

Follow-up Interview with Can Bey, Curator and Gallery Director — ABC Art Gallery

Interviewer: In our last talk, you described how exhibitions begin with an idea or conversation. But the brochure also mentioned a selection committee. Who sits on that committee, and how does it really work?

Can Bey: Yes, we do call it a committee, although it's not a formal board. It's usually three of us: myself, Elif, and one invited external member—often an art historian or a senior artist we trust. We meet twice a year, sometimes more if the program is dense. We review open submissions, portfolios sent through email, and suggestions gathered during the year. Each of us comes with a list, and we discuss relevance to the season's theme, production readiness, and how the works would fit the gallery's scale. Usually we look at twenty to thirty portfolios per meeting, sometimes more online than in person. It's a mix of structured review and intuition.

Interviewer: When the committee makes decisions, do you keep any notes or votes? How do you remember why someone was chosen?

Can Bey: We keep a record, yes, though it's modest. Elif prepares a document called the Selection Sheet with columns for artist name, decision (yes/no/maybe), and short remarks. Each participant adds initials next to comments. I write a closing note summarizing the rationale. We don't vote formally; it's consensus by discussion. These sheets go into a folder labeled by year, and we consult them when planning future exhibitions. For example, if an artist was a "maybe" last year, we revisit their file first.

Interviewer: Let's talk about finances again. You mentioned a restricted folder with reserve prices and commissions. How is that prepared? Who writes the information and checks it?

Can Bey: It starts from the Lot Summary Sheet that Elif makes. After that, I add pricing columns: starting bid, reserve, and commission tier. The initial figures come from conversations with the artists or consignors. Once I enter them, our accountant verifies the math and format—ensuring tax fields, currency, and codes align. We update the file whenever a new lot is confirmed or a price changes, which can be several times before the auction. Before the catalog goes to print, I cross-check each reserve against the signed consignment form and lock the file. The folder is password-protected and stored on an encrypted drive; only the accountant, Elif, and I can open it.

Interviewer: How do you decide reserve prices in the first place? Is it entirely your call?

Can Bey: No, not entirely. We discuss with the artist or lender first. Some come with firm expectations; others ask for guidance. I compare recent sales of similar works, either from our own records or public data, and consider exhibition history. There's also a balancing act—reserves should protect value but not scare bidders. We don't follow a fixed percentage, but generally 60–70 percent of estimated market value works. In borderline cases I consult one of two external appraisers. The final figure is mine to approve, but it's collaborative reasoning.

Interviewer: You and Elif both talked about folders and spreadsheets as your inventory. Can you explain how that actually works?

Can Bey: Each artwork has a digital folder named with its object code—say MY-014. Inside you'll find subfolders: Condition, Contracts, Images, Insurance, and Movement. The spreadsheet—called the Master Object Register—acts as the index. It lists object code, artist, title, medium, dimensions, owner type (gallery, loan, or consignment), insurance status, and current location. When a work arrives, Elif fills a new row and adds the entry form and condition report PDFs to the object folder.

If it moves to another exhibition or auction, she updates the “status” and “location” columns, not the code itself. The spreadsheet is linked to some automatic formulas but still manually curated. It’s simple yet stable.

Interviewer: About those object codes—how do you create them and make sure they never repeat?

Can Bey: The codes are generated manually but according to a strict rule. They’re based on the artist’s initials plus a running number kept in a separate Code Ledger. For each artist, Elif checks the ledger, finds the last used number, and increments it by one. Before approving, I double-check against the register to prevent duplicates. Because it’s alphanumeric and cumulative, it can run for decades without conflict. If we ever computerize it, we can import the ledger as a reference table.

Interviewer: Let’s talk about the auction catalog. How do you decide it’s ready for release?

Can Bey: The process begins after all lots and reserves are finalized. Elif provides the technical data; Kerem supplies approved images and captions. I open the draft catalog and check sequencing—starting with lighter works, then larger or headline pieces, ending with experimental ones. Visual rhythm matters. I review each caption for accuracy and tone, ensuring it matches the canonical sheet. Once I approve layout and pagination, Kerem sends the digital proof to our designer. We print one mock copy for review. Only after my signature on the proof do we call it final.

Interviewer: You’ve spoken about wanting a database. Do you have an actual plan or schedule for it now?

Can Bey: We’re finally serious this year. I’m drafting a proposal to migrate the Master Object Register and exhibition logs into a relational database. It won’t be “BigBrain Mode” exactly, but something modular we can maintain ourselves—perhaps a small PostgreSQL instance with a web interface. The first data we’ll import are the object and exhibition tables because they’re the spine. Visitor numbers and auction results will come next once we’ve cleaned the fields. If funding allows, I’d like a prototype within six months.

Interviewer: You mentioned protecting the financial folder. What other security measures do you take?

Can Bey: Apart from passwords and encryption, the drive keeps an automatic log of access attempts. Each week I check the log summary. Backups are encrypted and stored offline on a second drive that only the accountant handles. We rotate the password every quarter. We also avoid sending sensitive attachments by email; instead, we use a local file-sharing tool within the gallery network. It’s low-tech but safe.

Interviewer: When artworks move from exhibitions to auctions, how do you make sure the data still match? What if codes or files don’t agree?

Can Bey: Every time an artwork changes context, we compare the exhibition dossier and the auction lot sheet side by side. The object code must match; if it doesn’t, Elif corrects whichever file used a shorthand. We run a small reconciliation table in Excel listing object code, exhibition code, and lot number. After the auction, we update the status column to “SOLD” or “NS.” If a mismatch appears later, we check timestamps to find which file was newer. It’s manual, but consistent.

Interviewer: At the end of each year, you prepare a summary of artworks and sales. How do you use that for planning?

Can Bey: The Year-End Summary isn't just statistics; it's a mirror. We analyze attendance numbers from Kerem's logs, sales ratios from auction results, and production timelines from Elif's data. Together they show which kinds of shows attracted both visitors and buyers. We don't chase trends blindly, but if three photography exhibitions perform better than sculpture ones, it influences our next-year balance. The summary also helps us forecast insurance budgets and shipping volume.

Interviewer: Elif mentioned a Timeline Table in Excel. Do you plan to make it digital and connect it with other records?

Can Bey: Yes, absolutely. The timeline is the missing link between documents. My idea is to turn it into a shared dashboard—each entry pulling data from the exhibition, object, and daily log tables. It would let us see, on one screen, what's in transit, what's being installed, and what's waiting for deinstallation. Once that exists, the daily logs Elif keeps could auto-populate instead of being rewritten. That will reduce errors and give us a real-time sense of rhythm, which is crucial in such a small team.

Interviewer: It sounds like a lot of progress. Anything you'd add for context?

Can Bey: Only that everything we do—committee notes, ledgers, financial files—serves one purpose: accountability through memory. Each record, however small, tells future us why we made a choice. If our new database can preserve that reasoning while staying flexible, it will finally reflect how the gallery really thinks.