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Access the exhibition at: http://victormurari.art

Exhibition Statement

Unveiling the Hidden Control Mechanisms Shaping Digital Art in the Age of Al and Colonialism

Igorithmic colonialism emerges here as an operational structure: automated curation systems replicate power asymmetries by prioritizing narratives that align with data extraction logics. Distortion manifests as language, materialized in virtual reality environments where visitors experience the progressive erosion of artworks under the effect of predictive censorship filters, partial reconstructions of artistic narratives through intentional rendering gaps, and surveillance layers integrated into the interface as a disruptive aesthetic element.

The exhibition experience is built upon a play of distortion, erasure, and reconstruction, guiding visitors through a fragmented landscape shaped by data extraction, censorship, and surveillance. Through three theoretical axes, the exhibition seeks to destabilize interfaces, revealing programmed collisions between organic textures and surveillance geometries. Data archaeology exposes the metabolic traces left by artistic interactions on digital platforms, while absences promote a pedagogy of the invisible, mapping the intricate relationships between valuation and colonial behavioral patterns.

More than a space for contemplation, *Interrupted Narratives* is an invitation to provocation. How do systems simultaneously erase and hypervalue cultural expressions? Who profits from the digital art ecosystem? Who is watching, and with what intentions? Curating becomes an act of institutional hacking, revealing how digital gatekeepers reify colonial aesthetic hierarchies through algorithmic "recommendations," how attention economies transform artistic ruptures into calculated risk products, and how VR immersion protocols reproduce panoptic logics under a new technoutopian guise.

The exhibition operates as a meta-platform, where the very architecture of visualization reveals itself as a control device. At the end of the journey, visitors are challenged to recombine censored fragments, becoming co-authors of interrupted narratives— a political act that transcends the conventional exhibition space.

Victor Murari, Ph.d.



#1

VIRTUAL REALITY AND THE EVOLUTION OF CURATORIAL PRACTICE: CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON DIGITAL EXHIBITIONS

Introduction

Guratorship, traditionally associated with the activity of collecting, has come to designate a specific practice in the field of the arts. The term originates from the Latin *curare*, which refers to care and responsibility for another's heritage. Since 1661, "curator" has referred to an individual responsible for the administration of museums or exhibition spaces. Throughout history, curatorship has evolved in response to artistic and institutional transformations, becoming a dynamic and multidisciplinary contemporary practice.

For this reason, the relationship between curatorship and virtual reality (VR) has become a growing focus of academic interest due to the new possibilities brought by digital technologies. Digital curatorship, once concerned with physical production, now seeks to organize and preserve artistic information in virtual environments, ensuring its accessibility in an authentic and reliable manner. From this perspective, virtual reality expands exhibition possibilities, providing immersive and interactive experiences that reshape the way audiences engage with art. This situation demands new strategies from curators to integrate emerging technologies and mediate interactions between spectators and artworks.

In light of this scenario, this text investigates the possibilities of curatorship in virtual reality, analyzing how this technology transforms exhibition spaces and challenges traditional artistic mediation practices. The methodology adopted is based on a bibliographic review and an analysis of VR exhibitions and curatorial projects, aiming to understand their potential and challenges. Throughout the text, the impacts of virtual reality on contemporary curatorship, as well as its implications for curators, artists, and audiences, will be discussed.

The Role of Virtual Reality in Curatorial Practice

As previously mentioned, virtual reality emerges as a medium capable of expanding possibilities for spatial organization, narrative construction, and sensory immersion, surpassing the physical and conceptual limitations characteristic of traditional exhibition environments. The transition of exhibition spaces between the material and digital realms—from physical museums to the metaverse—has led to profound changes in how cultural artifacts are contextualized, interpreted, and experienced by diverse audiences worldwide.

The application of virtual reality in curatorial practice manifests across multiple functional dimensions. First, this technology enables overcoming geographical barriers, allowing remote access to digital exhibitions that can be explored independently of visitors' locations. Prestigious institutions like the Louvre and innovative platforms like Google Arts & Culture have developed sophisticated virtual tours that replicate physical galleries with remarkable fidelity, democratizing access to collections historically restricted by geographical, economic, and sociopolitical limitations. However, VR is not limited to reproducing existing spaces; it enables the creation of impossible architectures—exhibition environments unfeasible in the physical world—that allow collections to be contextualized in dynamic spatial configurations tailored to thematic, historical, or conceptual parameters.

The epistemological implications of virtual reality in curation raise fundamental questions about authenticity, materiality, and phenomenological experience. Exhibitions mediated by VR challenge traditional conservation practices by operating within immateriality. Simultaneously, VR inaugurates unprecedented forms of interaction, enabling visitors to break away from passive contemplation characteristic of traditional galleries. Through interactive functionalities, audiences not only observe but actively participate in meaning-making processes by manipulating virtual objects, exploring multidimensional environments, and crafting personalized narratives as they navigate virtual exhibition spaces. Therefore, this interactivity implies a reconfiguration of curatorial relationships, shifting from a

unidirectional communication model to a dialogical exchange. In this new model, visitors assume an even more active role in the exhibition experience at the expense of merely absorbing predefined interpretations.

Contemporary VR exhibitions often incorporate auditory, tactile, and kinesthetic elements that complement visual representation, creating immersive experiences that engage multiple perceptual modalities. This methodology allows for contextualized and comprehensive analysis of cultural artifacts—particularly those whose significance transcends visual dimensions—by incorporating specific soundscapes or temporal elements. Institutions such as the Foundation of the Hellenic World and Ars Electronica Center have pioneered immersive environments where visitors can experience cultural heritage within recreated historical contexts, promoting new forms of phenomenological engagement.

The adoption of virtual reality in curatorial practice requires revisiting established institutional structures and developing new professional competencies. Curators working with VR must navigate multiple disciplines by combining traditional art history methodologies with principles from digital design, user experience architecture, and computational literacies. This expanded skill set reflects the increasingly collaborative nature of digital curation involving technologists, interaction designers, and digital artists alongside traditional curators. Furthermore, VR challenges conventional institutional structures through its inherent decentralization; virtual exhibitions operate beyond physical and administrative boundaries of museums—enabling collaborations across geographically dispersed institutions while allowing independent curators to develop projects without institutional affiliation.

Critical Perspectives on Virtual Reality in Exhibitions Context

Although the proliferation of virtual reality (VR) technologies in exhibitions has been widely celebrated in museological and curatorial discourses, a rigorous critical analysis of these implementations reveals theoretical, practical, and socio-political limitations that demand academic scrutiny. This critical evaluation does not intend to deny the potential contributions of VR to curatorial practice but emphasizes the need for complex theoretical frameworks to guide its application, preserving the essential epistemological and phenomenological foundations of cultural engagement.

The ontological nature of digitally reproduced artifacts constitutes one of the main axes of questioning in VR-mediated exhibitions. Walter Benjamin's seminal discourse on mechanical reproduction acquires new relevance in the digital context, as virtual artifacts lack the auratic qualities he identifies as central to authentic aesthetic experience. The conversion of material objects into digital simulacra entails significant phenomenological losses—textural details, material imperfections, and subtle chromatic variations that identify physical artifacts are inevitably reduced, even in the most sophisticated digital reproductions. The representational gap in question demands profound investigations into the authenticity of virtual experiences in exhibitions, potentially compromising the ability of cultural institutions to promote relevant encounters with material heritage. It is urgent, therefore, to problematize the relationship between virtual reality and authentic experience with cultural artifacts, investigating whether the former complements or replaces the latter.

At the same time, the technological mediation of aesthetic experience through VR interfaces introduces problematic distances between spectators and cultural objects. The VR apparatus—comprising headsets, controllers, and computational hardware—creates an interpretive barrier that can attenuate immediate immersion in the exhibition space. This distancing contrasts with the embodied and unmediated experience of physical museums, where visitors interact intuitively with the architectural environment. Furthermore, the sensory limitations of current technologies—restricted

haptic feedback, reduced peripheral vision, and the absence of olfactory stimuli—compromise the multidimensionality of aesthetic perception. These restrictions reduce the complexity of the exhibition experience to a predominantly visual or auditory modality, incapable of reproducing the sensory richness of direct engagement with cultural artifacts.

The supposed democratization of exhibitions in virtual reality, often presented as a mechanism for expanding cultural access, also requires critical reevaluation under the lens of digital inequalities. While VR technologies enable the transcendence of geographical barriers, they impose new socioeconomic requirements for cultural participation. In other words, the high cost of VR devices still renders them inaccessible to broad segments of the population. Moreover, the technological literacies necessary for navigating virtual environments presuppose educational privileges that are unevenly distributed. Additionally, the infrastructure required for optimized VR experiences—high-speed connectivity, advanced computational equipment, and adequate physical space—reflects and may intensify pre-existing patterns of socio-economic stratification. Therefore, the apparent democratization promoted by virtual exhibitions can paradoxically reinforce cultural inequalities, creating new technological barriers that disproportionately affect marginalized communities.

Another critical aspect refers to the homogenization of the exhibition experience facilitated by standardized VR interfaces. While physical exhibition spaces possess architectural and environmental specificities—spatial configuration, lighting, acoustic properties, and atmospheric elements that structure cultural interpretation—virtual exhibitions often translate artifacts into generic digital environments, decontextualizing them from their historical, geographical, and socio-political frameworks. In light of this, the digital environment can compromise the essential function of curating works within appropriate interpretive frames, substituting cultural particularity with technological uniformity that attenuates the depth of historical and artistic engagement.

A fundamental point to be considered concerns the manner in which the emphasis on spectacularization and interactivity in VR exhibitions raises concerns about the intellectual depth of digital curatorial models. The technological affordances of VR often prioritize sensory stimuli and interactive engagement at the expense of critical reflection and substantive cultural analysis. In clearer terms, the exaggerated "gamification" can shift focus from contemplation to interactive immersion, transforming cultural artifacts into mere objects of entertainment, which would indeed reduce complex historical and artistic narratives to superficial experiences. The risk of this trend is transforming digital curation into a technological spectacle, minimizing its educational role and compromising its ability to foster critical thinking and cultural literacy.

As mentioned earlier, the immersive historical simulations provided by VR also raise fundamental ethical questions. The ability of virtual reality to recreate historical events in an immersive manner requires a careful examination and an appeal to common sense in representations of collective traumas, the potential for historical reductionism, and the psychological impact of these experiences on visitors. The immersiveness of simulations can inadvertently trivialize historical sufferings, converting tragedies into individualized entertainment experiences disconnected from their due historical context.

The institutional economy of implementing VR in exhibitions also demands attention. The substantial costs associated with VR development—including hardware acquisition, software programming, continuous maintenance, and professional training—impose significant financial pressures on cultural institutions that already operate with limited budgets. These investments can divert resources from essential curatorial functions—such as collection acquisition, conservation, academic research, and educational programs—in favor of technological innovations whose long-term

sustainability remains uncertain. The rapid obsolescence of digital devices requires continuous reinvestments to maintain updated technological standards, creating cycles of expenditure that can be unfeasible for institutions without access to sustainable funding.

Environmental considerations also raise critical questions about the unrestricted adoption of virtual reality in the curatorial context. The material infrastructure of digital exhibitions (data centers, computational equipment, transmission networks, and specialized peripherals) entails substantial environmental impacts, including high energy consumption, resource extraction, and electronic waste generation. These environmental externalities contrast with the growing institutional commitment to sustainability, creating tensions between technological innovation and ecological responsibility.

Finally, the cognitive and psychological effects of prolonged exposure to virtual reality constitute an additional layer of concern. Relatively recent studies suggest potential adverse impacts, such as perceptual distortions, proprioceptive disorientation, and psychological dissociations associated with virtual experiences. These implications raise questions about institutional responsibility for the well-being of visitors, especially in contexts of prolonged immersion.

Conclusion

Critical analysis of virtual reality in contemporary curatorship highlights the intricate interrelationships between technological innovation and established museological practices. Throughout this investigation, various dimensions of curatorial practice have been explored, encompassing its historical evolution, methodological innovations, epistemological implications, and critical challenges arising from the incorporation of immersive technologies in exhibition contexts. From this comprehensive analysis emerge significant reflections on the evolving relationship between virtual reality and curatorial practice in contemporary cultural institutions.

The historical trajectory of curatorship, which has shifted from functions centered on preservation to interpretive, educational, and socially engaged practices, provides an essential framework for understanding the integration of virtual reality into this context. From this perspective, VR does not constitute a radical rupture but rather the technological materialization of pre-existing curatorial imperatives, such as the expansion of access, public engagement, and interpretive depth. The affordances of virtual reality—immersive environments, interactivity, multi-sensory involvement, and overcoming spatial barriers—not only dialogue with these established goals but also introduce new methodological possibilities for their realization. Thus, virtual reality can be conceived both as an extension of curatorial evolution and as a factor in the reconfiguration of its traditional practices.

The epistemological implications of virtual reality in the curatorial context demand a critical engagement with fundamental questions of museology, such as authenticity, materiality, representation, and institutional authority. The conversion of material artifacts into digital simulacra involves processes of mediation that result in epistemological gains and losses. While virtual reproduction can democratize access to cultural heritage by overcoming geographical barriers, it can also weaken the auratic dimensions of the aesthetic experience, creating problematic distances between the viewer and the work. The dialectical tension between accessibility and authenticity, between democratization and potential decontextualization, constitutes one of the central challenges of virtual curatorship. Rather than seeking a definitive resolution, curatorial practice can benefit from

recognizing these complexities, developing strategies that value both the democratizing potential and the phenomenological limitations of virtual exhibitions.

The institutional implementation of virtual reality demands a substantial reconfiguration of curatorial competencies, organizational structures, and established professional practices. The interdisciplinary nature of digital curatorship requires the integration of technological expertise with traditional museological knowledge, promoting collaborations that transcend conventional disciplinary boundaries. In this sense, cultural institutions must adopt new evaluative criteria to measure the effectiveness of virtual exhibitions, considering not only technological functionality but also user experience, educational effectiveness, and cultural authenticity. These institutional transformations reflect broader processes of digital remediation in the cultural sector, in which traditional practices are preserved, expanded, and reconfigured through technological innovations that reconcile institutional continuity and methodological renewal.

The critical analysis of the limitations of virtual reality in curatorial contexts reveals ontological, phenomenological, socio-political, and ethical challenges that require in-depth institutional reflection. Issues such as digital inequality, experiential homogenization, the primacy of spectacle, historical reductionism, institutional financial precarity, environmental impacts, and psychological effects represent substantial counterweights to unrestricted technological enthusiasm. However, these criticisms do not invalidate the potential contributions of VR to curatorship; on the contrary, they establish necessary parameters for its responsible implementation, ensuring that technological innovation is incorporated without compromising the essential functions of cultural institutions. Through a dialectical engagement with the possibilities and limitations of virtual reality, institutions can develop more nuanced approaches that leverage its digital potentialities without losing sight of its inherent constraints.

In conclusion, the incorporation of virtual reality into contemporary curatorial practice does not represent a universal solution to institutional challenges, nor an existential threat to traditional museological values. Rather, it is a complex technological means through which historical curatorial imperatives—such as accessibility, participation, and interpretation—can be simultaneously amplified and reformulated. The great challenge for cultural institutions lies in developing implementation strategies that reconcile innovation and criticality, ensuring that technological affordances are explored without disregarding their limitations and socio-political implications. By adopting a dialectical approach that recognizes both the possibilities and the constraints of emerging technologies, curators can navigate with greater sophistication the intersection between innovation and tradition, preserving the essential functions of cultural institutions while reflexively integrating new digital modalities. This critical engagement with technological innovation, grounded in an awareness of its complex epistemological, ethical, and socio-political dimensions, constitutes the most promising path for the meaningful integration of virtual reality into contemporary curatorial frameworks.



Art Ehibition space view 1.

#2

CURATING THE DIGITAL GAZE: POWER, CONTROL, AND EXPERIMENTATION IN

he virtual exhibition "Interrupted Narratives: Art and Control in the Digital Age" presents itself as a laboratory for curatorial experimentation in the digital environment. Far from offering definitive answers, the project seeks to challenge emerging questions about art, technology, and power, problematizing the relationships between the production, circulation, and consumption of images in the age of artificial intelligence and massive digitization. In a context where the virtual increasingly intertwines with the physical, this exhibition is an invitation to critical reflection on the control mechanisms that permeate the creation and reception of art in the digital realm.

Divided into two exhibition nuclei, the show establishes a reflective and critical journey on the impact of digital technologies on artistic creation and the control of contemporary visual discourses. The first nucleus, composed of four conceptual panels, presents fundamental provocations that permeate the universe of digital art and the structures of power that traverse it. These panels function as devices for reflection, suggesting different readings on the intersection between art and technology.

Images Mine: Who Feeds the Machine? – Explores the data economy and the role of image creators in feeding algorithms. Who are the true authors, and what does it mean to appropriate someone else's work to train AI models? This panel questions the invisible exploitation of artists and content creators whose images are collected without explicit consent to feed artificial intelligence databases. At the same time, it investigates how authorship is redefined in a scenario where the machine assumes a creative role.

What Cannot Be Seen? – Questions the invisibilities imposed by algorithmic filters, automated censorship, and structural omissions in databases. How do platforms determine what can or cannot be visible? How do programming biases affect access to visual information? This panel proposes a reflection on the limits of representation in the digital environment and the exclusion mechanisms that operate silently behind technological interfaces.

Who Profits from Digital Art? – Investigates the market dynamics of digital art, the use of NFTs, and the exploitation of computational aesthetics in an environment of growing financialization. How do economic power structures impact the valuation of art in the digital context? Who truly benefits from the new models of art commercialization? The panel seeks to problematize the promises and contradictions of the digital art market, observing how financial speculation redefines the meanings and values of artistic production.

Who Is Watching? – Discusses surveillance and control in the digital space, reflecting on the impacts of the omnipresence of tracking devices in art and society. In a world where data and images are constantly monitored, what does it mean to be watched? How do surveillance mechanisms shape the production and reception of art? This panel explores the complexities of privacy in the digital environment and its implications for creative freedom.

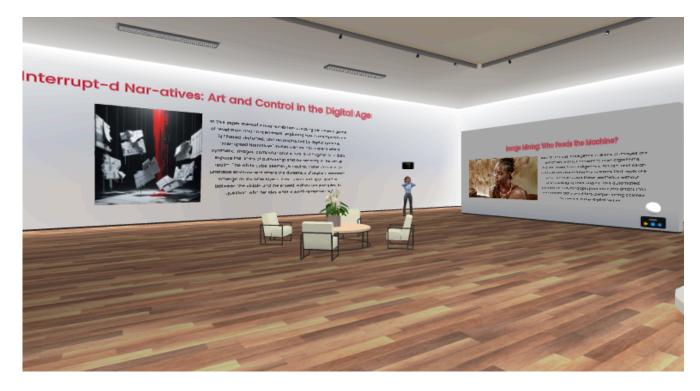
The second nucleus brings together objects that move between AI-generated production and 3D digitization, highlighting the frictions between the physical and the

virtual, originality and technical reproducibility. In this space, the works not only illustrate the themes proposed in the panels but also challenge notions of authorship, materiality, and curatorship in an immaterial environment. The pieces exhibited here raise questions about the instability of form and matter in the digital age, where the transience of images contrasts with the fixity of physical objects.

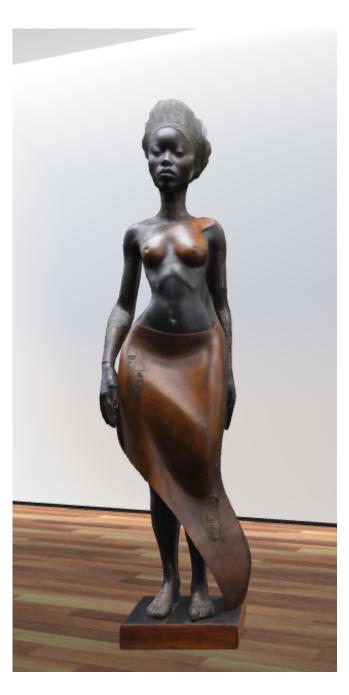
By blending objects created by artificial intelligence and digitized artifacts, the nucleus suggests a debate on the artificiality of memory and how technology interferes with preserving and constructing visual narratives. On the one hand, digitization allows for the conservation and dissemination of artistic works. Still, on the other, it raises questions about the authenticity and appropriation of cultural assets in the virtual environment.

As an independent project, "Interrupted Narratives" assumes the implications of this positioning: while gaining the freedom to explore themes and experimental approaches, it also bears the burdens of autonomy, without institutional or commercial support. This condition reinforces its investigative and open character, fostering a continuous debate on the possibilities and limitations of digital curatorship. The project's independence allows the exhibition to function as a space for radical experimentation, where traditional exhibition formats are challenged and redefined for the virtual context.

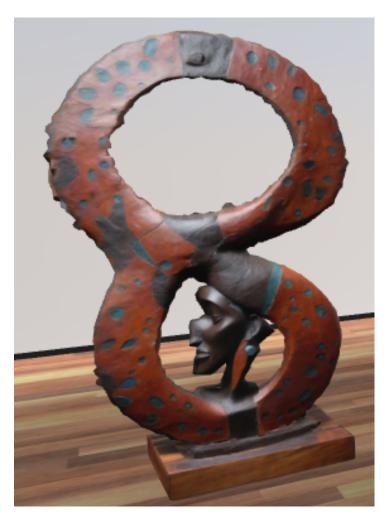
The exhibition does not seek to provide fixed answers but rather to expand inquiries. In a context where images are constantly appropriated, reconfigured, and monetized by automated systems, reflecting on the flows of control in digital art becomes a critical urgency. "Interrupted Narratives" invites the audience to inhabit this space of questioning, where each image, each object, and each concept serve as starting points for an ongoing thought process. Here, curatorship manifests as a critical practice that problematizes and deconstructs certainties, stimulating new ways of seeing, thinking, and experiencing art in the digital age.



HISTORICAL ART OBJECTS



The artwork generated by AI based on the prompt "African Art" depicts a hypersexualized female figure, raising critical concerns about the reproduction of colonial stereotypes and reductive cultural representations embedded in algorithmic systems. By emphasizing physical attributes over historical or cultural depth, the piece reflects the extractive logic of algorithmic colonialism, where diverse artistic traditions are simplified into generic and often problematic visual tropes. This lack of contextual specificity erases the richness and complexity of African art, replacing it with an exoticized and objectified portrayal that aligns with historical patterns of exploitation. Within the exhibition's framework, the inclusion of this work serves as a critical intervention, exposing the limitations of AI in cultural representation and inviting viewers to interrogate the socio-political implications of such technologies. By highlighting how digital systems perpetuate asymmetries of power and aesthetic hierarchies, the artwork becomes a tool for questioning the ethics of algorithmic curation and its role in shaping narratives about marginalized cultures.



The "Contemporary Indigenous Sculpture," generated from a broad prompt, showcases a stylized female figure within a figure-eight shape, highlighting the problematic nature of AI's interpretation and representation of Indigenous cultures; the AI risks cultural appropriation as the lack of specificity from the prompt can lead to a homogenization of diverse Indigenous identities, potentially perpetuating harmful stereotypes, stripping the artwork of its original social, spiritual, or historical context, and commodifying cultural elements. The generic use of "Indigenous" may draw from biased datasets, resulting in decontextualized symbolism and a superficial representation, ultimately prompting a critical curatorial examination of the ethical considerations of AI in art and the importance of supporting authentic Indigenous voices and artistic practices.

Presenting the digitized Zapotec ceramic vessel (Inv. GB 278) in a virtual exhibition offers both opportunities and challenges: while digitization allows for preservation, increased accessibility, and enhanced interpretation through added context, its isolated display risks decontextualization, stripping the vessel of its original narrative, function, and materiality, potentially leading to cultural fetishization; to mitigate these risks, the exhibition should provide rich contextual information, acknowledge the limitations of digitization, engage with Zapotec voices for culturally sensitive interpretations, and link to relevant resources, fostering a more ethical and meaningful engagement with this cultural artifact.

While the inclusion of the digitized Namibian ritual mask (Figure 3) offers a powerful "interruptive device" to challenge colonial narratives and amplify the cultural significance of the Ovambo people by facilitating critical reinterpretation and sharing marginalized stories, it also carries inherent risks of decontextualization, potential for cultural fetishization, and the unintentional perpetuation of misrepresentations; therefore, the exhibition must balance these aspects by providing rich ethnographic data, engaging Ovambo voices, and openly acknowledging the limitations of digital representation to foster an informed and respectful understanding of the mask beyond its digital form.



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