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HOW CONTEMPORARY CURATORIAL PRACTICE CO-OPTS PARTICIPATORY ART

BY

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SUBMITTED TO CLAREMONT MCKENNA COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF THE ARTS

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## Instagram in the Museum

In the summer of 2017, I walked into an exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art called *Hélio Oiticica: To Organize Delirium*. It was the summer after my freshman year of college, and I had just decided to pursue a career in the art world. I began following museums, galleries, and most importantly art influencers on Instagram. That's how I came across JiaJia Fei.<sup>1</sup> I worked as a social media intern only yards away from her desk in the digital marketing department at the Jewish Museum in New York. Despite our close physical proximity, I came across her work as an art world influencer through her Instagram feed and those of her friends. Through the Instagram posts and stories of Fei, Antwaun Sargent (@sirsargent) and Elena Soboleva (@elenasoboleva), I learned more about the ins and outs of the art world than through my museum internship or the endless free time filled by reading Artnet articles.<sup>2</sup> It was through an intriguing Instagram story video and Instagram posts from JiaJia Fei that I learned about the exhibition *Hélio Oiticica: To Organize Delirium*. She showed how fun the exhibition could be by posting videos of herself wiggling her toes in the sand and exploring a tropical landscape. Who doesn't want to go play at the beach on the fifth floor of a Manhattan museum and still learn about art? I had never heard of the Brazilian artist Hélio Oiticica, but JiaJia Fei's posts compelled me to go. When I got there, I couldn't resist taking similar photos and videos of myself in the exhibition.

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<sup>1</sup> JiaJia Fei is an important thread throughout this thesis as she acts as both participant, theorist, and producer of the content considered. She recently launched the very first digital consultancy for art.

<sup>2</sup> Antwaun Sargent is a writer and curator most known for his exhibition and book, *The New Black Vanguard: Photography Between Art and Fashion*. Sargent is also JiaJia Fei's best friend. Elena Soboleva is David Zwirner's Online Sales Director. She ushered in a new era for David Zwirner by establishing its Online Viewing Room and managing their extensive social media presence.

After this visit, I began to consider some of the patterns I observed. An exhibition would arrive at a museum, influencers would start posting photos of themselves at the exhibition, the exhibition would become popular, and non-influencers would flock to the exhibition to post their own photos. What makes an “Instagram-worthy” exhibition? Instagram tags containing posts of popular art exhibitions reveals that influencers and visitors are not posting photos of paintings in a frame, or of static art objects; following a general trend of contemporary art, an Instagram-worthy exhibition must include installation artworks.<sup>3</sup> More importantly, the exhibition must be one that a visitor can participate in. Art museums facilitate audience interactions through education and outreach programming, but Instagram provides a new dimension of interaction. As a result, Instagram-worthy artworks and exhibitions necessitate participation.

Participatory art has an extended history, beginning with the Fluxus experimental artists such as Nam June Paik, Joseph Beuys, and Yoko Ono. The conceptual artists of the 1960s and 70s redefined the parameters of an artwork by shifting its focus from medium and formal properties to ideas and active audience engagement. Performance art emerged as a dominant tactic with leading figures such as Marina Abramovic and Chris Burden. Abramovic is known for her intimate engagements with her audience including staring into each other’s eyes, forces the audience to brush past her and her partner’s naked bodies, and allows audience members to do what they please with her using a series of tools set out on a table. In 2001 Nicolas Bourriaud, a French curator and critic, defined participatory art, as it existed in the 1990s and early 2000s, as a separate set of aesthetic principles. The artists he discussed, such as Rirkrit Tiravanija, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, and Liam Gillick did not create works that could be sold and hung on a wall. Instead, they facilitated social interactions between viewers and with the artist.

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Brenson, “A Curator’s Moment,” *Art Journal* 57, no. 4 (Winter 1998), 16–27.  
<https://doi.org/10.2307/777925>.

Drawing from their predecessors, there were physical components to their pieces— a bowl of pad thai, a pile of candy, a plexi-glass room divider— but the goal of each piece was to create or represent interpersonal relationships. Bourriaud first wrote of the contemporary art phenomenon in his 2001 book, titled *Relational Aesthetics* first published in French in 2001 and translated in 2009. Bourriaud defined relational aesthetics as, “an art taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and *private* symbolic space.”<sup>4</sup> The new definition took hold and in 2008 the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum presented a major exhibition called “theanyspacewhatever” that highlighted the relational aesthetics genre.<sup>5</sup> Roberta Smith, a leading New York Times art critic, wrote in her review of the relational aesthetics exhibition that, “the larger point is to resensitize people to their surroundings and, moreover, to one another in a time when so much technology, stress, [and] shopping conspires against human connection.”<sup>6</sup> Relational aesthetics works within the confines of the art institution. In all of Rirkrit Tiravanija’s iterations of “Pad Thai” he cooked in an art gallery or a museum. Relational aesthetics artists exhibit all of their work in traditional gallery spaces despite how nontraditional their work appears. This is essential to the relational aesthetics model; it uses an unexpected medium and participation to impart its message to a willing audience.

In recent years, it has become apparent that museums do not operate above the mechanics of the rest of the art world. Galleries with exhibited artists sponsor exhibition catalogues and mount their own shows simultaneously. The invention of social media has made the separation

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<sup>4</sup> Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans, Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods, (Dijon: Presses du réel, 2002), 14.

<sup>5</sup> Guggenheim Museum. “Theanyspacewhatever,” 2008.  
<http://web.guggenheim.org/exhibitions/anyspace/exhibition.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Roberta Smith, 2008, “A Romantic Comedy Unspools at the Guggenheim,” *The New York Times*, October 31, 2008, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/31/arts/design/31gugg.html>.

of research-based exhibitions and their marketing and communications impossible in our competitive experiential economy. The experience economy is defined by the *Harvard Business Review* as, “An experience occurs when a company intentionally uses services as the stage, and goods as props, to engage individual customers in a way that creates a memorable event. Commodities are fungible, goods tangible, services intangible, and experiences *memorable*.”<sup>7</sup> Although the application of this definition reduces the art museum to its singular role as an economic player, the museum, as it exists today, is inseparable from the mechanics of the market. Museums have always had to compete for the little time that visitors have to spend engaging with cultural institutions. However, marketing is more important than it ever was since museums have direct, constant access to their visitors through social media. And it appears as though museums have been experiencing a boom in visitors recently.<sup>8</sup>

Despite an increasing number of outlets demanding our attention, we are in a time when people are attending museums more than ever.<sup>9</sup> This occurs for a number of reasons. It is because we have more access to the knowledge of these institutions' existence. It is because they market to us more directly through targeted social media advertising. And it is because our presence in those institutions or the record of our presence in those institutions increases our social capital, which is then amplified by the social media platform. Instagram is arguably the most important social media platform when it comes to the arts because it is inherently a visual

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<sup>7</sup> Joseph B. Pine and James H. Gilmore, 1998, “Welcome to the Experience Economy.” *Harvard Business Review*, July 1, 1998. <https://hbr.org/1998/07/welcome-to-the-experience-economy>.

<sup>8</sup> Emily Sharpe and José Da Silva, “Art’s Most Popular: Here Are 2019’s Most Visited Exhibitions and Museums in the World | The Art Newspaper,” *The Art Newspaper*, March 31, 2020. <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/analysis/art-s-most-popular-here-are-2019-s-most-visited-shows-and-museums>.

<sup>9</sup> Sharpe, Emily, and José Da Silva. “Art’s Most Popular: Here Are 2019’s Most Visited Exhibitions and Museums in the World | The Art Newspaper.” *The Art Newspaper*, March 31, 2020. <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/analysis/art-s-most-popular-here-are-2019-s-most-visited-shows-and-museums>.]

This article lists numerous record-breaking numbers for major art museums around the world. However, it also gives a warning that 2020 might be the last year of museum growth. Ne

platform. You cannot post to the platform without including an image. Therefore, in a visual arts setting it is undeniable that communicating an image would be essential. Although Facebook and YouTube have the most users, according to a 2018 *Pew Research* poll, Instagram continues to have the fastest growing user base with 75% of 18-24 year olds using the platform.<sup>10</sup> These statistics indicate that Instagram has the potential to be the most important social media platform for an arts institution to reach a young visitor base. Since arts institutions need to use social media to maintain and or increase their visitor base, they must entice their followers to visit the museum which comes in the form of interesting social media content. The ability to reach younger audiences assures a steady visitor base over time. Producing interesting content is not just contained to Instagram posts but can also be said of curating exhibitions. The close parallels of these two content producing processes means that they often inform each other. The museum creates experiences for visitors through exhibitions. Those visitors subsequently determine the value of the institution and the work that it exhibits. These experiences culminate in the form of the participatory art installation.

There is a reciprocal relationship with Instagram use in the museum that exhibits participatory works. Relational aesthetics is linked to superstar curators and artists such as Hans Ulrich Obrist and Maurizio Cattelan.<sup>11</sup> Their exhibitions create immense buzz throughout the art world. Take Cattelan, who the *New Yorker* nicknamed “The Prankster” in 2004, garnered attention just this past year for taping a banana to Perrotin’s booth wall at Miami Basel which

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<sup>10</sup> “Share of U.S. Adults Using Social Media, Including Facebook, Is Mostly Unchanged since 2018,” *Pew Research Center*, April 10, 2019. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/04/10/share-of-u-s-adults-using-social-media-including-facebook-is-mostly-unchanged-since-2018/>.

<sup>11</sup> For more information on the newsworthy works of Hans Ulrich Obrist and Maurizio Cattelan refer to Obrist’s website in collaboration with Google Arts and Culture <https://waysofcurating.withgoogle.com> and Cattelan’s gallerist Perrotin’s webpage on the artist [https://www.perrotin.com/artists/Maurizio\\_Cattelan/2#biography](https://www.perrotin.com/artists/Maurizio_Cattelan/2#biography).

was suspiciously eaten by another art prankster.<sup>12</sup> Star curators and artists have the potential big visitor numbers for museums, but the museum must market their exhibitions well to assure success. With Instagram's seemingly endless opportunities for fame and monetization, art institutions began asking themselves, how can we best utilize this medium for exposure? Fei emerged as a leading expert on the use of digital media in museum practice, along with former Metropolitan Museum of Art social media manager Kimberly Drew and ICA/Boston curator Eva Respini.<sup>13</sup> At the beginning of her career at the Guggenheim Museum, Fei led the digital department through crucial exhibitions such as the retrospective *James Turrell* in 2013. This exhibition posed an important dilemma with the relationship between social media, photography, and art. Turrell specifically requested that photography not be allowed in the Guggenheim Museum during his exhibition.<sup>14</sup> As a light and space artist, he believes that the work cannot be fully experienced without existing presently in the exhibition space, especially with the light of a device interfering with the light quality of the work. However, visitors still posted photos from the exhibition. In fact, the photos from the exhibition were shared more than 5,000 times on Instagram and became the Guggenheim's most Instagrammed exhibition.<sup>15</sup> The result of the James Turrell exhibition proved that the incentive to Instagram an artwork or exhibition may prove more potent than the intentions of the artist. The ability to effectively and subtly implement the tool of Instagram in popular exhibitions is a sought-after skill.

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<sup>12</sup> Tomkins, Calvin. "The Prankster." *The New Yorker*, October 4, 2004; Farago, Jason. "A (Grudging) Defense of the \$120,000 Banana - The New York Times." *The New York Times*. December 8, 2019, sec. Art & Design. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/08/arts/design/a-critics-defense-of-cattelan-banana-.html>; Guy Trebay, "The \$120,000 Banana Wins Art Basel," *The New York Times*, December 6, 2019, sec. Style, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/06/style/art-basel-miami-beach.html>.

<sup>13</sup> Goldstein, Caroline. "Want to Understand the Art World? Follow These 12 Influencers on Instagram | Artnet News." *Artnet News*, September 25, 2017. <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/art-world-instagram-influencers-1078328>.

<sup>14</sup> JiaJia. 2016. *Art in the Age of Instagram | Jia Jia Fei | TEDxMarthasVineyard*. TEDxTalks. Martha's Vineyard. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8DLNFDQt8Pc>.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

Name brand art workers draw in visitors who want to see the exhibitions for themselves and post on Instagram to say, “I was here.” Moreover, participatory art draws in visitors because the work directly involves them. Participation appeals to the ego and makes the artwork easier to understand because it is about one’s own experience in the work. The addition of celebrity further appeals to the visitor ego as they are included in the artwork. Maria A. Slowinska analyzes the intersection of contemporary art and marketing in her book *Art/Commerce*. She argues that the value of the art object is changing and that,

Art’s use value—which, ironically, is its instrumental uselessness—loses importance, while the exchange value of art becomes primary. Art comes to revolve only around the spectator being there and being in the know, and not around the actual experience of the work or object of art. The value of art then no longer lies in its own (useless) use value, but in its usefulness for something else. This something else is social appreciation. The appreciation that a renowned work of art receives supposedly mirrors the social standing of the person who appreciates it.<sup>16</sup>

It is the spectator’s value of social reciprocity attributed to an artwork that defines an artwork’s institutional, social, and economic value in the age of Instagram. Participatory art, with its celebrity-like allure, exists at the pinnacle of this social reciprocity.<sup>17</sup> A visitor that participates in a famous work of participatory art becomes a part of the history of that work and feels a bit of that fame. An Instagram post that documents that interaction, cements that occasion of celebrity in digital reproduction.

The question must now be asked, how are museums adapting to the increased use of Instagram? At the emergence of relational aesthetics in the 1990s and early 2000s, a social space necessitated physical interaction between people. Artists redefined the museum and gallery as a social space through participatory art. Since the rise of social media in the late 2000s and early

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<sup>16</sup> Maria A. Slowinska, *Art/Commerce: The Convergence of Art and Marketing in Contemporary Culture*, Cultural and Media Studies, (Bielefeld: Transcript-Verlag, 2014), 118.

<sup>17</sup> Bishop, Claire. “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics.” *October* 110 (2004): 51–79.

2010s, social spaces have increasingly moved into the digital sphere. Social media has given rise to social media native artworks, most notably the work of Amalia Ullman, who created a fake Instagram profile of her journey to become a model.<sup>18</sup> It also provides new and critically engaging platforms for physical artworks. In the case of participatory art, the introduction of social media allows the artist to expand their audience to the digital social space. Although an existing participatory artwork cannot be experienced fully as intended without participating physically with the artwork, the artwork may be experienced in a completely new way on social media. In her TedTalk, Fei “predict[ed] that the digitization of the work of art will completely change the physical object and dematerialize it and turn it into a social object completely defined by the conversation around it rather than the experience itself.”<sup>19</sup> This prediction moves beyond the experience economy into another sphere defined by communal engagement. Claire Bishop, in her 2004 article, “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,” argues that Bourriaud and many of the artists he mentions fail to value participatory artworks by the quality of conversation created through audience interaction.<sup>20</sup> Are art museums doing the same, or are they facilitating critically engaged conversation evaluating their exhibitions?

In this thesis, I investigate the consequences of various art museums’ use of Instagram in programming and curating an exhibition. I hypothesize that contemporary art museums are co-opting participatory art for Instagram marketing, and I explore the extent to which this affects the meaning of the artworks and their exhibitions. I focus on three exhibitions from 2016 and 2017: *Yayoi Kusama: Infinity Mirrors* at the Broad Museum in Los Angeles, *Take Me (I’m Yours)* at the Jewish Museum in New York City, and *Hélio Oiticica: To Organize Delirium* at the Whitney

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<sup>18</sup> For other artists creating Instagram native work please refer to the Instagram’s of Cindy Sherman (@cindysherman), Stephen Shore (@stephen.shore), @nothingtoworryabout.

<sup>19</sup> JiaJia Fei, *Art in the Age of Instagram | Jia Jia Fei | TEDxMarthasVineyard*, March 2, 2016.

<sup>20</sup> Claire Bishop, “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,” *October* 110 (2004): 51–79.



Museum of American Art in New York City. This project aims to consider the balancing act of curatorial responsibility and institutional marketing through the consideration of the three projects.

It is important to note that while I write critically of the exhibitions and institutions, I do not aim to be critical of the artworks themselves, the original iterations of these exhibitions, their curators, and the artists. Given the highly visual nature of Instagram, we should consider an analysis of its use in order to refocus curatorial relationships with the platform. Within traditional circles there is already so much cynicism occupying the sphere of Instagram in the art museum. I find it stifles critical thinking and is wholly unhelpful. Instagram is here to stay in the art world. What I do think is crucial, is to perform an analysis of the ways that art institutions apply these new forms of media, and examine how they affect the function of artworks. How can we make the most of Instagram's myriad of benefits while honoring the spirit of the artworks we present? It is essential progressive thinking to remain critical of, ethical with, and deliberate in Instagram's use just as one would curating an exhibition. Using Instagram in the museum has the potential to celebrate the individual voices of the artists, artworks, art workers, and art appreciators.

## Kusama Fever

Yayoi Kusama has been working for over 70 years but only recently has her work reached a new height of international acclaim. If she was working alongside popular artists such as Andy Warhol and the Abstract Expressionists, why is she just now becoming a household name? Kusama's work fills Instagram feeds as museum and gallery goers flock to her exhibitions. In 2017, lines formed around the block for David Zwirner's show "Festival of Life" which included two of her "Infinity Rooms" and her signature polka-dots covering another room. It took up to six hours for entrance into the otherwise free and open gallery.<sup>21</sup> Again in 2017, ninety thousand advanced tickets for the Broad Museum's exhibition *Yayoi Kusama: Infinity Mirrors* sold out in mere hours.<sup>22</sup> In Instagram posts in which the Broad is tagged (@thebroadmuseum), a majority feature Kusama's artworks. This kind of excitement and attendance for a contemporary artist is unprecedented. *Hyperallergic* designated it "Kusama fever."<sup>23</sup> One would be hard pressed to find a living artist more popular than Yayoi Kusama.

The Broad Museum opened at the end of 2015 in the heart of Downtown Los Angeles. The museum is a monument to the collection and community work of Los Angeles mega couple, Eli and Edythe Broad. As a new cultural center, built in the social media age, in the center of an image conscious city known for celebrity, the Broad capitalizes on the influence of Instagram. The private collection of Eli and Edythe Broad contains many "Instagrammable" artworks including Glenn Ligon's neon *Double America 2*, Jeff Koons's monumental mirrored *Tulips* and *Balloon Dog (Blue)*, and of course Yayoi Kusama's "Infinity Mirrored Rooms." These artworks

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<sup>21</sup> Jenni Sorkin, *Yayoi Kusama: Festival of Life*, New York: David Zwirner Books, 2018.

<sup>22</sup> Eileen Kinsella, "Broad Museum Counts Over 820,000 Visitors in First Year," *Artnet News*, September 20, 2016, sec. Art World. <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/broad-museum-820000-visitors-first-year-659210>.

<sup>23</sup> Elena Goukassian, "How Long Do You Have to Wait to Get Into a Kusama Infinity Room? We Found Out," *Hyperallergic*, January 22, 2018. <https://hyperallergic.com/421316/kusama-infinity-room-wait-times/>.

can be seen over and over again in Instagram posts using the hashtag, #broadmuseum. A simple google search of “broad museum instagrammable” yields endless articles touting the Broad as one of “The Most Instagrammable Places in LA.”<sup>24</sup> The Broad’s webpage on Kusama’s “Infinity Mirrored Rooms” even shows up as a Google search result despite not containing the word “instagrammable.” Google’s search engine algorithm conflates these two phrases (Kusama’s Infinity Mirror Rooms at the Broad and “instagrammable”) through learned interactions and user data rather than through an analysis of the actual webpage. Therefore, Internet users must be conflating Kusama and “instagrammable” themselves.

In 2017, the Broad Museum announced that it would hold its first visiting special exhibition *Yayoi Kusama: Infinity Mirrors*.<sup>25</sup> This exhibition was organized by Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden by curator Mika Yoshitake and travelled to six major museums in the U.S. and Canada.<sup>26</sup> The exhibition was a packaged show, a “blockbuster.” The blockbuster exhibition is increasingly a major aspect of museum practice despite its complicated logistics.

John Zarobell, art historian and former curator, explained,

One doesn’t have to be an economist to figure out that the more exhibitions succeed, the more they will be proposed, and further, the more in demand works of art that might be put to such uses are, the more difficult and expensive blockbuster shows will be to mount as time goes on. It seems an almost impossible conundrum until one remembers that collecting museums are always seeking new funding streams, and that funding a blockbuster exhibition, whether as an institution or private organization, is very likely to yield a profit no matter how much it costs. Blockbusters have thus become a global business model, changing museums from within and without.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> “Broad Museum Instagrammable - Google Search.” Accessed March 29, 2020.

[https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&ei=CEF6XrGABpjn-gTAgliY AQ&q=broad+museum+instagrammable&oq=instagrammable+LA&gs\\_l=psy-ab.3...0.0..12642914...17.0..0.100.197.1j1.....0.....gws-wiz.7V2faPwRsaE&ved=0ahUKEwixpLeWz7PoAhWYs54KHUAAAhMQ4dUDCAo&uact=5](https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&ei=CEF6XrGABpjn-gTAgliY AQ&q=broad+museum+instagrammable&oq=instagrammable+LA&gs_l=psy-ab.3...0.0..12642914...17.0..0.100.197.1j1.....0.....gws-wiz.7V2faPwRsaE&ved=0ahUKEwixpLeWz7PoAhWYs54KHUAAAhMQ4dUDCAo&uact=5).

<sup>25</sup> Sarah Cascone, “Yayoi Kusama’s ‘Infinity Mirrors’ Opens at the Broad in Los Angeles,” *Artnet News*, October 20, 2017, sec. On View. <https://news.artnet.com/exhibitions/yayoi-kusama-infinity-mirrors-broad-1106675>.

<sup>26</sup> Mika Yoshitake, ed. *Yayoi Kusama: Infinity Mirrors*, exh. cat. (Washington, DC, Munich, and New York: Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden; DelMonico Books/Prestel, 2017).

<sup>27</sup> John Zarobell, “Museum Exhibitions in the Era of Globalization,” In *Art and the Global Economy*, 1st ed., 64–89. University of California Press, 2017. [www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctv1xxwsr.10](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctv1xxwsr.10).

*Yayoi Kusama: Infinity Mirrors* helped its exhibiting institutions blow through visitor records. In 2018, the year they showed *Yayoi Kusama: Infinity Rooms*, The Cleveland Art Museum broke its previous 1987 visitor number record by almost fifty thousand and increased its yearly visitors by over thirty percent.<sup>28</sup> The Hirshhorn doubled its average attendance and broke its highest spring attendance record since the museum's opening.<sup>29</sup> Aside from the market price of Kusama's work, *Yayoi Kusama: Infinity Mirrors* is undeniably an extremely valuable exhibition for art museums.

Kusama's initial popularity began long before the Instagram age. Kusama began working as an artist in the 1950s after she moved to New York from her small town in central Japan. In New York she infamously took on the male-dominated art world of Abstract Expressionists, Minimalists, and Pop Artists. Her work transcended that of her male contemporaries, however, it always stayed within the aesthetics of the time. She is a multimedia artist who engages with painting, sculpture, and performance pieces. Her minimalist aesthetic paintings called "Infinity Nets" engage with materiality and the psychology of aesthetics. Her performance work, mostly completed in the 1960s, was politically motivated and critiqued both the art world and the larger political scene. She staged "happenings" around New York, much like Andy Warhol, in an effort to protest the Vietnam War. In a now famous guerilla style performance piece, Kusama laid out chrome balls at the 1966 Venice Biennale and sold them each for two dollars. The work was called "Narcissus Garden" alluding to the narcissistic commodification of the art market; buyers would see themselves reflected in the chrome spheres. Her "Infinity Mirrored Rooms," which

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<sup>28</sup> Emily Sharpe and José Da Silva, "Art's Most Popular: Here Are 2018's Most Visited Shows and Museums." *The Art Newspaper*, March 24, 2019. <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/analysis/fashion-provides-winning-formula>.

<sup>29</sup> Allison Peck, 2017, "Hirshhorn's 'Yayoi Kusama: Infinity Mirrors' Breaks Records." <https://www.si.edu/newsdesk/releases/hirshhorn-s-yayoi-kusama-infinity-mirrors-breaks-records>.

she began creating in 1965 with the piece *Phalli's Field*, are physical manifestations of the hallucinations Kusama has experienced throughout her life.<sup>30</sup> The rooms are quite small in actuality but the infinitely reflecting mirrors make the room, objects inside, and your image multiply endlessly. Kusama's *oeuvre* consists of both politically minded and non-political artworks. Her personal history of mental illness, abuse survival, and success in the face of patriarchy gives her artworks powerful context. Kusama's life provides an omnipresent myth of the artist. This myth was amplified by her return to Japan in 1973 and voluntary admittance into a Tokyo psychiatric hospital where she continues to live today.<sup>31</sup> Her well-documented mental state and biography is mentioned in almost every contemporary exhibition of hers. On the Broad Museum's website entry for *Yayoi Kusama: Infinity Mirrors*, the museum includes a timeline of Kusama's life despite the fact that the exhibition was not a retrospective and the dates of the included artworks only span ten years.<sup>32</sup> The myth of the reclusive artist has been well studied by art historian Peter Sturman who wrote: "Reclusion is an act of disengagement, yet, ironically, pronouncing reclusion is the opposite: a calling out for individuals of a sympathetic mind."<sup>33</sup> It is of note that this quotation and the myth of the reclusive artist was related to Kusama's biography by her New York gallerist David Zwirner in the Jenni Sorkin essay for the *Festival of Life* exhibition catalogue. Some critics and those close to her doubt the validity of this myth. According to writer Jason Kaufman, Kusama did not mention her hallucinations until her mid-thirties. He claims that her Japanese art dealers have been heavily involved in the crafting of this narrative, citing that Kusama repainted early works to include the hallucinatory dots and

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<sup>30</sup> Jenni Sorkin, *Yayoi Kusama: Festival of Life*, (New York: David Zwirner Books, 2018).

<sup>31</sup> Alexandra Munroe, 2019, "Yayoi Kusama at 90: How the 'Undiscovered Genius' Became an International Sensation." CNN, March 22, 2019. <https://www.cnn.com/style/article/yayoi-kusama-artist/index.html>.

<sup>32</sup> The Broad Museum. "Yayoi Kusama: Infinity Mirrors | The Broad." Accessed March 29, 2020. <https://www.thebroad.org/art/special-exhibitions/yayoi-kusama-infinity-mirrors>.

<sup>33</sup> Jenni Sorkin, *Yayoi Kusama: Festival of Life*, (New York: David Zwirner Books, 2018).

backdated paintings from the 1980s to the 1960s.<sup>34</sup> Whether or not Kusama's backstory is manufactured, it has created so much buzz for the artist that she and her team cannot be denied as great marketers.

Kusama's "Infinity Mirrored Rooms" are small but the effect they produce is an ever-expanding room and infinitely multiplying images of the participant. Very simply, Kusama encloses a space with mirrors on all four walls and, in their most recent iterations, on the ceilings and floors. In combination with lights and/or patterns, the room and its objects reflect into an intangible space. This creates the effect that the viewer enters into a new dimension. Kusama intends for this to be the space of the mind. In one of her rooms titled *The Souls of Millions of Light Years Away* (Fig. 1), it appears as though the entire universe is contained within Kusama's room. Small LED lights appear like stars in an unbounded black space. The participant is made aware of their place in the universe, as they appear to have ventured into it. Their image reverberates through the constructed universe as it does in real life. As stated previously, Kusama's rooms are an immersive experience of her supposed hallucinations. Many of these rooms on view today are either recent (in the past ten years) recreations of her 1960s rooms or brand-new installations.<sup>35</sup> With regard to the recreations, Kusama's rooms have taken on a different meaning in the Instagram age. Just like many relational aesthetics artworks, the original contemplative interactions with the works have been replaced by participants using the room to generate Instagram content. Aside from the rooms' aesthetic value, in a time when mental health and spirituality is at the forefront of political campaigns and celebrity causes, Kusama's "Infinity Mirrored Rooms" also fit into current social trends. Viewers explore their own relationship with spirituality, the cosmos, mental health, and celebrity by participating in her installations. This

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<sup>34</sup> Jason Kaufman, "Polka Dot Priestess," *Black Card Mag*, Spring 2014, 226–42.

<sup>35</sup> Mika Yoshitake, ed. *Yayoi Kusama: Infinity Mirrors*. exh. cat.

conversation is then amplified through its subsequent broadcast over Instagram through photos taken within the “Infinity Mirrored Room.”

Kusama’s “Infinity Mirrored Rooms” have impacted Instagram in a major way. At the time of writing, #infinityroom had almost eighty-five thousand posts on Instagram and #yayoikusama had over eight hundred seventy-eight posts on Instagram (it is important to keep in mind that these numbers are only a fraction of the total Instagram posts including Kusama and the “Infinity Mirror Rooms” since many Instagram users don’t use hashtags).<sup>36</sup> The Hirshhorn reported in May of 2017 that ninety-one million Instagram and Twitter users had seen a post on the social media platforms using the hashtag #InfiniteKusama.<sup>37</sup> Kusama’s work has all of the hallmarks of an instagrammable artwork. One only has to look at the #infinityroom tag to understand how participants interact with the artworks through their phones (seen in Fig. 2). The mirror selfie is a mainstay of Instagram use and so a mirror selfie inside of an artwork makes a more desirable Instagram photo. Maria Slowinska’s determination of art’s social use value is crucial for understanding the art mirror selfie. Kusama’s “Infinity Mirrored Rooms” transmute from their experiential use value to their usefulness as an instrument for Instagram posts. An “Infinity Room” mirror selfie has been proven over and over again as a desirable display of social capital through the thousands of almost identical photos posted on Instagram.<sup>38</sup>

The “Infinity Mirrored Room” selfie phenomenon ties closely with the postmodern theories of Jean Baudrillard as written in his seminal text *Simulacra and Simulation*. Kusama produces a Baudrillardian hologram through her mirrored rooms; the viewer’s image is

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<sup>36</sup> #infinityroom, Instagram hashtag, April 13, 2020, <https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/infinityroom/?hl=en>; #yayoikusama, Instagram hashtag, April 13, 2020, <https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/yayoikusama/?hl=en>.

<sup>37</sup> The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, “The Exhibition-Yayoi Kusama: Infinity Mirror Rooms,” n.d. <https://hirshhorn.si.edu/kusama/the-exhibition/>.

<sup>38</sup> For examples, refer to the Instagram hashtags: #yayoikusama, #infinityroom, #infinityrooms, #infinityroomselfie, #yayoikusamaexhibition, and many more related terms.

replicated through reflecting mirrors to create infinite false holograms of the viewer and the room.<sup>39</sup> Baudrillard defines the allure of the hologram as that, “We dream of passing through ourselves and of finding ourselves in the beyond: the day when your holographic double will be there in space, eventually moving and talking, you will have realized this miracle. Of course, it will no longer be a dream, so its charm will be lost.”<sup>40</sup> The alluring hologram is then exponentially replicated through subsequent Instagram posts. The spatiality of digital platforms and User Interface Design (UI design), especially as implemented by Instagram, appears to provide three-dimensional space for an image to reside. The image takes on a life of its own through the platform’s algorithms. It is through digital social interactions that the Instagram user creates a hologram of Kusama’s hologram. Baudrillard writes, “The closer one gets to the perfection of the simulacrum (and this is true of objects, but also of figures of art or of models of social or psychological relations), the more evident it becomes how everything escapes representation, escapes its own double and resemblance.”<sup>41</sup> The viewer’s image of self fractures with every iteration produced within the room and on Instagram. With every instance of the Instagram post appearing on another user’s feed, the real image of the viewer is less real. Through the Instagram post, the viewer continues to replicate and fracture the image of the exhibiting institution as well. As Baudrillard explains, the hologram is always a simulacrum of the original yet our fascination with it persists.<sup>42</sup> Perhaps our propensity to replicate the self and our social interactions is what makes Kusama’s work so wildly popular for viewers and institutions.

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<sup>39</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Glaser, (United States: University of Michigan, 1994), 105-9.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 105.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 107.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 107.



There is nothing inherently wrong about the way that Instagram users affect the function of Kusama's "Infinity Mirrored Rooms;" visitors are responding to the trends of interaction that are already present in modern and postmodern life. It is no new notion that the art world, specifically museums and galleries, have an enforced set of social norms: don't touch the art, stand eighteen inches away, lower your voice, etc. Kusama's Infinity Mirror Rooms, and most other works of relational aesthetics or participatory art, do not follow these same social guidelines. Therefore, other social norms must be established. This is where the museum has found its authority. Take for example, Baudrillard's explication of the social norms of the hypermarket, or supermarket as it's known in the United States.

At the deepest level, another kind of work is at issue here, the work of acculturation, of confrontation, of examination, of the social code, and of the verdict: people go there to find and to select objects-responses to all the questions they may ask themselves; or, rather they *themselves* come in *response* to the functional and directed question that the objects constitute. The objects are no longer commodities: they are no longer even signs whose meaning and message one could decipher and appropriate for oneself, they are *tests*, they are the ones that interrogate us, and we are summoned to answer them, and the answer is included in the question.<sup>43</sup>

The museum and the supermarket are similar to each other in numerous ways. Many contemporary artists have drawn these parallels in their own work including felt artist Lucy Sparrow and ceramicist Stephanie Shih.<sup>44</sup> An even stronger parallel is made with the exhibition *Take Me (I'm Yours)*, as seen in chapter two of this thesis. Through their exhibition and promotion in the modern museum, participatory works command a certain type of interaction. The prevalence of Instagram within the museum space, especially in the Broad, summons the visitor to use Instagram posting as a means of interacting with Kusama's "Infinity Mirrored

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<sup>43</sup> Baudrillard, 75.

<sup>44</sup> artnet News, "See the Adorable New Grocery Store in Rockefeller Center, Where Everything Is Art—and It's All on Sale for as Little as \$5," October 1, 2019. <https://news.artnet.com/exhibitions/lucy-sparrow-rockefeller-center-1666675>; Edible Brooklyn, "This Asian-American Artist Creates Community with a Porcelain Pantry," November 28, 2018. <https://www.ediblebrooklyn.com/2018/stephanie-shih-porcelain-ceramics/>.

Rooms.” When reproduced in an Instagram post, *The Souls of Millions of Light Years Away* is no longer a simulacrum of Kusama’s hallucination and it is “no longer even signs whose meaning and message one could decipher and appropriate for oneself.”<sup>45</sup> There is an undeniable pull for visitors to photograph themselves within Kusama’s “Infinity Mirrored Rooms” and post the photo to Instagram because it has been made a social norm.

The museum plays the most important role in this exchange because it dictates and perpetuates these Instagram focused interactions. As previously surmised, museums hold the authority that creates and permits these new social norms. The Broad made social media a priority in the marketing of *Yayoi Kusama: Infinity Mirrors*. For example, the museum initiated a weekly sweepstakes where entrants answered a question posted to The Broad’s social media with a photo, video, or comment post of their own. To be entered participants had to use the designated exhibition hashtag #infinetela. The prize was two tickets to see the exhibition, where then they could post more photos from the exhibition.<sup>46</sup> Throughout *Yayoi Kusama: Infinity Mirrors*, the Broad made an effort to promote visitors’ personal Instagrams on its accounts, and clarified that photography was encouraged in the installations. An article from the LAist, reported that one of the Visitor Services Associates at the Broad gave them the tip to turn around in the rooms because the mirrored door that closes behind you allows for a clearer selfie.<sup>47</sup> The Broad clearly facilitated the use of Instagram in *Yayoi Kusama: Infinity Mirrors*, through their social media and in-person promotion of the exhibition.

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<sup>45</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Glaser, (United States: University of Michigan, 1994).

<sup>46</sup> The Broad, “Yayoi Kusama: Infinity Mirrors | The Broad,” Accessed March 29, 2020.

<https://www.thebroad.org/art/special-exhibitions/yayoi-kusama-infinity-mirrors>.

<sup>47</sup> Tim Loc, “Five Tips On Capturing Glorious Selfies At The ‘Infinity Mirrors’ Exhibit,” *LAist*, October 31, 2017. [https://laist.com/2017/10/31/infinity\\_selfies.php](https://laist.com/2017/10/31/infinity_selfies.php).

It is in the facilitation of Instagram interactions where the Broad affects the significance of Kusama's work. In his chapter "The Implosion of Meaning in the Media," Baudrillard argues that the proliferation of information through mass media "is directly destructive of meaning and signification."<sup>48</sup> Visitors and the Broad proliferate images of and interactions with Kusama's "Infinity Mirrored Rooms" through their Instagram posts. Therefore, the meaning of the "Infinity Mirrored Rooms" implodes with its continued posting to Instagram. According to Baudrillard,

[Implosion signifies] the short-circuiting between poles of every differential system of meaning, the erasure of distinct terms and oppositions, including that of the medium and of the real—thus the impossibility of any mediation, of any dialectical intervention between the two of from one to the other. Circularity of all media effects. Hence the impossibility of meaning in the literal sense of a unilateral vector that goes from one pole to another.<sup>49</sup>

Baudrillard claims that no meaning can be ascribed to an object that is so diluted by media circulation; we can argue this applies to curator intervention, as well. The observed interactions with the physical artworks and the subsequent interactions over Instagram are of similar value: Instagram driven. Despite extensive exhibition material explaining the importance of Kusama as a transgenerational artist creating captivating artworks that speak to the sublime of human experience, the "Infinity Mirrored Rooms" transform into Instagram fodder. The Broad not only contributed to but perpetuates this phenomenon through their promotional material and exhibition programming.

In today's art world, it is impossible to separate Instagram from Kusama's work. In fact, accepting Baudrillard, the significance of Kusama's work has transferred to the facilitation of Instagram posts. Visitors are compelled to photograph themselves in the installations by the

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<sup>48</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*. 79.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. 83.

curators and administration at the Broad. These strategies, in turn, bring in more visitors and create more profits for the Broad during the exhibition and over time.

On March 16, 2018, the Broad announced that it had acquired a new Infinity Mirror Room, *Longing For Eternity*. This announcement came only three months after the close of *Yayoi Kusama: Infinity Mirrors*. In the press release, the Broad highlighted that *Longing For Eternity* would be open to the public the next day, which was months sooner than any of the other acquisitions announced.<sup>50</sup> The Broad capitalized on the excitement of the announcement and the recency of the special exhibition by immediately exhibiting the work. The Kusama Instagram phenomenon changed the significance of Kusama's work to an experiential marketing ploy.

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<sup>50</sup> Alice Chung, "The Broad Announces Major New Acquisitions Including Mark Bradford's 'Helter Skelter I' and Yayoi Kusama's 'Longing for Eternity,'" March 16, 2018.

## Take Me and Post Me

In 1995, Hans Ulrich Obrist, in collaboration with artist Christian Boltanski, curated a groundbreaking relational aesthetics exhibition at the Serpentine Galleries in London. The show was titled *Take Me (I'm Yours)* and it encouraged visitors to do just as the title suggested: take artworks away.<sup>51</sup> The show included twelve artists with artworks available to be picked apart and taken home. The concept of a major exhibiting institution allowing their visitors to pick up, let alone leave with its artworks was revolutionary yet nerve-racking. Artworks included a vending machine that dispensed common objects created by Christine Hill, slogan buttons by Gilbert & George, and a competition for a dinner date with artist Douglas Gordon at the end of the exhibition.<sup>52</sup> These artworks exemplified the philosophy of relational aesthetics by maximizing participation. In effect, the Serpentine exhibition was popular due to its novelty but also its potential for audience gain.

*Take Me (I'm Yours)*, along with many other popular exhibitions, put Ulrich Obrist on the map as a star curator. The star curator has become a mainstay of contemporary curatorial practice. Recruiting celebrity curators allows for institutions to claim intellectual legitimacy and relieve some institutional accountability.<sup>53</sup> Most pertinent, however, is that star curated exhibitions help establish a mythological narrative around the exhibition, and ultimately the exhibiting institution. Roland Barthes, the semiological theologian, analyzed the semantics of

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<sup>51</sup> Serpentine Galleries, "Take Me (I'm Yours)," 2020. <https://www.serpentinegalleries.org/exhibitions-events/take-me-i%E2%80%99m-yours>.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> John Zarobell, 2017, "Museum Exhibitions in the Era of Globalization." In *Art and the Global Economy*, 1st ed., 64–89, University of California Press, [www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctv1xxwsr.10](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctv1xxwsr.10).

modern mythology in his 1957 book, *Mythologies*. Although the breakdown of semiologics is most important to Barthes, his evaluation that “myth cannot possibly be an object, a concept, or an idea; it is a mode of signification, a form,” is critical to understanding the marketing strategies of art museums.<sup>54</sup> Obrist’s status is a constructed myth which art institutions can then communicate and add to their own mythology.

Hans Ulrich Obrist’s status as a star curator makes his exhibitions hugely valuable for art institutions today. Art museums are able to buy well thought out and proven exhibitions from the star curator and add their own touch to add even more intrigue. The Jewish Museum in New York did just that. It restaged the 1995 Serpentine exhibition with the approval of Obrist and Boltanski while adding thirty additional artists. The additional artists, such as Yoko Ono, Martha Rosler, and Andrea Bowers, added even more opportunity for name recognition and popular take home art pieces. The list of artists reads like a shopping list of some of the most popular contemporary artists.<sup>55</sup> The exhibition took place in the two main galleries of the museum. Its method of display departed from traditional exhibition design techniques. Many of the artworks were placed on plastic crates like the ones used in food packing and milk storage. In the center of the gallery sat a mound of thrifted clothing for Christian Boltanski’s piece, *Dispersion* (Fig. 3). Before entering the exhibition, the visitor could grab a plastic shopping bag with the title of the exhibition printed on the front. With the shopping bag, visitors moved throughout the exhibition

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<sup>54</sup> Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Richard Howard and Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 2013). 109.

<sup>55</sup> aaajiao, Kelly Akashi, Uri Aran, Dana Awartani, Cara Benedetto, Christian Boltanski, Andrea Bowers, James Lee Byars, Luis Camnitzer, Ian Cheng, Heman Chong, Maria Eichhorn, Hans-Peter Feldmann, Claire Fontaine, Andrea Fraser, General Sisters, Gilbert & George, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Matthew Angelo Harrison, Yngve Holen, Carsten Höller, Jonathan Horowitz, Jibade-Khalil Huffman, Alex Israel, Koo Jeong A, Alison Knowles, Angelika Markul, Adriana Martinez, Daniel Joseph Martinez, Jonas Mekas, Rivane Neuenschwander, Yoko Ono, Sondra Perry, Rachel Rose, Martha Rosler, Allan Ruppersberg, Tino Sehgal, Daniel Spoerri, Haim Steinbach, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Amalia Ulman, and Lawrence Weiner

picking up artworks as they went. The shopping bags facilitated the motive of the exhibition but also emphasized the artworks' roles as commodities. There were also various photo opportunities throughout, including Lawrence Weiner's mural "Nau Em I Art Bilong Yumi," Felix Gonzalez Torres's colorful candies strewn over the floor, and Martha Roslers's wall of protest ribbons. Each of these artworks provide a colorful backdrop for an aesthetic Instagram designated photo. In fact, art world influencer and current David Zwirner digital media marketing specialist, Elena Soboleva, was featured on the Jewish Museum website after she posted an image of herself in front of Wiener's mural with one of Rosler's ribbons tied around herself like a sash. The museum hired a creative consulting agency Topo Graphics, whose founders also serve as creative directors for the museum.<sup>56</sup> Even though the exhibition was a restaging of an earlier exhibition, the creative directors at the Jewish Museum employed many new curatorial tactics to make the exhibition different. These new flourishes were well documented in Jewish Museum press releases and subsequent articles. The curators decided to place the exhibition brochures and guides in basic metal paper towel dispensers.<sup>57</sup> This mode of display called attention to the free items we use in our daily lives and mirrored the art dispensing occurring in the exhibition. The designers Roy Rub and Seth Labenz described their design.

There are common threads that weave throughout the artists' works — ideas such as readymade, mass production, and the financial value of artworks. These ideas inspired us to channel retail vernacular not unlike a dollar store in the exhibition design. We needed to hit that sweet spot between a retail store and a gallery space — the exhibition is both of those, and neither of those.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Museum, The Jewish. "Unconventional Design for an Unconventional Exhibition." Medium, March 15, 2017. <https://stories.thejewishmuseum.org/unconventional-design-for-an-unconventional-exhibition-c2d7ba55328b>.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

The designers made a decision to lower the barriers of art through common signifiers. They equated the dealing of artworks to shopping at the supermarket through the actions of picking up the desired item, of which there are endless replacements, placing the item in your shopping bag, and moving on to the next. When searching the exhibition online, article titles tout “free stuff!” or “In some ways, the show seems to anticipate the viewer’s every need: Feeling chilly? Sort through Boltanski’s mound of thrift store goodies to find an oversize cardigan.”<sup>59</sup> Article after article, describing the exhibition, seems to use the same phrases over and over again with little critical assessment, and phrases appeared plucked out of The Jewish Museum’s press release. The Jewish Museum reposted an article to their Facebook with the caption, “You Can Blow Your Nose with a Haim Steinbach at the Jewish Museum.”<sup>60</sup> This lack of critical engagement feeds into the clickbait nature of the exhibition.

The exhibition lets the audience member subvert an area of society that has been famously elusive. The curators point to the art market as the target of the exhibition, but in today’s experience economy, the artist’s market will likely strengthen due to the increased recognition of the exhibiting artists. This becomes especially true when a photo of the artwork is subsequently posted to Instagram. The Jewish Museum’s restaging of the exhibition took on a different meaning in the Instagram age. Their Instagram engagement promoting the curatorial and institutional quality of the Jewish Museum brings in larger audiences. *Take Me (I’m Yours)*

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<sup>59</sup> Roberta Smith, “The Jewish Museum Is Giving Away Art. You Get What You Pay For,” *The New York Times*, October 20, 2016, sec. Arts. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/21/arts/design/review-take-me-im-yours-jewish-museum.html>; Sarah Cascone, “The Art Is Yours at the Jewish Museum’s Take Me (I’m Yours),” *artnet News*, September 20, 2016. <https://news.artnet.com/exhibitions/you-can-blow-your-nose-with-a-haim-steinbach-at-the-jewish-museum-658235>.

<sup>60</sup> The Jewish Museum, “You can blow your nose with a Haim Steinbach at the Jewish Museum’s Take Me (I’m Yours)”: <http://thejm.net/TB8O304qd4M> via Artnet News” Facebook, September 21, 2016, [https://www.facebook.com/TheJewishMuseum/photos/a.54168973682.68834.8668468682/10153935790308683/?type=3&comment\\_tracking=%7B%22tn%22%3A%22O%22%7D](https://www.facebook.com/TheJewishMuseum/photos/a.54168973682.68834.8668468682/10153935790308683/?type=3&comment_tracking=%7B%22tn%22%3A%22O%22%7D).



at the Jewish Museum contributed to a larger museum studies discourse about ownership, audience interaction, and marketability.

The Jewish Museum's *Take Me (I'm Yours)* was curated by rising star curators Jens Hoffmann and Kelly Taxter. They are in-demand contemporary art curators that work beyond their home institution of the Jewish Museum contributing to popular media, biennials, and blockbuster exhibitions.<sup>61</sup> Beyond the status of their curators, the Jewish Museum began putting an administrative focus on the use of Instagram in their institution, starting with the hiring of digital media expert JiaJia Fei. Fei was hired in 2015 by the Jewish Museum in a newly created position as Director of Digital.<sup>62</sup> The move to a smaller institution from the behemoth of the Guggenheim Museum, gave Fei the opportunity to radically grow the digital engagement of an art institution. According to Fei's website, she grew the Jewish Museum's social media following by one thousand percent.<sup>63</sup> Fei's hiring coincided with "a number of interactive, runaway exhibitions—the most recent of which is titled *Take Me (I'm Yours)*." Fei also worked on Martha Rosler's retrospective, an Alex Israel solo show, and many other significant exhibitions of contemporary artists.<sup>64</sup> Fei's own Instagram account, @vajaja, displays Fei's opinions on social media use in the art institution; she almost exclusively posts photos of herself

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<sup>61</sup> As of December 17, 2017, two months before the close of *Take Me (I'm Yours)*, the Jewish Museum terminated their relationship with Jens Hoffmann in light of multiple allegations of sexual harassment by employees. Other institutions, including The Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit and Mousse Magazine, followed suit and terminated their contracts with Jens Hoffmann.

<sup>62</sup> Rain Embuscado, "Interview With Jewish Museum Digital Director JiaJia Fei," artnet News, October 10, 2016. <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/jiajia-fei-interview-jewish-museum-672887>.

<sup>63</sup> JiaJia Fei, "JiaJia Fei | Digital Strategist for the Art World," Accessed April 26, 2020. <https://www.jiajiafei.net>.

<sup>64</sup> Rain Embuscado. "Interview With Jewish Museum Digital Director JiaJia Fei." artnet News, October 10, 2016.

standing in front of artworks or of the artworks alone.<sup>65</sup> Through her Instagram feed, Fei curates an online exhibition of works that she feels her followers should or would like to see. The inclusion of her face and body in front of the artworks further personalizes and claims authority. Fei believes that social media is an integral part of contemporary curatorial practice, citing that “by opening up access, we open up the discourse for art, and we can lead that discourse, and we open up visual literacy for all.”<sup>66</sup> Fei’s role in providing digital imagery of art exhibitions does provide greater access to art images. However, the discourse that results is entirely Instagram driven. Contemporary curatorial and museum practice can be understood through the collaboration between institutional departments, like education and digital marketing. Although Hoffmann and Taxter curated *Take Me (I’m Yours)*, Fei was an integral part of the realization of the exhibition, as well. Fei, as Director of Digital and art influencer, brought visitors into the exhibition, which is essential to the success of the relational aesthetic works.

Jens Hoffmann, in his catalog essay, conclusively positions *Take Me (I’m Yours)* as a social media literate exhibition. He titles his essay paragraphs using hashtag headings including: “#NewMaterialism,” “#LucyLippard,” and “#Relics.”<sup>67</sup> The body of his catalog essay further indicates his placement of the restaged *Take Me (I’m Yours)* exhibition within an Instagram conscious environment. The mission of the Jewish Museum is to exhibit and collect works

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<sup>65</sup> JiaJia Fei (@vajiajia), “👋 JiaJia Fei 费嘉菁, digital strategist for the art world, founder of the first digital agency for art, consulting director of digital @thejewishmuseum jiajiafei.net,” Instagram profile, <https://www.instagram.com/vajiajia/?hl=en>

<sup>66</sup> JiaJia Fei, *Art in the Age of Instagram* | Jia Jia Fei | TEDxMarthasVineyard, TEDxTalks, Martha’s Vineyard, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8DLNFDQt8Pc>.

<sup>67</sup> Jens Hoffmann, “Why Not Give It All Away?” in *Take Me (I’m Yours)*, exh. cat., (New York: Jewish Museum, 2016), 4-21.

pertaining to the Jewish religion, people, and values. The institution claims that the exhibition *Take Me (I'm Yours)* represents the Jewish values of “selflessness and giving” as described by curator Kelly Taxter.<sup>68</sup> These values are echoed in the exhibition catalog by Hoffmann in his #Gift paragraph. Hoffmann writes, “the gesture of the gift is not entirely centered on the receiver; indeed, many psychologists argue that gift giving has an even more beneficial impact on the giver.”<sup>69</sup> If one is to extend this thread to the undertaking of the exhibition then Hoffmann concedes that the exhibition benefits the Jewish Museum more than it benefits the viewers that take home the artworks. This argument can be proven through Instagram engagement since the Jewish Museum will collectively see more social media engagement than any one of its visitors using the hashtag, #TakeMeI'mYours. Instagram is embedded in the curatorial message of the exhibition. An exhibition can be used a tool to market the merit of a museum and Instagram disseminates that marketing message to a wide audience. Then adding that the inclusion of so many big-name contemporary artists increases the status of the museum; the accessibility of the artworks through participatory strategies combined with prestigious artists' work allows for a desirable contemporary art exhibition.

The Jewish Museum heavily promoted the use of Instagram in *Take Me (I'm Yours)*. In multiple blog posts the Jewish Museum writers pointed to actual Instagram posts as a way to engage with the exhibition. In their promotional material, as seen on their website, emails, blog posts, and Instagrams, the museum prominently featured the hashtag, #TakeMeImYoursNYC, to

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<sup>68</sup> Kelly Taxter, “Taken: A Brief History of Take Me (I'm Yours),” In *Take Me (I'm Yours)*, (New York: The Jewish Museum, 2016), 23–29.

<sup>69</sup> Jens Hoffmann, “Why Not Give It All Away?” 17.

encourage visitors or followers to use when posting about the exhibition. The hashtag and reposting of actual Instagrams indicated to followers that if they posted a high-quality image relating to the exhibition, then they could be featured by the museum. The status of a prominent New York art museum makes the possibility for a feature appealing to an Instagram user. For example, in a blog post by the Jewish Museum, the writer includes three “flat-lays,” a social media term describing an amalgam of objects photographed from above. The inclusion of the three images in the blog post increases the likelihood that these three Instagram users will incur additional followers. Or, they can brag about their feature on their own Instagrams in a bid to get more approval from their existing followers. In their promotional materials the Jewish Museum states clearly that the photos posted to Instagram with the predetermined hashtags are posted directly to the Jewish Museum website, reaching a wider audience. It is a social exchange, but it is also one driven by the economic needs of the museum. In combination with the status boost outlined previously, this feature could compel another Instagram user to visit the museum, and once again post about the exhibition. It is in this circular exchange that the Jewish Museum uses the positioning of the exhibition for Instagram marketing.

Throughout his catalogue essay of key hashtags, Hoffmann returns to the idea that the internet and relational aesthetics offer “subversive alternatives to the capitalist system.”<sup>70</sup> He agrees with Bourriaud’s conviction that relational aesthetics is a democratizing art form. In his final paragraph titled #Democratization, Hoffmann intimates that his *Take Me (I’m Yours)* is a part of the New Institutionalism by “trad[ing] in the stodgy, buttoned-up museum for a

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<sup>70</sup> Jens Hoffmann, “Why Not Give It All Away?” 19.

transparent, flexible space that encourages learning, interaction, and access.”<sup>71</sup> There is no doubt that the exhibition challenged traditional notions of museum function and exhibition space and allowed unprecedented access to artworks. However, Hoffmann fails to perceive that *Take Me (I’m Yours)* still follows the old objectives of the museum. Visitors are prompted to engage with artworks the same way that they engage with groceries in a supermarket. They are encouraged to translate their art interactions and new possessions to Instagram posts. This only reinforces a hyper-capitalist system and further commodifies art and social interaction.

On November 7th, 2016, Instagram user @ashtongilbert posted a flat-lay image of artworks she owns by Alex Israel, Lawrence Weiner, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Yoko Ono, Gilbert & George, and Carsten Höller. Under different circumstances this display of artwork would be considered a flagrant display of wealth and status. And even though the pieces were free to @ashtongilbert, the Instagram post is still a display of wealth and status. Her Instagram post shows that she is educated, socially connected, and can take the time out of her week to go see an art exhibition. Furthermore, @ashtongilbert positioned herself on her Instagram feed as a D.I.Y. (do it yourself) art curator. Creating everyday art curators was one of the main goals of the curators for *Take Me (I’m Yours)*. They knew that visitors would take the art objects home, arrange them or install them in their own home, and (hopefully) post photos of their new acquisitions on Instagram. The reciprocal value of this social media exchange was fundamental to the exhibition’s marketing tactics. The visitor and Instagram user boost their social capital and the Jewish Museum boosted their reputation through media exposure and direct consumer

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 20.

marketing. The Jewish Museum encouraged its visitors to go out into the world and display, wear, or use the art object from the exhibition so that their curatorial message is broadcast to a wider audience. It was the participatory nature of the art objects chosen for the exhibition that made this form of marketing possible. Lawrence Weiner distributed a stencil with the pidgin words “nau em i art bilong yumi,” which translates to “the art of today belongs to us.” The stencil was meant to be taken by visitors into the world and used to create reproductions. There was also a temporary tattoo with the same words to place on your skin. Rirkrit Tirajaniva created a t-shirt with the phrase “Freedom cannot be simulated” which was supposed to be taken out into the world to spark conversations with others.<sup>72</sup> The new owners of the t-shirt, temporary tattoo, and stencil could also, of course, post a photo of themselves on Instagram wearing the shirt, tattoos, or in front of their stenciled creation. The action of each of the art objects leaving the museum and entering into the everyday created more opportunities for social media engagement. The Jewish Museum could not control the images of these art objects once they leave the museum, but they benefit from them, nonetheless. The visitors of the museum essentially became curators of the physical exhibition because they continue the narrative of these objects. *Take Me (I’m Yours)* expanded outside of the walls of the Jewish Museum, and most importantly, expanded into the digital realm.

The curators and the Jewish Museum staged *Take Me (I’m Yours)* in consideration of potential Instagram engagement. Instagram was embedded in the curatorial work of the exhibition. However, Instagram is a marketing platform. It is a place to market a business, and

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<sup>72</sup> Christian Boltanski, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Jens Hoffmann, and Kelly Taxter, *Take Me (I’m Yours) exh. cat.*, (New York: Jewish Museum, 2016).

most importantly market the self. Instagram is also a platform that can disseminate institutional mythologies. Barthes' evaluation of modern myth development through speech which he takes care to define as any form of communication, even, and perhaps especially, photography.<sup>73</sup> The Jewish Museum took care to develop the mythology of *Take Me (I'm Yours)* by conveying the exhibition's celebrity, intrigue, and value through Instagram. The museum did this through publicity, visitors' Instagram engagement, and curatorial intentions while touting the art historical merits of relational aesthetics.

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<sup>73</sup> Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Richard Howard and Annette Lavers, 2013, 110-111.

## Delirium over Oiticica on Instagram

After stepping out of the third-floor elevator of the Whitney Museum of American Art in July 2017, viewers immediately confronted the suspended orange rectangles of Hélio Oiticica's *NC6 Medium Nucleus 3* (*NC6 nucleo medio 3*) constructed in 1961 (Fig. 4). Almost undetectably varied in color, the orange rectangular composite boards hung at eye level, still, not touching, and appeared to shift from every eye angle. Selections from his *Metasquemias*, a series of paintings of arranged colored geometric shapes on cardboard, surrounded the suspended sculpture and mirrored the composite wood panels of *NC6 Medium Nucleus 3*. The result was a dancing mass of rectangles that made viewers aware of their spatial relationships and perceptions of color. This first gallery is representative of the early years of Oiticica's working life in Brazil. In the subsequent galleries, the viewer approached the first relational pieces of Oiticica's *oeuvre*. These works included *B11 Box Bólido 9* (*B11 Bólido caixa 9*); an orange plywood box with sliding drawers containing yellow colored pigment and his large-scale installations from 1964. Filling most of the second gallery space was Oiticica's most famous relational installation artwork, *Tropicália* (Fig. 5). It prompted visitors to walk on the sandy floor and touch the objects in the installation. *Tropicália* represented a microcosm of Brazilian life in the 1960s. The rest of the exhibition included capes, or *Parangolés*, one could wear while dancing, hammocks to lie in, and textures to walk on. There was also a particular focus in the last galleries on photography and ephemera from Oiticica's decades in New York.<sup>74</sup> The retrospective situated the artist as a radical Brazilian artist with a special place in the New York art scene.

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<sup>74</sup> Donna De Salvo, Christopher Dunn, and Elizabeth Sussman, *Hélio Oiticica: To Organize Delirium*, online audio guides, New York, <https://whitney.org/audio-guides/60?language=english&type=general&night=false&stop=9>.



The exhibition became popular on Instagram through its display of Oiticica's radical works that disregarded traditional museum etiquette. Visitors filmed themselves walking through the basins of water and sand and taking selfies in front of the bright oranges, greens, and reds of Oiticica's relational works. Throughout 2016 and 2017, this retrospective of the Brazilian artist Hélio Oiticica traveled to three major museums in the United States. The exhibition titled, *Hélio Oiticica: To Organize Delirium* was the first retrospective of Oiticica's work in the U.S. in almost two decades. It opened in Pittsburgh at the Carnegie Museum of Art in October of 2016. Then, it traveled to the Art Institute of Chicago in February of 2017. Finally, the exhibition finished its tour in July at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York (or the Whitney).<sup>75</sup> The joint effort by the three institutions designated a resurgence in popularity for the artist due to the high-profile nature of a major traveling retrospective.

The Whitney's mounting of *Hélio Oiticica: To Organize Delirium* produced a curatorial conversation that intersected modern society's reliance on Instagram and the institution's responsibility to preserve and educate its visitors about an artist's work. The operation of the exhibition follows closely in line with the previously discussed exhibitions. However, the exhibition did not present itself in the same Instagram self-conscious manner. Changing histories and societal lenses modify one's understanding of an artist's *oeuvre* as their work is continually rearticulated in new exhibitions. However, the Instagram affected outcome was due to the Whitney's presentation and the unavoidable presence of Instagram in the museum. The Whitney reframed Oiticica's work in a contemporary New York retrospective which shifted the artistic argument away from his original intention of social and environmental awareness to depoliticized social interaction and clout.

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<sup>75</sup> Lynn Zelevansky, Elisabeth Sussman, Donna M De Salvo., Anna Katherine Brodbeck, James Rondeau, Hélio Oiticica: *to Organize Delirium*, exh. cat., (Munich, London, and New York: DelMonico Books/Prestel, 2016).

Oiticica began working as an artist a decade before the 1964 Brazilian coup d'état. The political unrest of his home country deeply influenced his work and that of his peers. In 1959, two years before the resignation of Brazil's president Janio Quadros, Oiticica joined the Brazil centric *neoconcreto* art movement.<sup>76</sup> The *neoconcretos* called for greater freedom in their art by resisting objective analyses of art.<sup>77</sup> In 1959, *neoconcreto* founder Ferreira Bullar wrote in his *Manifesto Neoconcreto*, "We do not conceive of art either as a "machine" or as an "object" but as a quasi-corpus, that is, an entity whose reality is not exhausted in the external relationships of its elements; an entity that, though analytically divisible into its parts, only gives itself up fully to a direct, phenomenological approach."<sup>78</sup> The phenomenological approach allowed for artworks to merge with elements of daily life. Artworks were not elevated on pedestals or above the emotional or intellectual plane of the viewer. Instead, *neoconcreto* artists integrated artworks in the space of the audience within the gallery or in daily life.

Oiticica quickly became one of the stars of the movement for his radical interventions of gallery spaces, despite not being a founding member. After joining the *neoconcreto* movement, Oiticica initiated a series of works that he referred to as "nuclei" that expressed the relationship between color, space, and time.<sup>79</sup> "I believe color now attains the sublime— or its threshold— within me, although the agility needed to express it is only just beginning. The experience with the "nuclei" (of which I have already made a few small models) opened all the doors I needed for the liberation of color and its perfect structural integration in space and time."<sup>80</sup> He created

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<sup>76</sup> Mari Carmen Ramírez and Luciano Figueiredo, eds., *Hélio Oiticica: The Body of Color*, exh. cat. (London: Tate Publishing & Enterprises, 2007), 361-369.

<sup>77</sup> Zelevansky, *Hélio Oiticica: to Organize Delirium*, exh. cat., 51.

<sup>78</sup> Janet Ing Freeman, "Constructivist and Neo-Concrete Art," In *Readings in Latin American Modern Art*, ed. Patrick Frank, (New Haven: Yale University Press. 2008), 172-75.

<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/claremont/detail.action?docID=3419868>.

<sup>79</sup> Ramírez and Figueiredo, *Hélio Oiticica: The Body of Colour*, exh. cat., 51.

<sup>80</sup> Ramírez and Figueiredo, *Hélio Oiticica: The Body of Colour*, exh. cat., 246.

these nuclei using industrial wood fiberboard painted with resin and orange oil paint. The layering of the boards suspended in space revealed new color relationships. The sculptures' vibrant orange hues and suspension above the middle of the gallery demand the viewer's attention, while still allowing them to decide what angle they wish to view the work from. One may move around the sculpture so that the new color and shape reveal themselves, or one may choose to walk between the panels. These spatial relationships were again highlighted in 1967 when Oiticica began his series of *Penetráveis*.<sup>81</sup> These spatial interventions consisted of rectangular booths with sensory experiences like sound or texture. His series began with the groundbreaking work of *Tropicália*, which allowed participants to engage with the essence of Brazil.

In order to enter *Tropicália*, one must remove your shoes and step barefoot onto a sandy island. There are two suggested entrances designated with gravel pathways. In the sandy space there are two colorful *Penetráveis*, and one large metal bird cage. The *Penetráveis* are constructed using colorful fabric panels, simple wood frames, and other materials. The first *Penetrable*, titled *PN2 Purity is a Myth*, is a red, black and yellow wooden booth containing fragrant herbs like cinnamon and patchouli. The second penetrable, titled *PN3 Imagetical*, is a spiraling structure with draped colorful fabrics with a television playing local broadcasting at the center.<sup>82</sup> The large metal bird cage houses two live wild parrots that squawk and move freely. Scattered throughout the piece are tropical plants in terracotta pots and tiles and bricks with

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<sup>81</sup> Ramírez and Figueiredo, *Hélio Oiticica: The Body of Colour*, exh. cat., 382.

I have pulled most of my information about Hélio Oiticica's background and thoughts from the exhibition catalog of the Tate Modern exhibition from 2007 titled, "Hélio Oiticica: The Body of Colour." The exhibition catalog for "Hélio Oiticica: To Organize Delirium" is more superficial in its analysis of Oiticica's work, which is not unusual for a major retrospective. Therefore, I have made use of the writings from *Hélio Oiticica: The Body of Colour* which is largely constructed with Oiticica's own journal entries.

<sup>82</sup> Richard Martin, "'Tropicália, Penetrables PN 2 'Purity Is a Myth' and PN 3 'Imagetical', Hélio Oiticica, 1966-7," *Tropicália*, Tate, June 2016, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/oiticica-tropicalia-penetrables-pn-2-purity-is-a-myth-and-pn-3-imagetical-t12414>.

poetry from Roberta Camila Salgado.<sup>83</sup> Oiticica described the installation as, “a kind of map. It’s a map of Rio and it is a map of my imagination. It’s a map that you go into.”<sup>84</sup> The winding qualities of the gravel pathway and simultaneous sensory experiences (the sound of the TV, smell of the herbs, and feeling of various textures), evoke a sense of play and exploration. These experiences are meant to feel quintessentially Brazilian, but their presentation also confronts Brazilian stereotypes. The *Penetráveis* in *Tropicália* allude to the Brazilian *favelas*, makeshift structures built in shantytowns at the time. The sounds of the birds combined with the sand and deep green plants elicit an imagined tropical landscape in the artificial environment of the institution. The first exhibition of *Tropicália* occurred in Rio at the Museum of Modern Art in 1967 as a part of the *New Brazilian Objectivity* show. When it was first shown, the installation had distinct political significance for Brazilian viewers. Its iconography alluded to false nationalism within a false utopia. However, two years later when it was shown at the Whitechapel Gallery in London in 1969 as a part of Oiticica’s “Whitechapel Experience,” visitors interacted with the work in a very different way. Visitors to the “Whitechapel Experience” treated *Tropicália* playfully and used the space to relax. A friend of Oiticica’s recounted moms bringing their children to come play in the sand and businessmen listening to the birds on their lunch break.<sup>85</sup> Because of the extremely different socio-political context of these two institutions, the presentation of *Tropicália* elicited two very different readings.

Although both achieved the artist’s goal of creating a participatory experience for the audience, the Brazilian exhibition in 1967 was interpreted more critically while the other turned

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<sup>83</sup> Donna De Salvo, Christopher Dunn, and Elizabeth Sussman, *Hélio Oiticica: To Organize Delirium*, Online Audio Guides, New York, <https://whitney.org/audio-guides/60?language=english&type=general&night=false&stop=9>.

<sup>84</sup> Exhibitions, “Hélio Oiticica: To Organize Delirium | Whitney Museum of American Art,” Accessed November 3, 2019, <https://web.archive.org/web/20191202185944/https://whitney.org/Exhibitions/HelioOiticica>.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

the gallery into a site of leisure. As artwork is curated repeatedly by different institutions over time, it becomes de-contextualized and loses its meaning and importance. Institutions, like the Whitechapel Gallery, bear the responsibility of informing viewers of the artist's original intention with their work. Since it is likely that the majority of the audience has little understanding of the works political meaning, it is the gallery's responsibility to inform them. The audience does not readily recall the political meaning of the work, when removed from the political context in which the artists created the artwork. Since viewers were given a limited understanding of the piece's original context, when *Tropicália* was exhibited at the Whitechapel Gallery, the artwork lost its political significance and visitors interpreted the piece as an exploration of pleasure and recreation. *Tropicália's* reception depends on the curatorial context given by the exhibiting institution, since the work is removed from its original environment.

As a witness to the political unrest of 1960s Brazil, Oiticica attempted to subvert the instruments of authoritarian rule by creating conceptual relationships between participants and their environment. Oiticica wanted to make participants aware of their body in space, whether physical, societal, environmental, or political. His work is meant to be grounded emotionally and physically for the participant and force the viewer to be present. The Whitney curators stated that Oiticica's work, "awakens us to our bodies, our senses, our feelings about being in the world... [it] challenges us to assume a more active role."<sup>86</sup> Although Oiticica's *oeuvre* predates the model, his work is now judged through the lens of relational art. Oiticica created his work with the intention of producing interpersonal connections between participants with

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<sup>86</sup> Donna De Salvo, Christopher Dunn, and Elizabeth Sussman, *Hélio Oiticica: To Organize Delirium*, Online audio guides, New York, November 13, 2019. <https://whitney.org/audio-guides/60?language=english&type=general&night=false&stop=9>.

the hopes that the participants may become more aware of their social context. *Tropicália*, the *Bólides*, *Parangolés*, and other sculptural pieces become relational through their participatory activation and socially conscious goals. Bourriaud declared that all contemporary art is inherently political, a theory that emerged during rapid globalization. Therefore, all relational art is political. Oiticica's work utilizes a political lens through his experiences in his oppressed and volatile home country of Brazil. Oiticica wrote,

[A manifestation of creativity] is where an ethical need for another order of manifestation arises, one that I also include in the environmental one... [discourse] is a social manifestation, which basically includes an ethical position (as well as a political one) that resumes itself in manifestations of individual behavior. First of all, I must make it clear that such a position here can be one of total anarchy, such is its implicit degree of freedom. It stands in opposition to everything that is socially or individually oppressive—all fixed and decadent forms of government, or social structures in force, come into conflict here—the 'socio-environmental' position is the starting point for all social and political change (or at least the fodder for such).<sup>87</sup>

One issue that pertains especially to relational art is its ability to shift in meaning when placed in different contexts. Because the relational artwork is completely dependent on the audience, its meaning can be unpredictable. The gallery that contained the *Parangolés* exhibited the artworks on a metal clothing rack, like you would find in any coat closet at the museum. There was Samba music playing and a projection of Oiticica's photography that included the capes. Most importantly, there was a mirror opposite the rack of *Parangolés* and projection. This curatorial choice defines the intention of the artwork within the exhibition. You are meant to see yourself wearing and dancing in the *Parangolé*. And through the projected photography, others are meant to see you in them. Oiticica wrote of his work,

"The *Parangolé* 'penetrable' takes on an important function: it becomes a 'shelter' for the spectator, inviting him/her to participate in it, activating the elements contained within it, always manually or with his whole body, never mechanically. Movement ceases when the spectator's movements come to a halt; actually, it is important to note 'action' and 'pause' in the unfolding of [the spectator's] participation as elements of

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<sup>87</sup> Ramírez and Figueiredo, *Hélio Oiticica: The Body of Colour*, exh. cat., 320.

‘total action.’ This is where the work becomes more of an ‘action work’ than the old *action painting*, which sought to convey the pure visual shape of action and not action itself transformed into an element of the work, as in the case here.”<sup>88</sup>

Oiticica clearly intended for his works to be experienced completely in person and in motion.

Static photography of his works does not communicate the full significance of the *Parangolés*.

The misinterpretation of relational works is tenuous for an exhibiting institution and so must be considered. In an essay titled “A Case for Active Viewing,” art historian William H. Truettner wrote,

Implicit in the process is the assumption that different viewers will see this interaction differently and that consensus will be reached only after considerable debate. Or perhaps not at all. Or for a relatively short time. Thus, works of art viewed in this way sacrifice an enduring status; their meanings are open to continual revision, to the unpredictable. And that, in turn, causes some degree of alarm among institutions founded to preserve and protect them--indeed, whose very existence is predicated on the assumption that they are treasure houses, stocked with collections that have a timeless value.<sup>89</sup>

Truettner implies that these changes in meaning may cause conflicts for an institution that strives to protect the value of its collection. The idea that art museums avoid bringing their work down to the level of the public is now antiquated as the public is essential to the function of the museum. The invention of Instagram has revolutionized the way that institutions market themselves, just as it has for any other business. The popularity of many museums and galleries is now dictated by social media interactions and aesthetics, as opposed to political, ethical, or philosophical, values. Nonetheless, museums still have the same responsibility to guard the intellectual and monetary value of their collections.

The Whitney exhibition was the last stop in the tour of *Hélio Oiticica: To Organize Delirium*. Although the Whitney was equally involved with the formation of the retrospective,

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<sup>88</sup> Ramírez and Figueiredo, *Hélio Oiticica: The Body of Colour*, exh. cat., 298.

<sup>89</sup> William H. Truettner, “A Case for Viewing,” In *The Two Art Histories: The Museum and the University*, ed. Charles W. Haxthausen, (Williamstown: Clark Art Institute. 2003), 102–14.

the Whitney benefitted to a greater extent from the previous visibility of the exhibition at the other two institutions. On the occasion of the Whitney opening, there were already numerous positive reviews of the exhibition.<sup>90</sup> Additionally, there were numerous photographs published on social media of the exhibition. For example, The Art Institute of Chicago enlisted Max Kakacek and Julien Ehrlich of the band Whitney to take over their Instagram feed for twenty-four hours. However, The Art Institute did not explicitly tell their Instagram audience that the band was promoting *Hélio Oiticica: To Organize Delirium*. Instead, it appeared that the band had full artistic control over the “take over.” During this “take over” the band members posted four times (Figs. 6-9).<sup>91</sup> All three of the photographs and the one video show one of the band members interacting with an artwork from *Hélio Oiticica: To Organize Delirium*. They did not post from any other exhibit at the museum or any work from a different artist, indicating that the exhibition was an ideal location for taking photos for Instagram posts. These posts communicate to The Art Institute’s Instagram followers how they may interact with the artwork and the potential success of their own Instagram posts of the exhibition.

In 2014, for the very first time, the Whitney encouraged its visitors to use the hashtags #Koons and #ArtSelfie when posting photos from their Jeff Koons retrospective.<sup>92</sup> Today, only five years after its debut, #ArtSelfie has over seventy-one thousand posts on Instagram.<sup>93</sup> The Whitney was deemed the third most Instagrammed museum in New York and the seventh in the world.<sup>94</sup> Therefore, Instagram is inseparable from the curatorial work of the Whitney. As a

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<sup>90</sup> Review sources consulted include 4Columns, Artnet News, College Art Association, Studio International, and Time Out New York, see bibliography for full citations.

<sup>91</sup> The Art Institute of Chicago (@artinstitutechi), Instagram, February 17, 2016.

<sup>92</sup> Stella Bugbee, “Kevin Systrom: The Man Who Unleashed Instagram,” *New York Magazine*, 2019.

<sup>93</sup> #ArtSelfie, Instagram, November 2019, <https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/artselfie/>.

<sup>94</sup> Tatiana Walk-Morris, “These Are the Most Instagrammed Museums of 2017,” Smithsonian.com, Smithsonian Institution, December 6, 2017, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/Parisian-Museum-most-instagrammed-2016-180967429/>.



result, the Whitney's Instagram presence is something that the institution must remain conscious of and is a crucial element to the institution's curatorial practice. Throughout the run of the exhibition, the Whitney posted photographs and videos to their Instagram that show viewers, or an actor posing as a visitor, in the case of one promotional video, moving throughout the galleries and interacting with the artworks as Oiticica intended. At the same time, the posts show the ease at which the artworks can be photographed. One video, which takes the form of a slideshow, shows all of the different angles that *NC6 Medium Nucleus* can be photographed.<sup>95</sup> Reproducing the artwork through photography for the platform of Instagram reduces the artwork to the flat plane of the photograph. In Oiticica's words, "Overlaid in three layers, the orthogonal panels of color do not intersect when projected onto a plane surface or from one side to another and are as important as the space." The three-dimensional negative space between the panels is equally as important as the positive shapes of the orange panels. However, when photographed the space in between the panels collapses. The Whitney's reproduction of *NC6 Medium Nucleus* on Instagram is not representative of the real object because the initial photo and subsequent Instagram post flattens the object. When photographed the sculpture loses its aura and transforms into a flattened colorful background; ideal for an Instagram post.<sup>96</sup>



Posting on Instagram about *Tropicália* poses a different theoretical dilemma. The central action of the installation is the movement through the work and the tactile and sensory


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<sup>95</sup> Whitney Museum of American Art (@whitneymuseum), "Walking around #HélioOiticica's NC6 Medium Nucleus 3 (NC6 Núcleo medio 3) (1961–63) to get a better look! This large golden-orange sculpture is from a series Oiticica called the Nuclei. In 1959, the geometric forms that had populated the artist's early paintings on cardboard began to take to the air. These works established a physical relationship to the viewer in a way that Oiticica couldn't achieve through his flat paintings on the wall: viewers have to walk around the works in order to fully experience them." Instagram, slideshow, August 12, 2017, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BXsYwG0F3Ru/>

<sup>96</sup> Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." In *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt trans. Harry Zohn, (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), <https://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/benjamin.pdf>

experiences within it. When reproduced in video or photographs, the central action of the work is lost. Viewers cannot smell the cinnamon and patchouli or feel sand underneath their bare feet. However, the work contains visual qualities that are ideal for the aesthetic of an Instagram post. The palm trees, sand, and colorful walls are all desirable objects to be photographed in front of because they symbolize pleasure, luxury, and leisure. JiaJia Fei posted two photographs from the Whitney show on July 23rd of 2017. Her photographs take place in front of and within *NC6 Medium Nucleus* (Fig. 10) and *Tropicália* (Fig. 11).<sup>97</sup> The post containing *Tropicália* shows Fei standing in front of a raffia wall, her bare feet in the sand, with a dark green tree peeking from behind the wall. She wore a solid black dress, contrasting white coat, blunt black haircut, and sunglasses. It is a simple yet compelling aesthetic style in conjunction with a simple yet tropical backdrop. This picture is discernibly subdued when compared to the colorful tropical aesthetics of the overall installation. She chose the simple beige backdrop, a small non-representative area, because it makes for a pleasing image that works well with her Instagram aesthetic. Fei captioned the post, “#HelioOiticica beach day 🌴.”<sup>98</sup> Fei’s reductive language describing the exhibition ignores Oiticica’s artistic statement about Brazilian heritage and the manipulation of clichés into nationalist authoritarianism. Fei’s Instagram post exemplifies how Oiticica’s work becomes diluted in contemporary contexts. *Tropicália* morphs from an overt

<sup>97</sup> JiaJia Fei (@vajiajia), “ #HelioOiticica geometry crush .,” Instagram, photograph, July 23, 2017, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BW5yXJ5Fo2e/>; JiaJia Fei (@vajiajia), “#HelioOiticica beach day 🌴,” Instagram, photograph, July 23, 2017, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BW52G51FXI2/>.

<sup>98</sup> The Whitney Museum of American Art, “Opening this Friday, #HélioOiticica: To Organize Delirium is the Brazilian artist’s first full-scale U.S. retrospective in two decades. The exhibition captures the excitement, complexity, and activist nature of Oiticica’s art, focusing on the decisive period he spent in New York in the 1970s. Whitney members can experience Oiticica’s immersive installations first during preview days this Wednesday and Thursday. Tap the link in our bio to learn more. [Hélio Oiticica (b. 1937), *Tropicália*, 1966–67. Plants, sand, birds, and poems by Roberta Camila Salgado. César and Claudio Oiticica Collection, Rio de Janeiro. © César and Claudio Oiticica, Rio de Janeiro. Image courtesy @thecmoa.  by Bryan Conley]” Instagram, photograph, July 10, 2017, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BWX0YgSFRBN/>.

political critique into an aesthetic novel that allows viewers to experience going to the beach in an art museum in the middle of a major city.

In addition to the social media coverage by visitors, the Whitney produced numerous videos that were posted on their website and on their Instagram. The first image the Whitney posted to Instagram that announced the opening of *Hélio Oiticica: To Organize Delirium* was an installation still of *Tropicália* (Fig. 5).<sup>99</sup> This post anchored *Tropicália* as the centerpiece of the exhibition. If a visitor knew nothing about this Brazilian artist's work, once seeing the Instagram post they will now recognize his most famous piece. The photograph shows three people: one entering *PN 2 Purity is a Myth* and two people looking at the parrots. This inclusion of people signals to the Instagram user that they can interact with the work and participation is encouraged. It gives the museum visitor a preview of what can be expected and tries to convince them that the show is worth seeing and subsequently posting about on Instagram.

In the main promotional video for the exhibition, the videographers film a woman walking through the exhibition. She begins at *Tropicália* where the installation is bustling with visitors, including children. The video then cuts to her feet in the sand, which could be in *Tropicália* or another installation. She is filmed walking around *NC6 Medium Nucleus* signaling that the sculpture can only be activated through viewer action. Oiticica's son, Cesar Oiticica Filho, simultaneously narrates how the sculpture necessitates viewer intervention.<sup>27</sup> Later, a young boy tries on a bright red *Parangolé* and others dance around the gallery in them. The camera pans to show visitors lying in hammocks. One person is even using the hammocks to check their phone. The approach of the video as a first-person experience of the exhibition indicates that *Hélio Oiticica: To Organize Delirium* is a visual and tactile experience rather than

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<sup>99</sup> Exhibitions, "Hélio Oiticica: To Organize Delirium | Whitney Museum of American Art," Accessed November 3, 2019, <https://web.archive.org/web/20191202185944/https://whitney.org/Exhibitions/HelioOiticica>.

an intellectual one. The narrator only glosses over the activist nature of Oiticica's work with the one sentence: "Many of these [*Parangolés*], were made in response to the prevailing oppressive governments."<sup>100</sup> This description only refers to one series of Oiticica's work. Furthermore, the narrator follows the sentence by saying that he left Rio for this reason, implying that he left politics behind.<sup>101</sup> These promotional videos and images are important messages for the museum visitor. In today's experience-based economy, consumers look to social media to gauge the value of an experience. The value of an experience can be quantified through photographic opportunities, aesthetics, and social clout. The Instagram content of the Whitney Museum communicates to their potential visitors what their own Instagram content may look like if they participate in the exhibition. The communication is hugely valuable for the museum to draw in visitors paying ticket admission and potentially create new memberships. The advantage of Instagram is that interaction with posts leads to more interaction from other users that aren't even direct followers. Friends of friends may be led to the Whitney Museum posts through advertising, the "discover tab," or the proprietary Instagram algorithm. If a museumgoer posts an Instagram story from the Oiticica exhibition, for example a video of their toes in the sand, their friends can tap through to the #HélioOiticica tag, @whitneymuseum, or the "Whitney Museum of American Art" location tag if they use the tags in the post. Not only do these tags show their friends what they are doing to gain social clout, but it creates free marketing for the Whitney.

Of course, these Instagram posts from visitors are not free marketing. The Whitney puts extensive thought into their exhibition programming. *Hélio Oiticica: To Organize Delirium*

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<sup>100</sup> Exhibitions, "Hélio Oiticica: To Organize Delirium | Whitney Museum of American Art," Accessed November 3, 2019, <https://web.archive.org/web/20191202185944/https://whitney.org/Exhibitions/HelioOiticica>.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

held latent value for the museum because the exhibition was deemed “Instagrammable” by visitors which in turn spread positive visitor experiences of the exhibition and fostered interest. This word of mouth advertisement is crucial for the Whitney to increase visitor numbers and memberships, since art institutions depend on visitor experience satisfaction. The combination of tropical aesthetics and participatory installations created opportunities for socially desirable Instagram posts. Through increased Instagram visibility, the Whitney received increased brand visibility which they hope will bring in more visitors to not only *Hélio Oiticica: To Organize Delirium* but future exhibitions as well.

The consequence of using Hélio Oiticica’s work as Instagram marketing is that his artistic substance is diluted. By recontextualizing Oiticica’s work in an American retrospective, the exhibition space becomes a playground and Instagram opportunities rather than a space for fostering contemplation and interpersonal connections.<sup>102</sup> Instead of producing interpersonal connections in the physical realm these interactions move into the digital space of the Instagram feed. Visitors using Instagram are not fully present in the space of the art but are translating some of the interactions with the artwork from the physical to the digital space. The Whitney’s curatorial interpretation of *Hélio Oiticica: To Organize Delirium* fundamentally altered the intent of Oiticica’s art by diluting its political content and prioritizing the exhibitions appeal to viewers as a place to create content for Instagram.

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<sup>102</sup> There is also an argument to be made about the implications of recontextualizing a Brazilian artist in an American retrospective. The Whitney Museum is specifically a museum for American art. Although he spent the final decades of his life living and working in New York City, Oiticica’s work is undeniably Brazilian in its conception. In combination with the dilution of the politics of his earlier work through the lens of an Instagram conscious audience, Oiticica’s artworks are further altered by the subliminal assertion that he can be claimed as an American artist, although the work was never intended for an American audience.

## Pocket Exhibitions

In presenting art exhibitions, curators alter the significance of artworks by placing them into historical contexts and conversations with other exhibited pieces. They separate artworks from the mind of the artist and add them to changing art histories, through their display tactics. The globalized contemporary art world has augmented the authority and responsibility of the curator. Michael Brenson considers the changing roles of the contemporary curator in his article “The Curator’s Moment.” Brenson insists that, “What needs to be stated is that the increasing institutional awareness of the importance of the audience has made curators more visible as mediators between art and its publics.”<sup>103</sup> Audiences are not primarily attending exhibitions to be taught, as was the case decades ago. They attend to engage and participate in the art world as they are included in its definition. The increased scrutiny by audiences and institutions should lead curators to feel an increased sense of responsibility to the integrity of their exhibitions. The responsibility of the curator is an ethical and moral one.<sup>104</sup> It is completely monitored by the institutions and systems of the art world rather than through concrete means. Brenson states that, “Sustained attention to the life of the object is no less of moral act to me than sustained attention to situations and communities artists enable me to enter.”<sup>105</sup> In terms of the exhibitions treated in this text, the curators and institutional operators, are expected to maintain “sustained attention to the life of the object.” Especially in the case of the three exhibitions considered since they are all restagings of previous exhibitions; this maintenance is key to their success.

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<sup>103</sup> Michael Brenson, “A Curator’s Moment,” *Art Journal* 57, no. 4 (Winter 1998), 18, <https://doi.org/10.2307/777925>.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 19.

The incorporation of Instagram into the life of the artworks fundamentally alters their reception and significance. This is most readily seen in Yayoi Kusama's artworks. Although Kusama herself has accepted this phenomenon into the history of her artworks, it is important to understand the full extent to which it alters meaning. Instagram is a powerful tool to generate popularity and in turn cultural and monetary value for an artwork. Brenson expresses a concern for the trend of transparency in contemporary curatorial practice.

The confidence with which ['self-consciousness, openness, and transparency] are now being used in the field suggests less an unending process in which any sense of control is ultimately illusory than finality, as if it is possible to declare oneself once and for all in that moment, or as if it is enough to be able to declare oneself in such a way as to get what one desires from a specific situation.<sup>106</sup>

I argue that the exhibiting institutions of these three exhibitions have used the modes of relational art to get what they desire from the exhibitions: Instagram marketing. Even with the transparency of encouraged social media use or the curatorial framework of the social media age, as seen in the statements of *Take Me (I'm Yours)*, the ultimate result is a false sense of self-consciousness that "reinforc[es] power at the curatorial, institutional, or political end." I would add that it reinforces the economic end, as well. Curators balance an increased burden to include their audiences

Of the three exhibitions, *Helio Oiticica: To Organize Delirium* at the Whitney Museum was the least explicit about its social media intentions. Most of the explicit Instagram engagement was initiated by outside actors, like Art Institute of Chicago's collaboration with the band Whitney and JiaJia Fei. However, this lack of explicit Instagram acknowledgement is what makes the ethics of their curatorial practice concerning moving forward. It is through the example of *Hélio Oiticica: To Organize Delirium* that the larger implications of my hypothesis

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<sup>106</sup> Michael Brenson, "A Curator's Moment," 21.

become clear. Curatorial work, although explicit in its aim to make an argument, does so through subliminal visual cues. Audiences are compelled to engage with these arguments without full awareness of their intentions. If even an aspect of the intention of an exhibition is to market the museum and the artworks, then the audience participates in and perpetuates a mode of engagement that modifies the significance of artworks. Moreover, this engagement contributes to the commodification of art. It is with the knowledge of Instagram's platform that arts institutions enact curatorial practices that benefit the institution more than their audience or artworks.

I would be remiss not discussing my research in reference to Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Benjamin's theory of the reproduced artwork has only become more apparent through the endless reproduction provided by the Internet and Instagram. Although Benjamin argues that the reproduction of the artwork increases the aura of the work, Benjamin warns of the changing modes of absorbing art. This thesis supports Benjamin's theory of the heightened aura of the reproduced artwork. However, Benjamin's examination of the modern audience's reception of film should be considered. Film was the most reproduced art form in Benjamin's time so let us consider the Instagram post of participatory art as an apt substitution. Benjamin claims that "reception in a state of distraction" can be observed more and more in the reproduced artwork. "The film makes the cult value recede into the background not only by putting the public in the position of the critic, but also by the fact that at the movies this position requires no attention. The public is an examiner, but an absent-minded one."<sup>107</sup> An Instagram interaction with a participatory artwork also requires no attention. As discussed in relation to Baudrillard's arguments, taking an Instagram photo in an art

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<sup>107</sup> Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." In *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1969.



piece is a mindless interaction compelled by the established norms of the contemporary art museum. Benjamin's impression of the movie-goer as absent-minded can be applied to the Instagram user. The contemporary curator as mediator between the art and audience asserts that their role is to edify, however, their audiences are becoming more absent-minded through the art museum's reliance on Instagram.

To illustrate the potential trajectory for art museum's use of Instagram, I want to turn to an exhibition mounted by Maurizio Cattelan, the relational aesthetics prankster. In 2018, Cattelan curated an exhibition in collaboration with Gucci's creative director Alessandro Michele at the Yuz Museum in Shanghai. The exhibition was named after Abramovic's infamous performance piece, *The Artist is Present*. He used Abramovic's likeness in widespread mural advertisement campaigns throughout New York, Milan, and Shanghai. Cattelan's advertisements hinted that he would recreate Abramovic's performance piece. However, the physical exhibition in Shanghai featured thirty works of relational aesthetics, performance, and appropriation that all copied objects and processes from real life. The exhibition also featured colorful light-filled rooms and slick minimalist aesthetics that provide ideal Instagram backdrops. Despite being an extensive exhibition at a major art museum, *The Artist is Present* was promotional material for Gucci's Shanghai Fashion Week show. *Vogue* reported, "The exhibition has already captured the attention of millennials and Generation Z art lovers in Shanghai, but given its immersive, experiential vibe, those who can't make it to China could get a feeling for it on Instagram."<sup>108</sup> This quotation suggests that the participatory art exhibition, which is not far removed from the exhibitions already considered, is able to be experienced on Instagram like it is in person. If

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<sup>108</sup> Emily Farra, "Maurizio Cattelan on 'The Artist Is Present,' His Mind-Bending New Exhibition With Alessandro Michele in Shanghai," *Vogue*, October 22, 2018, <https://www.vogue.com/article/the-artist-is-present-maurizio-cattelan-gucci-alessandro-michele-shanghai>.

Cattelan's participatory art exhibition was mainly marketing for a luxury fashion brand, how close are other art museums to reducing their exhibitions to pure marketing strategies?

It is crucial to recognize now that since the practice has been established, it will continue to be reinforced. Guy Debord argues that the art museum is a form of spectacle which keeps the masses pacified and complicit in the capitalist cycle. We can understand Instagram and the use of Instagram by museums as more examples of Guy Debord's spectacle defined as "not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images,"<sup>109</sup> among many others. The social relations of the spectacle are especially poignant in reference to the functions of participatory art. Debord would argue that as long as the capitalist, production-based society prevails, we will be reliant on the spectacle. The spectacle does not operate outside of or replaces reality but operates in tandem and inseparable from it.<sup>110</sup> Since Instagram is not a replacement for real lived experience and yet cannot be divorced from it, curators have a responsibility to moderate these interactions in an effort to sustain the life of the object, as brought forward in Brenson's discussion.<sup>111</sup> It must be understood how curatorial practice operates in tandem with Instagram for meaningful art experiences to occur.

The art world has already been replacing much of its real lived experiences with digital interactions. This has been accelerated through recent events of the Covid-19 pandemic. Online exhibitions have become a necessary method to interact with art as in person interactions pose significant threats to public health. These exhibitions provide much needed cultural exchange and increase access to art. The low barriers to producing online exhibitions do not encourage intensive researched exhibitions but they also mitigate the institutional pressures that cloud

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<sup>109</sup> Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, Reprint, (Detroit, Mich: Black & Red [u.a.], 2010), Paragraph 4.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Michael Brenson, "A Curator's Moment," 18.

curatorial practice. Since institutions do not have physical paying audiences currently, they have moved to providing digitized versions or experiences of their collections. Since mid-March 2020, the Broad Museum has been releasing videos on their Instagram in a series called “Infinite Drone.” The videos pair Kusama’s *The Souls of Millions of Light Years Away* with musical selections to create “contemplative” experiences.<sup>112</sup> These videos are not replacements or representations of Kusama’s work. Therefore, they can be understood as marketing for the Broad making use of a digitally tethered audience. The hope may be that when audiences can return, they will return in force to experience what they saw on their Instagram feeds in person.

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<sup>112</sup> The Broad Museum (@thebroadmuseum), “Infinite Drone: Geneva Skeen, Experience an immersive environment of light and sound in the spirit of Yayoi Kusama’s Infinity Mirrored Room—The Sounds of Millions of Light Years Away. Take an opportunity to delve into the spiritual aspects of Kusama’s exploration of eternity—paired with aural selections chosen by The Broad, including drone, electronic, ambient, and pop music. Featuring deep cuts by celebrated musicians and sound artists from Los Angeles and beyond, the Infinite Drone series presents a new, contemplative way of experiencing The Broad’s most popular artwork.” Instagram video, March 26, 2020.

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can experience Oiticica's immersive installations first during preview days this Wednesday and Thursday. Tap the link in our bio to learn more. [Hélio Oiticica (b. 1937), *Tropicália*, 1966–67. Plants, sand, birds, and poems by Roberta Camila Salgado. César and Claudio Oiticica Collection, Rio de Janeiro. © César and Claudio Oiticica, Rio de Janeiro. Image courtesy @thecmoa. 📷 by Bryan Conley]” Instagram, photograph, July 10, 2017, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BWX0YgSFRBN/>

The Whitney Museum of American Art (@whitneymuseum), “Walking around #HélioOiticica’s NC6 Medium Nucleus 3 (NC6 Núcleo medio 3) (1961–63) to get a better look! This large golden-orange sculpture is from a series Oiticica called the Nuclei. In 1959, the geometric forms that had populated the artist’s early paintings on cardboard began to take to the air. These works established a physical relationship to the viewer in a way that Oiticica couldn’t achieve through his flat paintings on the wall: viewers have to walk around the works in order to fully experience them.” Instagram, slideshow, August 12, 2017, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BXsYwG0F3Ru/>.

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## Illustrations



Figure 1. Yayoi Kusama. *The Souls of Millions of Light Years Away*. 2013. Wood, metal, glass mirrors, plastic, acrylic panel, rubber, LED lighting system, acrylic balls, and water, 113 1/4 x 163 1/2 x 163 1/2 in. (287.66 x 415.29 x 415.29 cm). The Broad Museum. F-KUSA-2014.004. <https://www.thebroad.org/art/yayoi-kusama/infinity-mirrored-room-souls-millions-light-years-away>.





Figure 2. @thebroadmuseum. *A Museum Can't Create Culture Alone. From Our Visitors Who Make up the Cultural Fabric of L.A. and around the World, to Our Visitor Service Associates Who Create an Inclusive and Safe Space to Enjoy Art—There's so Much to Be Grateful for Today and Every Day. Happy Thanksgiving from All of Us at The Broad!* Instagram. November 28, 2019. [https://www.instagram.com/p/B5a4ku2F\\_xP/](https://www.instagram.com/p/B5a4ku2F_xP/).



Figure 3. Christian Boltanski. Installation image. *Dispersion*. 2015-1991. Used clothing and bags. The Jewish Museum. <https://thejewishmuseum.org/index.php/exhibitions/take-me-im-yours>.



Figure 4. Hélio Oiticica. *NC6 Medium Nucleus (NC6 nucleo medio)*, 1961-63, Polyvinyl acetate resin on plywood, The Whitney Museum of American Art. Image from @whitneymuseum Twitter account. <https://twitter.com/whitneymuseum/status/898903145543159808>.





Figure 5. Hélio Oiticica. Installation view. *Tropicália*, 1966-67. Plants, sand, birds, poems by Roberta Camila Salgado on bricks, tiles and vinyl squares. Collection of César and Claudio Oiticica. Image from @whitneymuseum Instagram account. “Opening this Friday, #HélioOiticica: To Organize Delirium is the Brazilian artist’s first full-scale U.S. retrospective in two decades. The exhibition captures the excitement, complexity, and activist nature of Oiticica’s art, focusing on the decisive period he spent in New York in the 1970s. Whitney members can experience Oiticica’s immersive installations first during preview days this Wednesday and Thursday. Tap the link in our bio to learn more. [Hélio Oiticica (b. 1937), *Tropicália*, 1966–67. Plants, sand, birds, and poems by Roberta Camila Salgado. César and Claudio Oiticica Collection, Rio de Janeiro. © César and Claudio Oiticica, Rio de Janeiro. Image courtesy @thecmoa. 📷 by Bryan Conley].” July 10, 2017. <https://www.instagram.com/p/BWX0YgSFRBN/>.



Figure 6. The Art Institute of Chicago @artinstitutechi in collaboration with @whitneyband. “🌹🕊️🌹.” Instagram. February 17, 2017. [https://www.instagram.com/p/BQqaaP\\_jvIq/](https://www.instagram.com/p/BQqaaP_jvIq/).



Figure 7. The Art Institute of Chicago @artinstitutechi in collaboration with @whitneyband. “🌹.” Instagram. February 17, 2017. <https://www.instagram.com/p/BQop3DHD4F6/>.



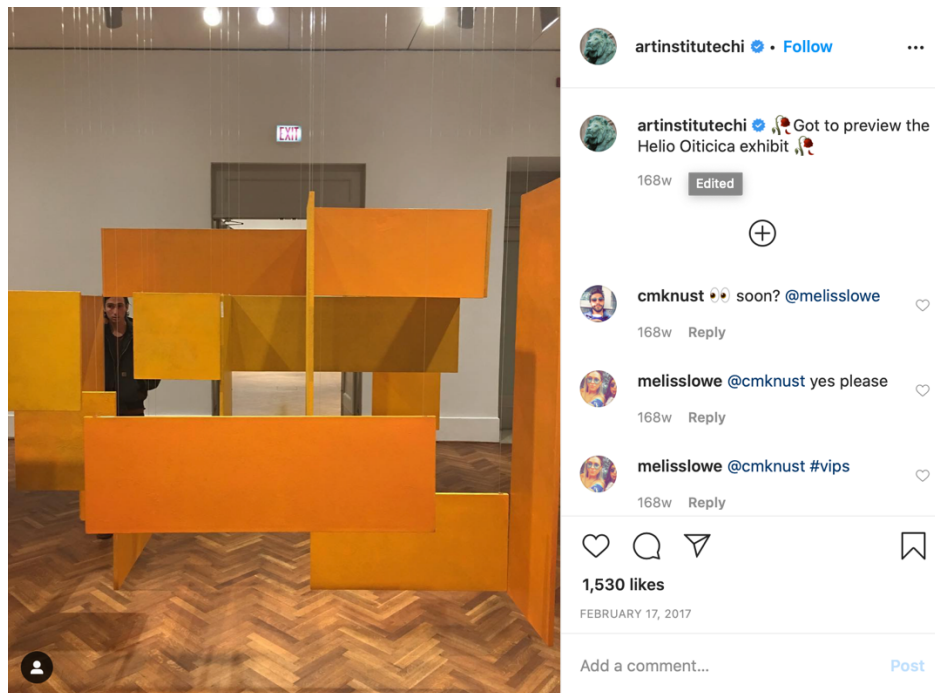


Figure 8. The Art Institute of Chicago @artinstitutechi in collaboration with @whitneyband. “📍 Got to preview the Hélio Oiticica exhibit 📍.” Instagram. February 17, 2017. <https://www.instagram.com/p/BQoYqp6DIsC/>



Figure 9. The Art Institute of Chicago @artinstitutechi in collaboration with @whitneyband. “hey we're @whitneyband and we'll be posting here for the next 24 hrs.” Instagram. February 17, 2017. [https://www.instagram.com/p/BQoS\\_j9DZMA/](https://www.instagram.com/p/BQoS_j9DZMA/)

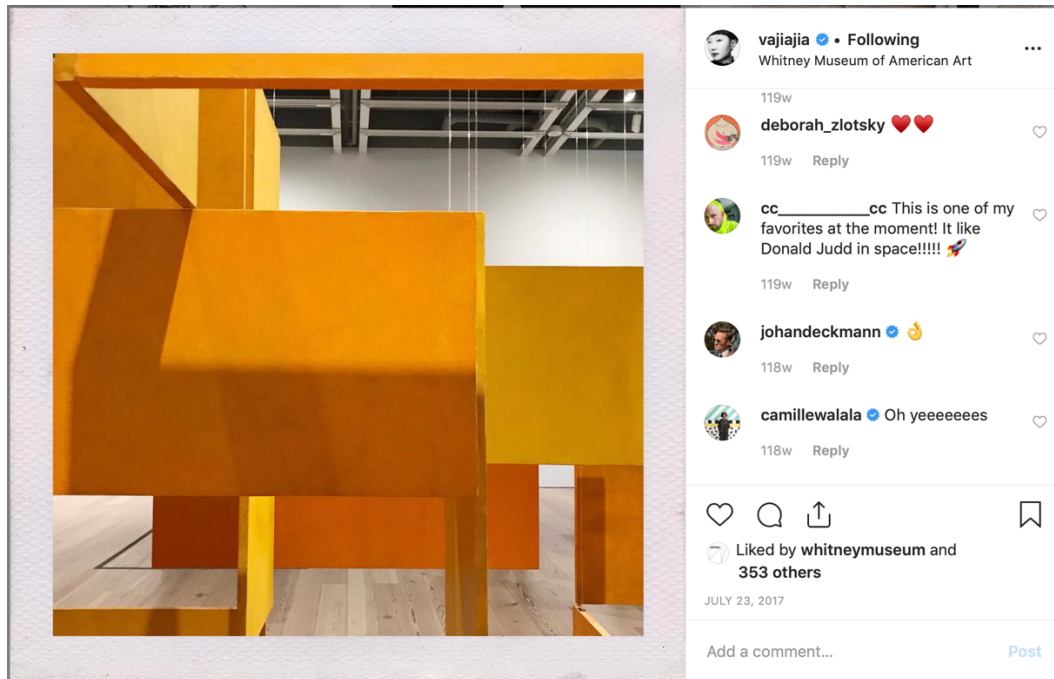


Figure 10. JiaJia Fei (@vajiajia). “**◆ #HelioOiticica geometry crush ◆**.” Instagram. July 23, 2017, <https://www.instagram.com/p/BW5yXJ5Fo2e/>.



Figure 11. JiaJia Fei (@vajiajia). “**#HelioOiticica beach day 🌴**,” Instagram. July 23, 2017. <https://www.instagram.com/p/BW52G51FX12/>.

