

ELIZAVETA ZHURKOVSKAYA

Toronto-based Art Curator, Art Advisor
and Kefi Art Gallery Owner.

LOIS EMMA HARKIN

Creator behind the STAY CONNECTED
2020 virtual exhibition.

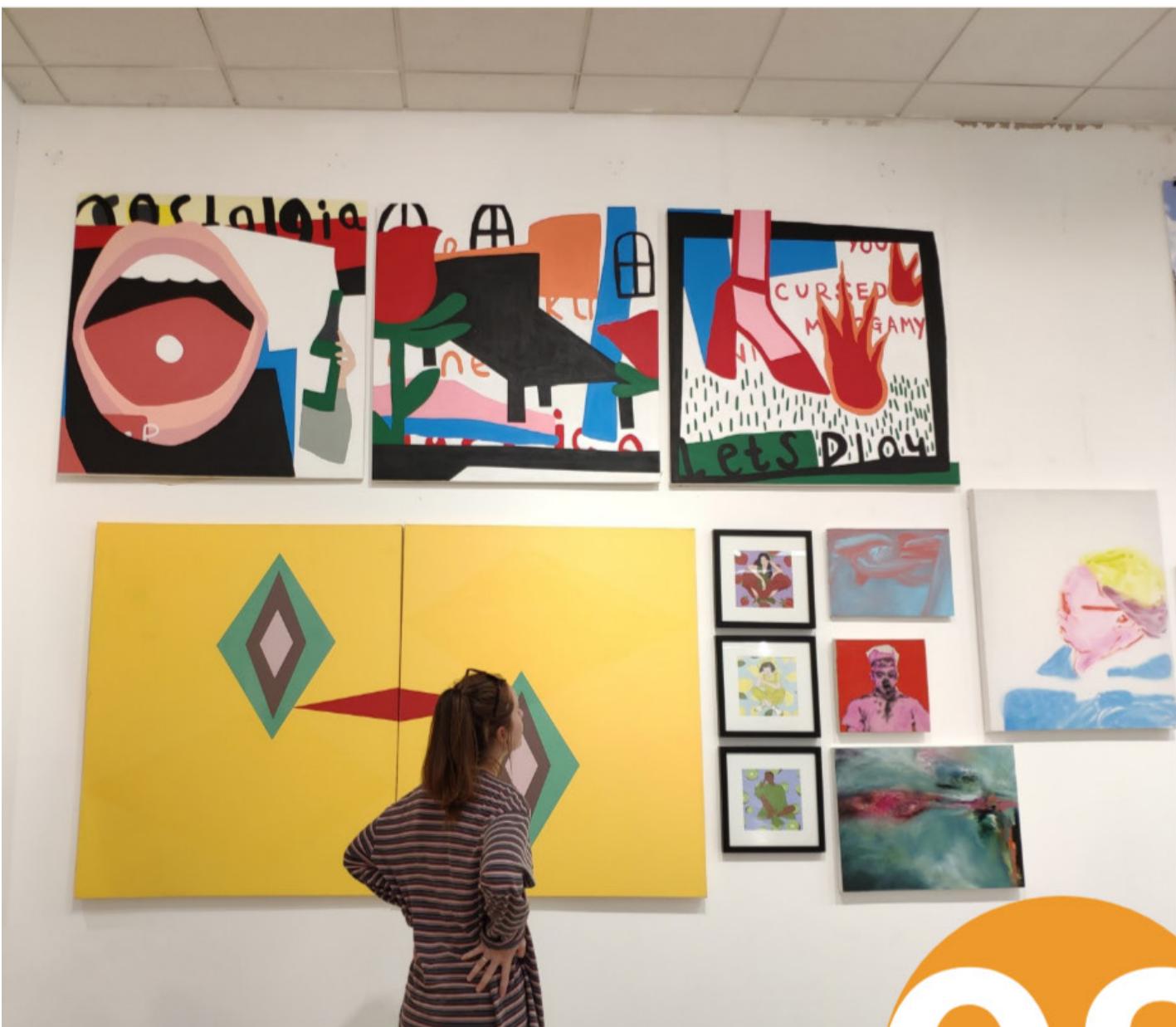
ADELE SMEJKAL

Curator and Owner of Artistellar
Online Gallery

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THE HUTS

WHATS AND WHYS WITH CURATORS



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Elizaveta ZHURKOVSKAYA

The Toronto-based art curator, art advisor, and Kefi Art Gallery owner in front of an audience. Also known as **CURATOR ON THE GO.**



When did you decide to be a curator?

I made this decision after finishing my undergrad degree in art history. I wanted to work with artists and use my education and experience to create engaging shows while making art accessible to everyone.

Did you ever envision yourself as a curator when you were younger?

No. I was born in a small city in Russia, and the word curator wasn't that common there. You couldn't go to school and learn how to be a curator there. I knew for sure I wanted to do something creative.

I was thinking to pursue architecture as my undergrad degree, but art history turned out to be a better option and of more interest to me and I did that at the University of Toronto, Canada. After graduating, my first job was in a commercial artist-run gallery and I really enjoyed the industry.

I started curating art events and shows and I decided to do my masters in Criticism and Curatorial Studies at OCAD University, Toronto.

During my last semester, I got my first independent project to curate a solo show for a local artist and since then I've been doing it full-time.

When planning a display, what task do you handle?

I have curated numerous exhibitions for commercial art galleries and not-for-profit organizations as well as for artists. I always compare exhibition curation to producing an original artwork – it's an experiment and an opportunity to make something creative and unique. The most rewarding moment for me is to see the installed show and how the viewers engage with displayed art.



Curator on
the Go - Podcast

“ A curator is someone curious, dynamic and driven by a passion for art... ”

One of the biggest misconceptions about art curators is that everyone can be a curator. If you just put an object here and another there and put a table and there is a show. However, curation of an art show requires deep involvement in what you are going to present – studying it and formatting it, rather than just packaging it.



A curator is someone curious, dynamic and driven by a passion for art in all its forms as well as someone who is giving their voice to the exhibition. The product of a good curation is not just a nice exhibition where you choose nice things, but how the public creates new knowledge by interacting with the show. I wear a lot of hats when I curate an art exhibition: event planner, curator, PR and marketing manager, etc. Also, my deep understanding of the arts helps me make sure that artworks are placed in conjunction with physical spaces, with culture and with actual people who see it.

Have you been to any galleries recently?

I work part-time as an exhibitions coordinator at a local Toronto-based gallery. We opened our doors in June, but I didn't get a chance to visit other galleries due to my busy schedule. I need to do that for sure!



"A Dream Come True to be able to contribute back to the local College/Ossington community. This Artwork was commissioned by me through Liza Zhurkovskaya, founder of Kefi Art Galery.

This work was created by Toronto muralist L. Phelan. A big thank you for helping me to achieve my vision which was to create a welcoming, inspiring, unifying and beautiful message to young women everywhere. I hope people will see themselves in this mural and visit often to see this vision of beauty in person."

- Althea Johnson, founder of Proprlifestyle.

What do you love about exhibitions?

Art exhibitions trigger emotions. Many art exhibitions have a therapeutic effect on me – I forget about everyday life and external disturbances. Nothing carries you away and clears your mind like visiting art galleries.

It also helps a lot of people boost their own personal creativity. If you want to unleash your own creative juices visit art galleries more often.

What do you dislike about exhibitions?

That many people still don't go to art galleries or museums because they don't have enough art education or knowledge about the artist/presented theme. Art institutions should focus more on making art accessible to everyone.

Your own reaction is the one that counts. If you have a genuine interest in art and an open mind, you are fully equipped. There is no pressure to make the most of it or to always learn something valuable. It's all about the experience you have.

What approach are your go-to to make your exhibitions successful?

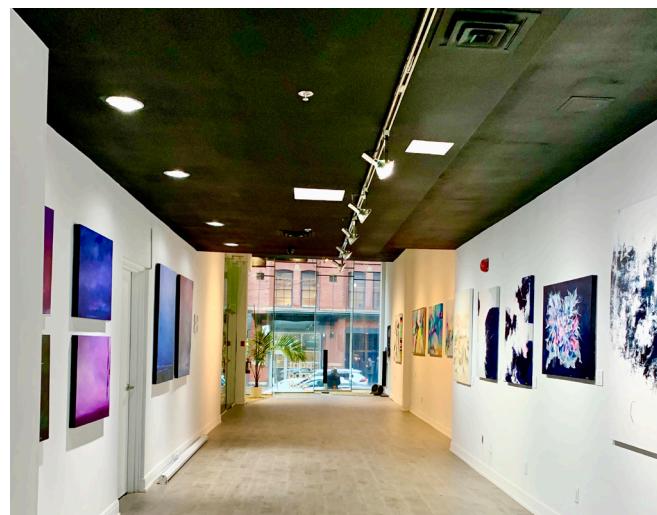
Plan ahead and do it with love. I always put the monetary aspect in second place as my goal is always to find a new home/space for exhibited artworks, make sure my clients are happy, and help my artists grow their practices. As when they thrive - I thrive too. Every exhibition is a way to learn and always make a better event in the future. I've created a list of my things to consider that may help you make your exhibition better.:

- Know the audience want to target.
- If you have a budget for PR/outreach – hire a PR company. If you want a wider or specifically targeted outreach – find a marketing agent who has contacts that fits your “ideal” public.
- Always visit the venue for your upcoming show in-person and pre-plan how many works you can fit in the space. A large venue can produce a “wow” effect but at the same time, it can be too big for the audience to stay focused. It's always great when you have lots of wall space to showcase art but use it wisely.
- Have a written curatorial or artist statement at the show. Visitors, being intrigued by the statement, would come to learn more about the artists and their art practice.
- Have a good photographer. A MUST. You need to have documentation for your records and artists' records. Cut your budget on food or drinks but hire a good photographer.
- Have music during the exhibition. You need to initiate the movement of people in the gallery. All my previous shows included music and people always comment that music helped them enjoy their experience and engagement with the art.

Are there any upcoming exhibitions you are working towards?

This year I've opened Kefi Art Gallery, and my main focus went into developing a successful art platform for people to find and buy affordable contemporary fine art and photography.

I am currently organizing an art exhibition in a gallery I work at called “Dreaming with Eyes Open” where we invite people to immerse themselves in the whimsical world of art, and escape vicariously through our artists' dreams.



LOIS EMMA HARKIN

Creator behind the **STAY CONNECTED** 2020 virtual exhibition on her experience in the Field.

Let's know a little about you and how you got into curating.

My adventure into curation has only recently begun. I have always been interested in how to display artwork and the process behind it. However, during lockdown, the traditional gallery setting to show artwork was not necessarily the best option; this being for my own painting practice or other artists artwork. The idea of artists struggling to show work traditionally during lockdown really got me thinking and sparked my interest further into curation.

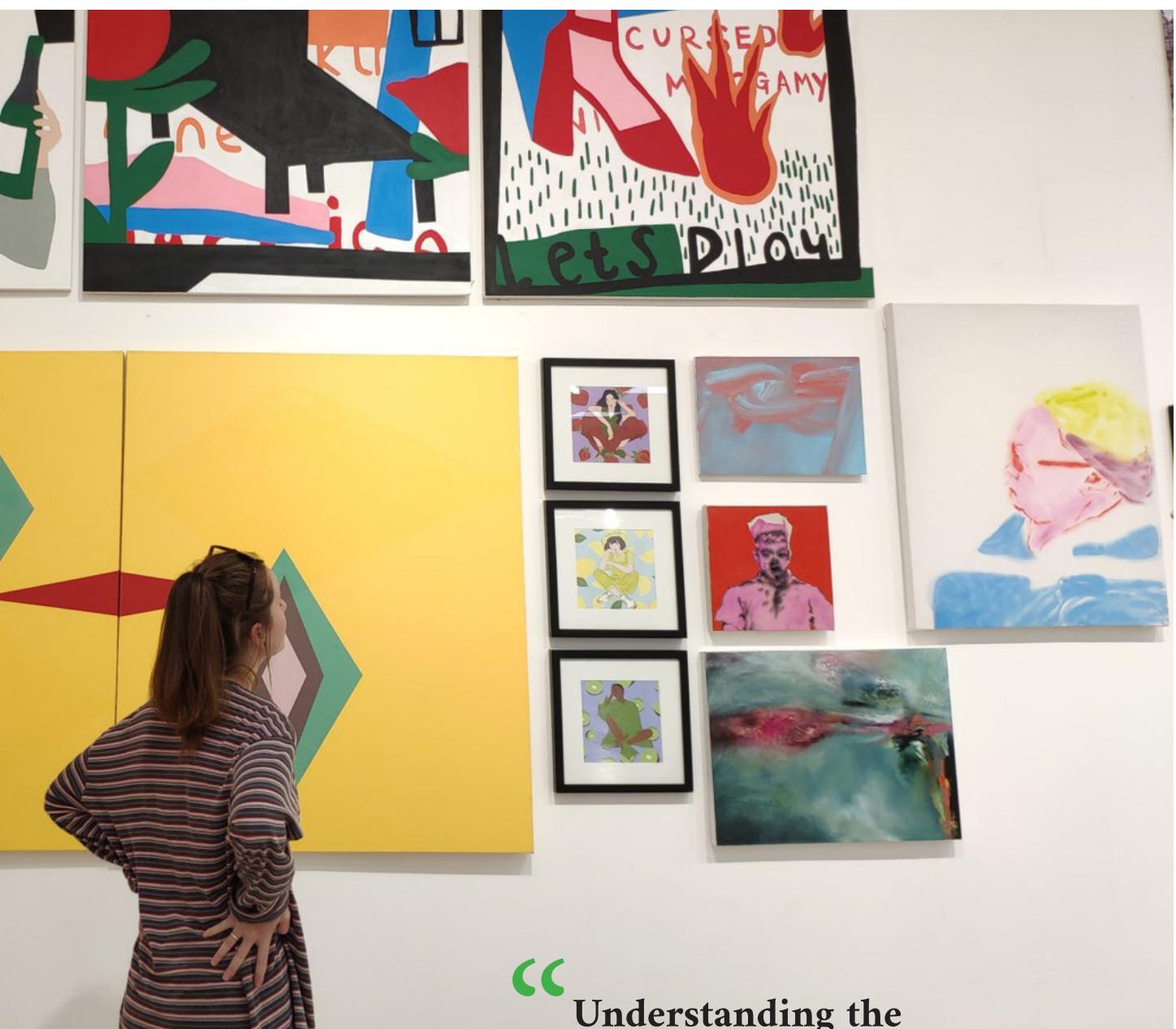
Why did you decide to be a curator?

I wanted to expand my creative practice. Understanding the whole process is something that I wanted to achieve. As a painter, I know my half of the process, deciding what to paint, stretching the canvas, wrapping the piece, and shipping it to a gallery. I wanted to know the other half, what happens when the painting gets to a gallery, how do they store it, how do they decided to hang it; how do they go about curating a physical piece or virtual one- this again sparked my curiosity.



What do you love about Exhibitions?

What I love about exhibitions is that you can be transported into a completely different space. There is something about an exhibition that excites and inspires me. You can visit an exhibition and see work you will never be able to see again.



“Understanding the whole process is something that I wanted to achieve.”



How would you organize information about an exhibition?

The information, or narrative, is salient within an exhibition design and curation. It is the story of the exhibition- what you want the audience to know, think and feel. In my virtual exhibitions, I use a website to store all my information in which is extremely useful when promoting or explaining

Sometimes artwork must be viewed in its physicality to understand scale and texture and emotion. It can spark your interest to produce new work or to research further into an artist, artwork, or concepts.

concepts to an audience; everything is where it is needed and is always very accessible.

What ways do you believe are most effective for publishing your exhibition?

I feel as though the best and most effective way to publish my exhibitions are social media, newsletters and general promotions across artists, galleries, and institutions. Spreading the word to a range of creatives not only engages them with a different way of experiencing exhibitions, but also creates a platform for artists to take part and show their work in a completely different setting. This also creates an opportunity to show work in a group exhibition whilst staying safe at home.

2020 Stay Connected Exhibition

It is a sustainable way of exhibiting which needs to be explored further in visual arts, especially now during the current climate.

What situation do you think might cause you to cancel an exhibition?

I think there is a range of things that could cancel an exhibition. However, I would ensure I first tried every option available to avoid this outcome. I have found that virtual exhibitions are more reliable in the sense of not having a physical space or artwork to depend upon. Everything is conducted online or in a software so the chances of my cancelling a virtual exhibition is highly unlikely.



What are your views on curating international exhibitions?

I feel as though any form of curation is exciting regardless if it is in the UK or international. I do not think the area changes the perspective of what an exhibition can be or how an audience can experience it. An exhibition is an accumulation of artworks or artifacts; I personally do not think it matters what country the exhibition resides within. This is why I want to develop the virtual exhibitions further; I can curate international artists in their own show no matter the location. This can then be seen from people around the

globe simultaneously without disruption.

What's your most recent curating gig?

My most recent exhibition is my own virtual exhibition: "Stay Connected". This was venturing on the idea of artists not being able to show work traditionally during the current circumstances of Covid-19. Stay Connected is a virtual exhibition that allows artists to simply 'stay connected' during the global pandemic, allowing them to still have their work shown and promoted to a range of creatives, galleries, and other artistic institutions

" You just need to get artworks for a gallery to be a curator" what would be your reply to this statement?

Artwork is very important to an exhibition, but it is definitely not the most important aspect. There are a lot more behind-the-scenes processes to make an exhibition work which goes on below the surface and remains unseen by visitors. Artworks are items used to help guide an audience through the narrative you wish to tell. However, in order to create the storyline, the exhibition space itself must reflect the story. You ask questions such as: "How do I want my audience to feel?" or "What order does this story need to be told in?" The

answers to these questions then inform which order artworks are placed in, which directions you want the audience to turn, lighting conditions, colour palettes and a great deal more which most visitors don't even notice. My virtual exhibitions are a perfect example of this.

Once I have the artworks, I need to create a space for them to be in which is created in 3D Studio max. This can take up to a month to create from scratch after asking questions such as those stated above. After I have a space, I can then start to curate the artwork, what artwork works well next to each other etc. Next, I create the website with all the artists pages, exhibition renders and 360 virtual tours of the space (this can be quite tedious). Finally, I start to promote via social media and reaching out to galleries, creatives, and other creative institutions before the exhibition can finally go live.

Adele Smejkal

The owner of **ARTISTELLAR GALLERY** talks to the audience about her career as a curator.

Let's know a little about you (Your background)

I studied Business Management, Art History and languages. I started off my career working in blue chip galleries like Pace and then transitioned to the world of auctions. I worked at Sotheby's London for several years before launching my online gallery platform focusing on emerging artists. For years now I've been also running an instagram based art blog and writing/contributing to several magazines such as XIBT Contemporary Art magazine, WideWalls magazine or Dovetail magazine.

How did you get into the art world?

I've always love art but professionally I only got into it when studying my MA and starting my first internship at an art gallery.

Why did you decide to be a curator?

Being a curator is one of the hats I wear. I've fell in love with emerging art, discovering new talents and showing the world why they matter through curated exhibitions.

What are your keys to success when communicating with the public?

I think it's adopting the general public's mind. You cannot expect that everyone has the same or similar knowledge of art as you. Thus, when communicating art to the public it's important to think outside of the box. For instance, I always try to make art 'accessible' to everyone by telling stories, giving tips, educating, or offering to answer any questions.

When the pandemic struck, museums/galleries were closed for a while. What did you do to pass time?

I was actually busier than ever during that time because I was just setting up my business. To compensate for no gallery/museum visits I visited online art fairs and exhibitions and read many books about art.

What emotions do you feel at the end of a display?

That always depends on what was the exhibition was like. All I can tell is that the emotions are always strong.

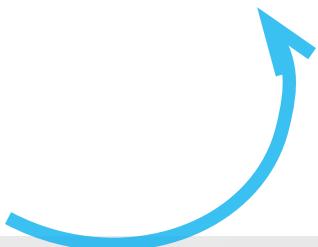


“
When communicating art to the public it's important to think outside of the box.”

Frieze Art Fair



Indian Summer | Artistellar



What path do you expect an aspiring curator to take to become successful?

There is so many things one can do. Watch, learn, read, network. Always take the initiative, look for projects to participate in even when it's for free. Every experience and contact is valuable.

What is your most recent curating gig

My recent curating gig was curating an online exhibition for my online gallery Artistellar. It was a seasonal group show of six emerging artists focusing on the period of Summer. This year summer has been very different to what we are used to and I wanted to examine what the specific season meant to artists and how it plays role in their work.





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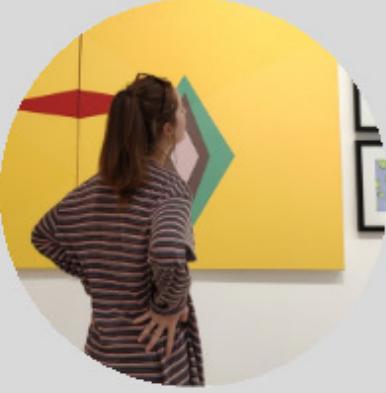
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