

Vanessa Kwan

FOR ME, THE SUBJECT OF CRITICAL CURATING relates to the question of how we negotiate relationships, respond supportively to artists' practices, and transform capital through our work. These elements of curatorial practice are perhaps less obvious on the surface, as our presence is most deeply acknowledged in the moment of presentation, be it in the white cube, a publication, or during a public discussion. But these quieter activities—the “doing” behind the “saying”—are what constitutes, for me, the basis for a critical curatorial practice.

One project we've been working on at grunt gallery hints at some of these factors. Since 2014, I, along with my colleagues Dan Pon (grunt gallery Archives Manager) and curator Maiko Tanaka, have been working with artist Jacqueline Hoàng Nguyễn on her project *The Making of an Archive*. Originating in the artist's ongoing, research-based practice, the project addresses a conspicuous lack in state-run archives in Canada. While researching at the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the National Film Board, and Library and Archives Canada, Nguyễn found they had precious little in their holdings under the search heading “multiculturalism” that reflected the lived experiences of immigrants in this country. *The Making of an Archive* is a grassroots attempt to provide a more representative photographic record—one that addresses a fuller range of experiences, civic engagements, and activist solidarity networks. It is a simple premise: collect and preserve the photo albums and ephemera from immigrants who identify as persons of colour (POC) and their families, and in the process offer a service to an intergenerational donor base—digitized copies of precious family archives. In practice, the work and the many points of outreach, cold-calling, digitization, interviewing, archiving, and cataloguing has required unique qualities of grit, reflection, and gentle ambition—and it has engendered a unique network of relationships and collaborations in the doing.

The Making of an Archive is a project with no foreseeable endpoint. Indeterminate in scale and evolving in scope, the project employs as guiding principles two, not necessarily complementary logics—accumulation and speculation. Built on a speculative premise (that there might be a way to gather a collection that addresses the diversity of immigrant experience in Canada) and driven by a logic of accumulation (gather what you can, for as long as you can), the project resists all attempts at a summarizing statement. Where we in arts institutions have become used to presentations that organize content in specific ways—exhibitions, websites, publications, and talks—*The Making of an Archive* challenges not only what these presentations might look like, but how they might be managed and supported. In this way, the effects of the archive far exceed the moment of presentation and bring into relief the role of the art institution in supporting projects of this scope.

There is no moment of presentation or closure with this project. It's a work in progress, and, for me, it has given some shape to a state of not knowing in creative and curatorial practice. This position, unresolved as it may seem, is central to remaining open to new ways of building relationships and sustaining knowledge that we might not have figured out just yet. This seems important. ¶

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