

EXHIBITION RESEARCH LAB 2020

Reflection

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I could never have imagined what I signed up for in February. The lectures laid the groundwork for how we could think about exhibition-making. They left me feeling surprised that exhibition and curating history is not part of the mandatory curriculum. It seems to me crucial for artists to be aware of the way exhibitions stage contexts and interpretations of artworks. From our first meetings in the classroom it was clear to me that our group was dedicated to make an exhibition where we would not only show works, but experiment with exhibition-making as a medium. I enjoyed our first discussions. We were well on our way to planning our exhibition. Then school closed.

Our first couple of online meetings were slow. I struggled with adjusting to having conversations with people through a screen. Speaking in online meetings can feel like talking to a wall. My relatively poor wi-fi connection did not make it any better. It was easy to lose track of people with the way Teams only showed four participants. In general, life has moved slowly this spring. We all had times when we struggled with keeping motivated in isolation. With your guidance and the encouragement of each other, it became easier. Our discussions were engaging. While there were certain voices that were more present in the discussion than others, everyone's feedback was still heard. Even in decisions where the majority were agreeing, someone could voice a concern and it would be heard and worked with. As soon as we adjusted to collaborating online, we managed to establish a good working process. Teams even came around in the end, showing all participants.

With Research Catalogue we also had a slow start. As a tool for showing multi-media projects online, it is simple and strait forward. Although it has a few quirks that can make working with it difficult. Firstly, it desperately needs a ctrl-z function. Several times I found myself accidentally editing someone else's input and struggling with fixing it. Additionally, when there are several authors in one exhibition it would be beneficial to have an automatic log of changes. This way, one could get an overview of things people have done in the project between sessions. Regardless, it is a great platform for collaborating. However, we needed time to get a feel for the platform to figure out how we could approach it in an interesting way. A concern that was raised early in the discussions regarded the use of virtual space simply as a substitute for a real space. Of course, the website was a substitute. Initially, we would all have preferred to exhibit in the real. There was a need, however, to avoid attempting to make an online exhibition the way we would make a physical one. The decision to include unfinished work as well as personal conversations contributed to making an experience that fit better into the online domain than the physical. The availability of the internet in contrast to an exhibition space makes it easier to expose works that we are somehow unsure of. For better or worse, we are more used to uploading images to Instagram than hanging paintings in exhibition spaces. When showing works in the real, it is quickly done to discard ideas, sketches and works that we are not completely confident in. It is as if we are holding ourselves back somehow. Regardless, these sketches and processes often make their way onto social media. I believe our social media comfort extended to the website, lowering the threshold of showing works and experiments that would otherwise have been neglected.

The shift from a traditional to a virtual exhibition provided a chance to focus less on individual work and more on the exhibition. To make the online exhibition work we needed a cohesive design for the whole website. In the beginning I was worried that if we were to focus only on our individual pages,

we would lose the potential narrative the works might create together. When exhibiting in a physical space, adjacent works create meaning, even if the works are initially unrelated. Our decision to model the website around a floorplan worked because it created an overarching story for our works. By situating our works in “rooms” we retained the freedom to create personal spaces that fit the work as well as the whole exhibition. The floorplan also dealt concern of the virtual exhibition merely being a substitute a physical one. Floorplans are in a strange place between presentation and representation. While they represent a real space, they precede the construction of it. A building is a copy of a floorplan which is a copy of a building that does not yet exist. With our plan to make a sequel exhibition in the real world we can continue to work with this.

I am very happy with how we worked together as a group over the past couple of months. For me there was a strong sense of dedicated collaboration. Together we made an exhibition that none of us would have imagined in March. However, even though I know how much we worked on it, it somehow feels as if we made nothing. A website is a strange space. It is fleeting and easy to forget. One aspect of exhibition-making that we did not have the chance to experience is taking it down. Cleaning up an exhibition when it is finished adds to the commitment of making an exhibition in the first place. We did not have to clean up the website in the end.