

Now Everybody Is a Curator, Huh?

By Dontae T. Muse

Between the Instagram carousel, the group chat exhibition announcement, and Chat Gpt, the word “curator” slipped its shoes off and made itself comfortable. Too comfortable, maybe.

Let me be clear before the think pieces begin to make themselves: everybody can curate. We all do it daily. We curate playlists, dinner parties, mood boards, timelines, and digital selves. Selection is human. Taste is personal. Storytelling is a natural human preservation technique and a key element of human history. That part is undeniable.

But being a curator? That’s different. Just because you can technically do it does not mean that you understand the technical intricacies behind it. Cooking a tasty meal doesn’t make you a Michelin chef.

Placing beside you what to pick, what to enjoy, is not curatorship. It’s about responsibility. It’s about context. It’s about understanding how things, ideas, and people move through space, history, and power. And yes, it’s about networking and influence as well. Pretending otherwise is alluring, which isn’t the case. And keep in mind: This is an art business.

In 2026, the art world is more accessible in the way that it is easier to find, contact, and connect with artists. Access has widened. Platforms have multiplied. Anyone can put on a show, a digital exhibition, declare a curatorial vision. That part is actually not that bad. More voices. More experiments. More risk. That energy has been overdue and necessary.

What hasn’t changed, though, is that actual impact continues to flow in relationships. Influence still compounds. Trust is still earned over time. More and more people are accessing and making fine art, but also more people are looking and believing that they can do it themselves, because “all it takes is some art from some artists”. This is muddying the water. You need a degree and a license to be called a doctor, but you need only art to be called a curator. Where does that leave the people who went to school for curatorial studies?

Curators are responsible for more than selecting work. A curator is someone whose decisions help artists push forward. That understands where work belongs in rooms where decisions are made. Who can advocate for, translate, contextualize, and protect artists all the time. That takes social capital, institutional literacy, management skills, and a reputation tied to consistency, not vibes.

Art does not exist in a vacuum. It circulates. It’s introduced. It is framed. Who does this framing determines how the work is received and remembered. If the artists are essentially making speeches to the artists, it is almost like preaching to the choir. Influence is important because it defines whether a show is a moment or a turning point.

But that does not mean that independent curators, artist-curators, or community curators are less reputable. These days, some of the most significant curatorial work occurs without institutional structure. But even within these spaces, the same principle applies. It is the curators who change trajectories, who have been connecting dots across ecosystems, not just aesthetics.

Additionally, there is some distinction between visibility and velocity. A carefully curated show can be well-attended, nicely photographed, and well-distributed without fundamentally changing an artist's long-term prospects. A curator knows that division and tries to overcome it. That's craft. That's strategy. That is care.

So yes, everyone can curate. Please do. Play. Experiment. Tell stories. Make rooms. Build platforms. But let's not pretend the title is weightless. Curatorship is an activity, not an announcement. It demands an alliance to move culture, not just organize it.

So if everyone is a curator now, the question is really: who bears the responsibility that comes with the word? And who is just holding the clipboard? Again, cooking a tasty meal doesn't make you a Michelin chef. But, go ahead and eat, though.