my [Harald Szeemann: The same discoverer as we all]. Logos, 6, 14-17.

Smith, T. 2015. Osmyslyaya sovremennoe kuratorstvo [Thinking Contemporary Curating]. Moscow: Ad Marginem Press.

Smolyanskaya, N. 2015. Na perepute nastoyashchego [At the crossroads of the present]. Dialog iskusstv, 4, 90-95.

Šola, T. 2015. Elitarnost muzeishchikov i kuratorov [Elitism of museum staff and curators]. Muzei, 10, 35-36.

Suvorov, N.N. 2015. Galereinoe delo: Obrashchenie proizvedenii iskusstva [The gallery business: Circulation of works of art]. Saint Petersburg: SPbGUP.

Tregulova, Z.I. 2015. Kurator ili ekspozitsioner? [Curator or exhibitor?]. Muzei, 10, 14-16.

Yaralova, M. 2014. Vremennoe bezdeistvie [Temporary inactivity]. Dialog iskusstv, 4, 52-53.

