Chapter 2

Temporality and Variability of Form in Curatorship

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Abstract

Curatorial practice is a field that has morphologically evolved in line with changing aesthetic paradigms and cultural transformations throughout art history, shaped by temporal sensitivity. It has acquired different meanings depending on the social and technological conditions of each era and has evolved today into a practice that not only selects works but also constructs narratives, designs spaces, establishes multilayered interactions with the audience, and accompanies artists throughout their creative processes. With the technological tools ushered in by the digital age, artificial intelligence systems have been integrated into curatorial practice; they are regarded as functional elements that support processes in areas such as data analysis, thematic grouping and filtering, visual recommendation development, and experience-focused content production. These technologies stand out as tools that accelerate and diversify the curatorial process and offer thematic pre-configurations, without eliminating the curator's intellectual and intuitive decision-making mechanisms. However, the fact that creative and contextual interpretative power remains with the human curator necessitates viewing artificial intelligence in this field solely as a supportive instrument. Therefore, this study examines how curatorial practice has transformed along the axes of temporality and variability of form, discussing the evolving roles of the contemporary curator within the context of technological advancements.

1. Introduction

Art has been defined and interpreted in various forms throughout history, depending on the intellectual, cultural, and social dynamics of each era. Similarly, curatorial practices and forms, which are inseparable from art today, have continuously evolved in accordance with the aesthetic and technological conditions of the era. This transformation is centered around

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temporality, yet remains connected to its essence, embodying a structure that adapts to the era in terms of form. Curatorship possesses a dynamic structure and adapts in terms of form to the aesthetic demands of the era, making it inseparable from art itself. It directly shapes the relationship between the artwork and the viewer in terms of spatial arrangements, narrative constructions, and the creation of a holistic experience. In this context, the curator, who contributes to the expressive dimension of art on an aesthetic level, goes beyond being merely an organizing actor by becoming an integral part of the work and taking on the role of a creative partner who accompanies the artist's process of creation. At the core of this approach lies not solely the role of an authority controlling tools or dividing tasks within the art management process, but rather artistic concerns that transcend technical expertise and deliberate curatorial decisions guided by critical awareness. Rather than arguing that artificial intelligence will replace the curator, this study emphasizes the need to redefine curatorial practice by transcending its historically assigned boundaries. In this context, the curator should be regarded as both a meaning-maker and a director of art. In line with these ideas, the curator's use of artificial intelligence as a medium of artistic transmission in the communication between the artwork and the audience presents a functional and transformative approach within the scope of contemporary curatorial practices. This study reinterprets the creative process through the lens of technological advancements, integrating curatorial modes of intervention shaped by AI-driven tools. The necessity of redefining curatorship, when considered from a historical perspective, is closely linked to the role of technology as one of the most effective mediators in conveying and communicating art to the audience.

In its most modern definition, the practice of art curatorship involves the knowledgeable presentation of an art collection. On the other hand, machine processes are characterized by their ability to manage and analyze large volumes of data (Schaerf et al., 2023). It has been defined in different ways at different periods. A retrospective examination of these definitions reveals that, in earlier periods, the function of art management was carried out by merchants who assumed an intermediary role between artists and buyers. Although Renaissance artists such as William Shakespeare and Pieter Paul Rubens managed the organization of their artistic production themselves, this was regarded as a natural part of the cultural and artistic world of the time. Nevertheless, over time, a model emerged in which merchants assumed the intermediary role between artists and patrons (Vargün, 2015). At this stage, it is evident that the art management process had not yet come under the control of individuals possessing the knowledge and expertise to oversee

artistic processes. Therefore, it is essential to first examine the definition of curatorship and trace its evolution since its inception. When a deeper analysis is undertaken and a historical perspective is adopted toward the art field of the twentieth century, it becomes apparent that the concept of curatorship—which has played a transformative role in art—began to gain prominence particularly after the 1990s and emerged as a new actor in artistic production (Tezcan & Özdemir, 2019). Throughout this transformation process, it is observed that art management has progressed by adapting to the conditions of the time. Indeed, as with the definition of art itself, it has only been possible—distinct from Ancient Greek thought—to define art after it broke away from its purely functional role during the Renaissance. As Kristeller (1951) noted, the fundamental idea that the five major arts formed a distinct field of their own, separated from crafts, sciences, and other human activities by shared characteristics, has been accepted unquestioningly by most writers on aesthetics from Kant to the present day. Even critics of art and literature who claim not to believe in the concept of 'aesthetics' freely make use of this distinction. Among the general public, the idea of 'Art'—written with a capital 'A'—which refers to a narrowing domain of life outside science, religion, or practical activities, has been embraced as a natural reality (Kristeller, 1951). As in the historical development of art, a similar process can also be observed in curatorial practice. Although its theoretical foundations remain subject to debate, curatorial practice has gradually assumed a more visible and influential role over time and continues to develop along this trajectory today. Initially regarded as outside the dominant understanding of art, this approach gradually gained legitimacy over time and became an integral part of the evolving structures of both art and art management. At this point, it is clear that curatorial practice has undergone an evolutionary development, adapting to the needs of each period without adhering to a fixed model. These curatorial practices, ranging from the exhibition process to the technical aspects of narrative methods and the interactions established with the audience, show varying forms of change across different periods. In this context, temporality and variability of form are fundamental components of art management that cannot be considered independently from one another.

Today's active artificial intelligence, like in the historical phases of curatorial processes, positions itself as an effective actor in art production and is capable of performing certain curatorial practices. Within the scope of this study, the differences between AI curators—who, through large data sets and their algorithmic structure, can exhibit knowledgeable and audience-appropriate curatorial practices—and human curators are examined based on the literature. In addition, the necessity of re-evaluating not only curatorial

applications but also the role and definition of the human curator in light of current technological conditions is emphasized. This study investigates the evolution of art and curatorship through artificial intelligence by considering its relationship with the emotional and intellectual nature of humans.

2. Evolutionary Processes in the Relationship Between Artificial Intelligence and Art

Traditionally, the exhibition of artworks has been shaped by a curator's aesthetic and ideological perspective; however, with the influence of current technology, the nature of this role has begun to change. This shift, thanks to the algorithm structure, has led to completely non-human guidance and interpretation in the following processes. While the techniques and tools through which the artists express their work remain essential to the essence of art, the role of the curator is equally important. The curator is not merely an organizer but also a creator of meaning. With today's technology, the meaning attributed by the human curator offers new opportunities to redefine curatorial practice—previously bound by established boundaries—through collaboration between humans and machines. This transformation is not solely a technical change but represents an aesthetic, intellectual, and conceptual revolution.

Artificial intelligence's abilities to interpret artworks and perform curatorial interventions are opening new avenues that challenge aesthetic and conceptual boundaries. With its current level of technological development, artificial intelligence's capacity to engage aesthetically and conceptually is limited to data-driven imitations. Within this framework, it can be argued that there is a similarity between the production methods of artificial intelligence and human production based on imitation of nature, and this similarity can be evaluated within the context of the human relationship of imitation with nature. Since Plato's philosophy, art and literature have been regarded as "imitations of nature," and with many thinkers who have shaped contemporary thought sharing this view, it is broadly understood that humans and artificial intelligence produce in similar ways. The primary reason for this analogy is, of course, that artificial intelligence was also developed based on a similar conceptual foundation. Roland Barthes's (2012) treatment of the concept of originality as a myth challenges the concept itself, transforming the production of meaning in interpretative approaches and opening the way for broader possibilities of interpretation in this field. Based on this idea, questioning a production process that involves artificial intelligence and is built upon existing foundations is equivalent to questioning all the initial decisions made.

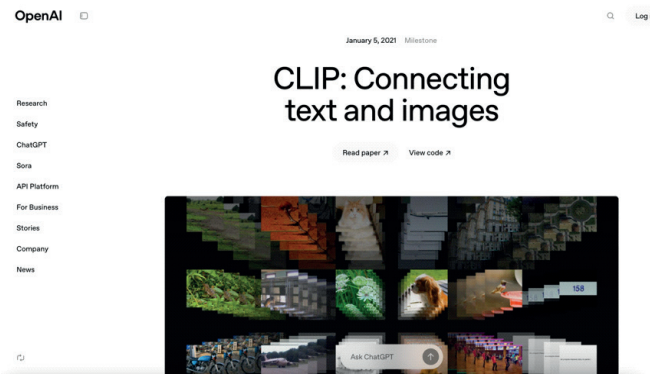
The human mind is intrinsically connected to the heritage of its culture, its language, past texts, and imagery. Everything it creates bears the traces of these constantly interacting structures. At this point, it can be argued that the human creative process shares similarities with today's algorithmic operations. Difference can be seen as a condition closely linked to determinism itself... Lightning distinguishes itself from the dark sky yet simultaneously drags the sky along with it (Deleuze et al., 2017). The technical roles of the curator include organizing the exhibition space, assembling artworks according to predetermined themes to create a meaningful narrative for the audience, selecting works by artists, designing the exhibition concept, ensuring appropriate placement of artworks within the venue, and preparing the exhibition catalogue. Recent advances in artificial intelligence models have reached a level where many of these roles can be undertaken, albeit contentiously, within the realm of creativity. Accordingly, it can be argued that the curator's role extends beyond spatial organization to touch the audience with a unique perspective and human depth through storytelling.

When approached through the depth of human experience—something artificial intelligence cannot attain—the role of the curator becomes more clearly defined in relation to time. At the point where the evaluation must proceed in light of this information, what becomes significant is that the human curator's accumulation of data—shaped by cultural and societal heritage—bears a resemblance to that of artificial intelligence. Exploring the similarities between the human curator's process of interpreting art and transmitting accumulated knowledge across generations, and artificial intelligence's use of machine learning and controlled application of big data, can contribute to redefining the role and value of the human curator.

3. The Ability of AI Systems to Understand Art and Perform Thematic Curation

Today's artificial intelligence models have reached the capacity to perform core curatorial functions such as classification, grouping, and thematic presentation. These AI models engage in a form of curatorship that could be described as thematic, by interpreting both visual and conceptual content and building bridges between meanings; they also provide examples of identifying aesthetic and cultural structures.

Figure 1. The visual-text matching interface of OpenAI's CLIP model (Open AI, 2021).



The AI model CLIP shown in Figure 1 has the capacity to match an artwork with a corresponding text. This AI model, which makes it possible to provide information about the content expressed by the artwork, enables the delegation of some fundamental tasks of the human curator to technology by providing semantic framing—such as contextual references, thematic associations, and the communication of meaning to the viewer. The difference that sets the CLIP model apart from other AI curator models is its minimal requirement for technical coding knowledge, making it accessible for use through a web interface.

Table 1. Code-based AI models[2].

Model	**Interpretative Capabilities**	**Thematic Curation Capabilities**
BERT	Capable of conducting contextual analysis within texts.	Can cluster artworks based on textual themes.
Autoencoder	Can identify visual and content-related similarities.	Capable of grouping similar artworks.
GAN	-	Can generate artworks aligned with specific themes.
Reinforcement Learning	-	Can develop suggestions based on user preferences and feedback.
Multimodal Learning	Can interpret visual, textual, and other modalities together.	Able to conduct in-depth and layered thematic analyses.

One common feature of the AI models listed in Table 1 is their reliance on coding. The BERT model, being text-based, is compatible with programming languages such as Python, yet its interface is quite limited. The

2 Constructed based on data collected by the author.

Autoencoder model also requires coding when working with specific data sets. GANs, by their very nature, operate through a training-based system that is fundamentally code-dependent. The Reinforcement Learning model, compared to other AI models, demands a more advanced level of coding knowledge to be implemented effectively. Multimodal Learning requires coding, particularly in the integration of various data types. Additionally, while CLIP can be used through a simple interface, it still requires coding knowledge for more extensive customization.

Aside from managing big data, coding—an expected competency for curators—can now be achieved through simple interfaces and user-friendly platforms. These platforms are not limited to curators or professionals dealing with big data; rather, they are AI-powered systems capable of performing a wide range of tasks.

Table 2. User-Friendly Artificial Intelligence Models[3].

Model	**Capabilities**	**Potential Uses in Curatorial Processes**
DALL-E and GPT 3.5, 4.0	Enables generative production of visuals and texts; contributes to creativity through extrapolated parameters on a given subject.	Can be used to ensure a shared language between text and visual elements. Capable of generating curatorial narratives based on specific commands and input. May assist in the creation of themes.
Deepseek	Open-source, generative, and general-purpose AI model. Can interpret commands and generate text-based content. Able to produce short texts.	Can provide commentary on exhibition texts and assist in constructing curatorial narratives. Capable of generating work descriptions aligned with the given data.
Claude (Anthropic)	A responsive dialogue model.	Can contribute to the transformation of textual content into contextually ethical narratives.
Gemini (Google)	A multimodal AI model developed by Google; capable of presenting information supported by both text and visuals.	May enhance curatorial content by providing both textual and visual input. Still in development compared to other models.
Perplexity AI	A data-driven question–answer model that provides real-time, source-backed responses.	Unlike other models, it is not suitable for artwork selection, text generation, or meaning-making. However, it can assist with curatorial processes by extracting references, offering knowledge, and enabling connections

3 Constructed based on data collected by the author.

Stable Diffusion	Can generate visuals based on textual commands. Able to stylize existing visuals and complete missing parts.	It can be used for a formal interface. It can provide context-appropriate support during promotional processes such as exhibition catalogues. Can generate visuals aligned with a theme and support concept development for exhibition posters or campaigns.
MidJourney, Firefly (Adobe), Leonardo	Visual generative AI models. Capable of artistic and visual production.	
Canva AI	AI-powered design assistant. Can modify user-created visuals by adding new elements or adjusting according to specific parameters.	Can generate visuals based on prompts. Able to create thematic scene imagery.

In the ever-evolving age of technology, artificial intelligence models are rapidly proliferating and advancing. The models presented in Table 2 have shown significant development since their emergence. The implication of this rapid progress for curatorial practices is that artificial intelligence can now be regarded as a functional tool within artistic narrative processes. Just as a pencil or paint serves the artist in the act of creation, these AI models—each with their own distinct capabilities and grounded in vast datasets—can similarly be employed by curators as purposeful instruments.

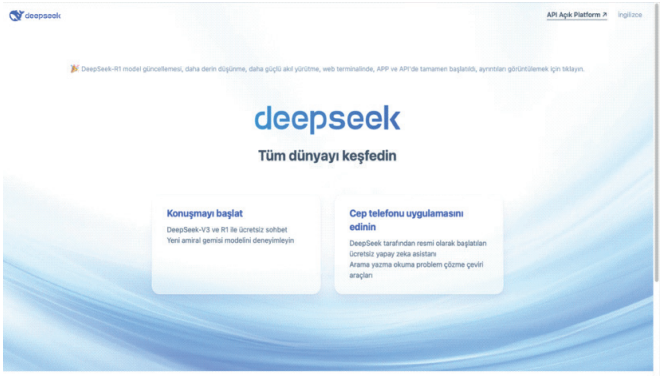
4. Human–Machine Collaboration: Prospective Hybrid Curatorial Models

Within the scope of human–machine collaboration, the human curator may utilize artificial intelligence as a filtering tool in processes such as selection, categorization, and thematic arrangement. For instance, a specific AI model may propose artworks aligned with a particular theme and possess the capacity to scan similar works from pre-structured data sets. In such cases, the human curator provides contextualization and makes the final selection. Models such as CLIP, BERT, and Autoencoder are among the AI tools that can potentially be employed for these purposes.

In interface-based interactive curatorial approaches, human and artificial intelligence remain in mutual interaction through a shared platform, co-developing suggestions. Based on these suggestions, AI may propose works, form groupings, and offer feedback both visually and verbally to guide curatorial decisions. The most suitable AI supports in this context include Multimodal Learning and UI/UX-supported AI systems, especially those grounded in coding-based frameworks. AI types that can sustain dialogue

throughout the interaction process are often more user-friendly. Compared to code-dependent AI models, these systems offer greater ease of use — particularly through their ability to manage data without requiring coding knowledge and to make inferences using parameters informed by machine learning tailored to specific situations and users. Although not all AI types possess such capabilities, Table 2 addresses the potential contributions of user-friendly AI models within curatorial practice.

Figure 2. Open-source, generative, and general-purpose AI model (DeepSeek, 2024).



Although the artificial intelligence model Deepseek shown in Figure 2 was developed for general-purpose use, it can, much like the GPT model, contribute to multiple stages of the curatorial process. Before listing these capabilities, it is essential to clarify why Deepseek is elaborated on specifically among the AI models listed in Table 2. Even though Deepseek may not equal GPT's advanced capabilities in every respect, it similarly integrates within a single framework the functions that are otherwise distributed across the various models listed in the tables—particularly when tailored to a specific topic.

In order to assess the kind of support a curator might receive from the Deepseek AI model during the development of an exhibition, it is necessary to consider the capabilities offered by such models. At the conceptual development stage of an exhibition, general-purpose generative language models such as GPT, Deepseek, and Claude AI can be employed for tasks such as data extraction, identity formation, offering alternative examples, and drafting preliminary texts. Additionally, real-time information engines like Perplexity AI can be utilized to conduct topic research and access up-to-date information related to the themes of the works included in the exhibition. This current data provides a foundation for shaping various strategic processes. In terms of visual material production, tools such as MidJourney,

DALL-E, and Adobe Firefly can be used to create theme-appropriate catalogues and virtual placements. Promotional ideas that align with the concept envisioned by the curator can also be generated through these tools, particularly to serve as a basis for poster design, and then shared with the designers involved in the exhibition. For promotional activities on social media, Canva AI can be employed to prepare social media posts, information boards, and presentation files. When it comes to thematic selections within large datasets, AI models can be particularly successful at highlighting previously overlooked works by calculating possibilities relevant to potential curatorial deadlocks and generating alternative paths for selection. AI-driven curating aims to offer new perspectives on digital cultural artifacts. It becomes possible to propose personalized journeys through collections and encourage creative approaches to their presentation (Schaerf et al., 2023). When these contributions are examined in greater depth, it becomes clear that open source and general-purpose AI models, especially those capable of maintaining conversational interaction, can inform the curator of various possibilities and thereby enhance their freedom of choice. One of the most crucial distinctions between AI and humans today lies in this very point: humans, unlike AI, possess the ability to make autonomous decisions based on personal desires and intentions, independent of command-based systems.

When it comes to the human curator, who remains the ultimate decision-maker, artificial intelligence must be regarded only as a tool. While AI can detect emotions through thematic selections and organize content based on emotional similarities, it cannot independently produce such emotional depth. In this context, AI can be seen as an assistant that supports the curator's creative process within the bounds of current technological capabilities. According to Dartanto (2024), the role of AI in curatorial practice has recently been defined as a transformative instrument that enhances curators' analytical abilities. By processing vast amounts of data, AI facilitates the categorization and organization of comprehensive art collections at a speed beyond human capability (Dartanto, 2024). When combined with human intuition and contextual knowledge, the computational and thematic associative power of AI can offer significant advantages—enabling faster prediction of possible outcomes, the development of broader thematic perspectives, and the opportunity to pursue more experimental approaches through enhanced technological support and time efficiency.

In order for machine creativity to be appreciated and valued, we must consider how such outputs can be related to aesthetics and how they can evoke emotions. Even in contemporary art, where aesthetics and emotional responses may be deliberately or unintentionally overlooked, it is the

temporal and social contexts that render such works compelling. These contexts encompass, but are not limited to, histories, traditions, heritages, technological advancements, as well as subconscious and personal associations (Chung, 2021). At present, the aesthetic evaluation and creative processes of algorithmically generated works remain highly contested and open to debate. One notable development in this area is the Creative Adversarial Network (CAN) model. The CAN study has raised a number of concerns about AI as a threat or competitor to human-made art. It focuses on questions surrounding the creative process in art and the nature and mechanics of creativity. However, artificial intelligence not only seeks to imitate human production but also aims to develop a machine-specific creative process and a distinct form of machine creativity (Mazzone & Elgammal, 2019). At this stage, the evolving CAN model has yet to produce a sufficiently impactful effect. The exhibition of artworks produced through artificial intelligence and algorithms has sparked a reconsideration of the roles of the contemporary curator, making it necessary to redefine those roles. Within the domain of new media art, curators are now responsible for acquiring solid expertise in algorithmic knowledge, technical and spatial technologies, and the digital curation of data in order to effectively exhibit digital artists' works. Provided that the exhibition space possesses the required technological infrastructure, it is incumbent upon the curator—or, more precisely, the digital curator—to be proficient in utilizing such technologies and technical systems (Kalyoncu Özge, 2022) . This represents one of the additional responsibilities now associated with curatorial practice. Amid these changes, curatorship is no longer limited to the act of exhibiting; it has transformed into a multilayered field of expertise that integrates digital technologies and demands technical knowledge. Selection processes now encompass a broad range of domains, including data analysis, software literacy, AI-assisted production processes, and interactive narratives. This shift indicates that curatorial practice cannot be reduced to a singular function. On the contrary, it has become a structurally evolving field shaped by technological innovations and cultural transformations. Consequently, the role of the contemporary curator must be redefined to include not only the traditional aesthetic dimensions of art but also the new competencies required by the digital age.

5. Conclusion

Curatorial practice has undergone various transformations throughout art history, evolving in response to the intellectual, cultural, and aesthetic dynamics of each era. When approached through the lens of temporality and variability of form, it becomes clear that curating is not a fixed or

monolithic practice. Rather, it is a flexible and adaptive field that reshapes itself according to the demands of its time. Today, this flexibility reveals that curating is no longer confined to the act of exhibition alone; it has evolved into a production-oriented process encompassing narrative construction, spatial design, experience curation, and even direct collaboration in artistic creation. The curator is no longer merely a selector and organizer but is increasingly becoming an agent capable of transforming the space itself, recontextualizing others' works, or becoming the subject of artistic intervention. This transformation is not limited to the human curator; with the technological advancements introduced by the digital age, AI-supported systems have also become part of the curatorial process. Especially those systems that operate on large datasets now serve as functional tools in areas such as visual production, narrative structuring, thematic pairing, and preliminary curation.

AI models can help a curator generate ideas at the initial stages of the exhibition design process; they can classify large collections thematically, perform rapid pre-selections, and present an intellectual draft by suggesting theme-appropriate groupings. Models such as BERT and CLIP are employed during this process. Though they do not act as direct decision-makers in the creative process, they are regarded as supportive tools that assist the workflow. However, the fundamental distinction lies in the fact that the ability to make decisions and perform contextual interpretation still resides with the human. AI technologies remain limited in terms of creativity, meaning they cannot substitute the intuitive and critical thinking skills of the human curator. Nevertheless, in the context of the accelerating pace and production pressures of the modern era, the speed and diversity offered by AI tools have become factors that support the formal transformation of the curatorial process.

When evaluated along the axes of variability of form and temporality, curatorial practice transcends being solely an exhibition-focused activity and emerges as a multilayered field of expertise reshaped by the aesthetic and technological structures of the era. With digital technologies, artificial intelligence has become an integral part of this framework, transforming into a tool that supports processes such as data analysis, visual production, and thematic classification. While the intuitive and contextual decision-making role of the human curator is preserved, AI-supported systems function as assistants that accelerate and diversify this process. Thus, curatorship is being redefined across a broad spectrum extending from aesthetics to technology and, despite transformations in form, continues to exist as a field that maintains its essential function.

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Extended Abstract

Curatorial practice, having evolved alongside art throughout history, is currently being transformed by the influence of digital technologies. Similar to how the definition of art has shifted in relation to the intellectual, cultural, and aesthetic dynamics of each period, curatorship has also developed as a practice that adapts to temporal and form-related demands. In this sense, the contemporary curator assumes roles that extend beyond selecting and organizing artworks. Their responsibilities now encompass constructing narratives, designing spatial experiences, engaging audiences, and orchestrating interactions with artworks. With the advent of the digital age, curatorial practice has evolved into a complex, multi-layered discipline that demands not only aesthetic insight but also technical expertise and proficiency with digital tools. The emergence of new media art, interactive installations, and online exhibition platforms has transformed the role and definition of the curator. Alongside their traditional responsibilities, curators are now required to possess digital literacy and a comprehensive understanding of software environments. This transformation has turned curatorship into a creative collaboration, involving curators in the shaping of themes and the artistic production process.

One of the most significant developments in this transformation is the integration of artificial intelligence tools into curatorial workflows. These systems, capable of processing large datasets, suggesting visual content, and identifying thematic relationships, support tasks such as preliminary selection, data organization, and narrative outline creation. Rather than replacing the human element, they provide new methods to structure and accelerate the decision-making process through the generation of thematic patterns. Human intuition and contextual understanding remain indispensable. AI tools do not make creative decisions. Rather, they serve as assistants, offering suggestions and carrying out analytical work. The final authority remains with the curator, who interprets data and constructs meaning. As AI has yet to reach the level of fully replicating human creativity, these systems are regarded as supportive instruments that expand possibilities without supplanting the core of curatorial thought.

This situation reflects a broader transformation in the nature of curatorial practice. It no longer conforms to a single, fixed definition; instead, it has become a flexible and evolving structure shaped by the aesthetic and technological demands of the time. Modern curators are not only organizers but active participants who transform exhibition spaces, shape audience

experiences, and collaborate closely with artists. Supported by digital tools, their roles continue to expand and diversify.

AI-supported systems contribute by generating thematic clusters, developing narrative strategies, and proposing new directions for exhibition planning. These outputs are subsequently assessed by the curator, who selects and refines them in accordance with the project's objectives. Thus, artificial intelligence becomes part of the intellectual process, augmenting curatorial imagination rather than replacing it. These developments necessitate a rethinking of curatorship itself. It is no longer confined to the act of displaying artworks; instead, it involves creating meaningful experiences through the integration of aesthetic vision and technological innovation. Today, curatorship represents a dynamic, adaptive, and interdisciplinary field. It responds to contemporary demands while preserving its fundamental connection to art. Curators maintain a central role by shaping how audiences perceive and engage with art in an increasingly digital and rapidly evolving world. To summarize, curatorship is emerging as a creative and flexible practice, shaped by both its historical roots and new digital possibilities. It is not exclusively concerned with what is exhibited, but with how it is presented, interpreted, and experienced. Artificial intelligence is not a replacement for curatorial thinking, but rather a tool that strengthens and expands it. As the field continues to evolve, curatorship is likely to become even more collaborative, experimental, and technologically integrated—while retaining the human insight that remains at its core.