

## Jamia Millia Islamia

### Final Evaluation

This grant will support a research and advocacy project on the policy and practice of curating in 20<sup>th</sup> century India through literary research on exhibition policy, stakeholder meetings for the preparation and distribution of advocacy materials and the development of a White Paper.

The Centre for Culture, Media and Governance (CCMG) began with a literature review to aggregate source material from various public art institutions such as the Lalit Kala Akademi, the National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA), New Delhi and private galleries in Delhi. It also conducted research into government policies on exhibitions through comprehensive baseline documentation, case studies, a timeline of exhibitions over the last 10 years and media archiving and analysis. The timeframe of 1999-2010 was chosen for this first phase of research on the understanding that the term 'curator' emerged in the Indian context during this period.

A literature review enabled the research team to map key theoretical issues and debates around the subject of art administration and curatorship, while annual reports of the Ministry of Culture were crucial in understanding the administrative structures of Indian public art institutions and preparing a list of exhibitions taking place under the auspices of government institutions such as NGMA and the Lalit Kala Akademi. Information regarding three private galleries—Vadehra Gallery, Gallery Espace, and Delhi Art Gallery—was also collected. These combined lines of inquiry enabled research staff to determine entry points of the 'curator' into the art landscape in India. Furthermore, it provided a list of important exhibitions which have the potential to be included in an in-depth study at a later point. Of equal importance was the creation of an inventory of objects selected for loan to international museums and galleries and investigation of the cultural contracts or MOUs between countries enabling such transactions. These four areas were covered in the literature review:

- a) Reportage in art magazines regarding curatorship, collectors, and other associated areas.
- b) Articles and essays from journals, both international and Indian. These pertained to three broad areas—cultural policy, curatorship, and museum management.
- c) Annual reports of the Ministry of Culture, Government of India and public art institutions such as Lalit Kala Akademi, together with Government of India Acts relating to the sphere of arts and art objects.
- d) Art market reports, for example FICCI summary report on the art market, the Art Tactic reports on the Indian art market and the Osian art market report.

The India Art Summit provided a platform to engage with firsthand perceptions of stakeholders in relation to art policy in India. A pilot survey, conducted over three days, was administered by students, Faculty of Fine Arts, and CCMG, Jamia Millia Islamia, covered approximately 300 people. Respondents included 187 artists, 13 curators, 21 galleries and 71 others (art historians, art writers and critics). The survey was designed to examine the following three key questions:

Curatorship



- a) What do these stakeholders see as major difficulties/hindrances in the making of an exhibition?
- b) In what areas do these stakeholders require help/assistance which at the present moment might be inaccessible or absent?
- c) What part of the art sector do these stakeholders think is in dire need of government involvement/participation?

Key findings of the survey worth rehearsing are as follows:

- Funding was seen as the biggest bottleneck across categories and was the area in which government assistance was most needed. Similarly, with regard to corporate funding, the majority of artists and curators believed that the sector was falling far short of expectations vis-à-vis supporting the arts.
- Lack of available exhibition spaces was the second biggest bottleneck across categories.
- A significant number of artists felt that issues of copyright were a major obstacle in the making of an exhibition; curators and galleries, on the other hand, did not share this viewpoint.
- Across constituencies it was felt that in terms of infrastructural gaps, storage was a significant problem as was lack of technical and technological expertise.
- The setting up of museums of contemporary arts was seen as critical.
- Insurance and import and export laws, while deemed important by respondents across constituencies, were areas in which there were consistently low levels of knowledge.

While the survey formed one mode of gauging stakeholder perception, coverage of artists and their work in newspapers elaborated on the specificities of media representation during and up to the days preceding the India Art Summit. In the words of CCMG, a 'unique matrix' was designed whereby every report was weighed according to different parameters, such as article length and article positioning, together with a content analysis of the article.

CCMG has also collaborated with Pro-Helvetia—Swiss Arts Council—to organise a symposium titled 'Cultural Policy & Curatorship: Perspectives from Switzerland'. The speakers at the symposium were Mirjam Varadinis, Curator, Kunsthau Zurich, and Marianne Burki, Head of Visual Arts, Swiss Arts Council, Pro-Helvetia. This talk was attended by a large number of students from the Fine Arts Department of Jamia Millia Islamia.

The presentation of both the curators at this symposium emphasised the need for arts council and other institutional support to build a healthy environment for the arts. While detailing their respective experiences in putting up exhibitions as curators, both Marianne and Mirjam elaborated on the extra-artistic negotiations that become essential in facilitating the making of exhibitions. Mirjam elaborated on one particular exhibition which she had curated that broadly dealt with the issues of identity in Switzerland. The effects of globalisation, migration and the rise of rightwing political parties have all led to the issue of identity gaining prominence in Swiss society, she explained. She elaborated further on how artists used the concept of 'shifting' in terms of change and interpreted it accordingly. Marianne spoke on exhibition practices and cultural policy. Admitting that



Pro-Helvetia makes grants to projects which promote the idea of 'Swissness', she recalled her experiences of the time when Pro-Helvetia decided to open an office in China. On the lessons learnt through this collaborative exhibition, she elaborated that it was important to adapt to local conditions. In societies like Switzerland, the curator plays a key role in acting as a link between the institution and the artist.

This was a useful exercise in understanding a European model and how it could be adopted in the Indian context in the event that institutional support for the visual arts is expanded, creating an environment conducive to domestic exhibition-making and international partnerships and activities.

Broadly speaking, these preliminary exercises yielded new knowledge about administrative practices governing exhibitions in public spaces in addition to the rules and regulations governing the display and exhibition of art, artifacts, and films in India. As there is no existing documentation of arts policy, the aggregation of these findings had the potential to contribute to policy studies in understanding the exhibition/curatorial imperative in the country, and the changing relationship between the government and private art institutions. Sadly, however, failure to consolidate research findings in published form has resulted in a lack of materials for dissemination. Similarly, there is no evidence that CCMG lobbied the government, advocating support for curatorial practices, projects and initiatives in both the public and private art sector. A further source of disappointment arises from a failure to interact with other nodal centres and conduct the planned research interviews, especially since these activities were presented as key to the project's methodology.

Notwithstanding these failings, there are mitigating factors which account for the shortfall between expectations and outcomes. Foremost among these is the early closure of the grant, necessitated by irreconcilable differences between CCMG and its research staff together with the disorder arising from rotation of staff at a midway point. A premature winding up of this research project proved to be an unfortunate development whose fallout is evident in the absence of materials which would have illuminated the stress points between policy and curatorial practice and provided a backbone for a concerted advocacy effort.

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