I have spent most of my career working in artist-run centres. I have been lucky to work alongside colleagues (from administrators to artists to maintenance workers) who were interested in (re)thinking how these spaces function, how they might best support artists, and how they represent and serve their broader constituencies. This is a line of questioning related to curatorial practice that can and should be taken outside of artist-run models and that deserves more consideration, as well as practices of collaboration, risk, site-specificity, ephemerality, failure, and non-hierarchical models of governance.

I recently attended an expansive and generous talk given by Los Angeles-based curator Hamza Walker, who encouraged the audience of emerging curators to think about how we engage with our communities. He told us to get out there, to figure out what we are interested in as curators, and to pursue it — to not worry too much about what was popular or who would become famous, but to develop strong social networks and enthusiastic, but also vulnerable, relationships to what is there. With Hamza Walker’s words, “look behind you.” His words have been ringing in my ears ever since, and I borrow and riff on them here as an additional answer to the question, What is critical curating? Let’s keep looking all around us.

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What is critical curating? Qu’est-ce que le commissariat engagé?