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“Fear of Knowledge”

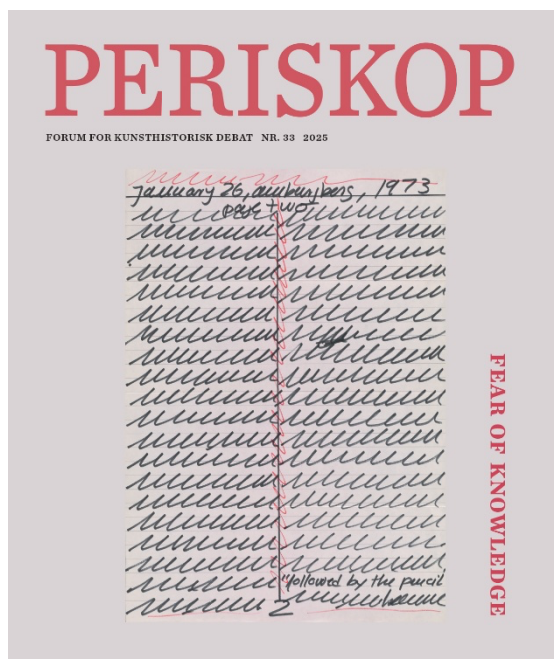
Titel: Unacknowledged Knowledge – Can (Art) Exhibitions Operate as an Alternative to Peer-Reviewed Articles?

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# Unacknowledged Knowledge

## – Can (Art) Exhibitions Operate as an Alternative to Peer-Reviewed Articles?

This intentionally polemical but also necessarily incomplete article is a first step towards examining the question of whether – and in what ways – exhibition-making can be considered an alternative to peer-reviewed journal articles when evaluating museums' research contributions within the academic field. With the increasing awareness of practice-based art studies operating at the intersection of the art world and universities, the article investigates (art) exhibitions as research, rather than as research-based exhibitions. Should (art) exhibitions – as research – be understood not only as spaces of knowledge production, but also as sites of epistemic inquiry in their own right, which might enable a transformation of evaluation metrics, allowing some exhibitions to be recognised as valid alternatives to peer-reviewed articles, thereby expanding ideas of what academic research and publishing is and can be?

To start considering these possibilities, this article will first briefly look into how the Bologna Process has brought research at universities and artistic and curatorial practices closer together. This is followed by an examination of how peer-reviewed models relating to exhibitions have gained ground and been implemented at the state level, for example the Research Excellence Framework in the UK, and in independent interdisciplinary online art magazines such as *Journal for Artistic Research* (JAR). Then the article explores the possibility of working with exhibitions as an alternative to peer-reviewed articles, drawing on museums' collaboration with universities, and how research is understood differently in museums, before examining the possibilities of working with selected

(art) exhibitions as spatial physical alternatives to peer-reviewed articles and written/digital representations. Here, I draw on experiences from both cultural-historical exhibition knowledge practices, primarily situated in the realm of production, and from the art world's concept of the curatorial, where the exhibition space itself functions as a site of epistemic entanglement. Lastly, I gather the information and point to possible points of attention and approaches that could be included in further work to create opportunities for (art) exhibitions to one day serve as potential alternatives to peer-reviewed articles.

### **The Bologna Process and the Homogenisation of Knowledge Creation in the Name of Equality**

For the past twenty or so years, what is referred to as practice-based art studies in Denmark has been subsumed under an academic umbrella. The shift in knowledge epistemes to academic standards has occurred in the wake of the implementation of the Bologna Declaration of 1999, which introduced a change in educational practices and evaluation metrics in many European countries. This radical transformation of art schools also occurred in Denmark in 2012 with the introduction of KUV (*kunstnerisk udviklingsvirksomhed*) together with academic valuation and evaluation criteria for knowledge creation that allowed for obtaining a PhD in practice-based art studies, which also included curatorial practice (Ministry of Culture Denmark 2012; The European Ministers of Education 1999). The introduction of academic standards at the art schools also led to a re-orientation within cultural production. Research activities have always been integral to various practices within the arts – often working in the margins, as a critical comment to the established educational systems. Historically, they include practices such as The UNOVIS Collective (1925), which produced projects and publications that significantly impacted the avant-garde movement; the collaboration between French Surrealists and anthropologists in the early 1920s, publishing in journals such as *Minotaure*; Asger Jorn, Piero Simondo, and Guiseppe Pinot-Gallizio's *Imaginist Bauhaus* (1957) which already at that time used the term “artistic research”; Joseph Beuys' Free International University (1973); and many more (Arnfred 2019; Clifford 1988; Jorn 1957). As a result, cognitive agency and productivity are today perceived by many as integral and essential to artistic and curatorial practice; with the Bologna process, these knowledge processes have been more formally institutionalised, and art and curating practices are often deployed more officially as research activities (Wilson 2011; Cramer and Terpsma 2021). Yet, despite the good intentions of fair and equal access and mobility across European borders, the Bologna process has

also led to the tightening grip of a powerful “managerial” logic on education and research within both universities and art schools, as well as on artistic and curatorial practices – if they are to be considered as contributing to academic research and knowledge production (Vanhaesebrouck 2018; Cramer and Terpsma 2021) – a grip that is making it difficult to talk about epistemic equity within artistic (including curatorial) and university practices and collaborations.

However, the integration of a whole new field has changed more than the individually impacted areas – such as curatorial practices – it has also led to a significant shift in academic practice. Over the years, practice-based art studies have shifted from the obscure corners of European universities and now take a more central stage. Practice-based art studies have permeated understandings of what academic knowledge production and creation is and can be, thus challenging academic knowledge paradigms. As artist and theorist Barbara Bolt writes, practice-based art studies function as a “performative force of research,” capable of bringing about significant “movement” in thought, expression, and action within individuals and the wider society (Bolt 2016, 129). This move has led to a questioning of what are to be regarded as academic knowledge practices in light of current practice, documentation and dissemination, i.e. modes of research and publication.

While there seems to be a general consensus that exhibitions are knowledge-producing, this does not automatically imply that they are peer-reviewed. If exhibitions are to count as an alternative to peer-reviewed articles in academic contexts, does it then follow that they should be subject to peer-review processes akin to those in academia?

### **Considerations on Evaluation Standards**

The question of how to publish at the intersection of academic and curatorial practices – particularly in terms of qualifying approaches and methods for working with (art) exhibitions as alternatives to peer-reviewed articles, and of determining what is valued and thus evaluated as knowledge creation and production – remains a contested and complex issue.<sup>1</sup> It is therefore worth considering whether collaborations between art, curating, and academic research in a research exhibition can be employed for research purposes beyond that of functioning as research mediation and illustration of already completed research (Arnfred 2025).

In academia, research documentation and publication primarily rely on textual and verbal presentations (Michelkevicius 2017). Academic dissemination occurs through peer-reviewed journals and books detailing the process and

the rational reflections and inspirations that lead to research outcomes. The academic form includes processes of untangling entangled knowledge processes into concise, rational arguments (Massumi 2022). From the point of view of scientific and scholarly research practice, it can therefore be argued that art, artistic and curatorial practices, and the exhibition as a medium are too loose, non-evidence-based producers with opaque knowledge processes and contributions. Consequently, the outcome of the exhibition is considered to be unquantifiable and unmeasurable, and thus not definable as quantitative data. According to this logic, research exhibitions, the art within them, and the practices and processes involved in their creation can be employed for research communication or as empirical tools, but not as academic epistemic practice.

On the other hand, curatorial and artistic practices are often performative and utilise many different materials and publication channels.<sup>2</sup> Yet in their dissemination, curators and artists do not generally account for their sources of inspiration or the research processes that led to the finished exhibition (Bishop 2023). Conversely, from an artistic perspective, it can be argued that artistic and curatorial practice neither should nor can be peer-reviewed. Working with exhibitions as an alternative to peer-reviewed articles risks leading to a limiting, ensnaring academisation, entrenching art and curating within sets of assumptions, rules and norms that come with institutional validation (Cramer and Terpsma 2021). Such a shift threatens to instrumentalise both art and curating, subjecting them to the logics of transparency and measurability – metrics that run counter to the opacity, ambiguity, open-ended reflections, fabulations, juxtapositions, and counternarratives that are often central to artistic and curatorial practices (Bishop 2023). To determine the role and effect of the (art) exhibition in an academic context, including the aspect of peer-review for specific exhibitions, could deprive the exhibition and artworks of their distinctive ways of operating, professionalise and systemise the processes they produce, and thereby transform art exhibitions from a performative act into a research tool, an illustration, or poor art and poor scholarly research (Bishop 2023). In this optic, applying peer-review processes to the exhibition presents a considerable risk of limiting artistic and curatorial freedom and fabulation, as characterised by the fact that it cannot necessarily be rationally laid out. It can therefore be questioned whether one can and should even talk about and attempt to define approaches and methodologies for working with exhibitions as an alternative to peer-reviewed articles.

A similar criticism to that of the academisation of curating and art in various forms has been raised in relation to the institutionalisation of academic practices and the mainstreaming of academic institutions, including peer-review

of academic research, as tendencies that have seeped into the humanities from hard science publication practices, streamlining academic argumentation and publication practices (Blockmans 2007; Konkiel 2018; Rijcke et al. 2016). It is imperative to pay attention to these objections, as they mirror many of the problems raised in the art world: instrumentalisation and limitation of free thinking and the freedom to find a form of expression. To take the above well-intentioned and justified criticisms of peer-review logic seriously, and try to understand what the critique is aimed at (and what it is based on), could take us somewhere other than where the polarised pro/con discussion at the intersection of artistic and academic practices all too often ends up.

However, the peer review process in academia is not only constituted by limiting criteria, gatekeeping, Western knowledge epistemes, and systematic metrics for the evaluation of quality, validity, and originality based on outdated and ensnaring institutional validations. It also entails critical engagement and peer-to-peer assistance, as a form of solidarity, and sharing becomes an epistemic gesture. Every reviewer is also reviewed, their own publishing activities also subject to peer scrutiny and feed-back in-between various research practices, allowing knowledges to move, to be touched, and to touch in return. This process permits selected peers to closely follow the coming into being of an article and offer ongoing critical reflections. Academic peer review also acknowledges, accounts for and traces epistemological process and recognises the traces of prior practices – those that have not only laid the ground for the work but that also have ruptured it, provoked it, challenged it and made it possible. References in this sense enable an ongoing entanglement with the knowledges, gestures and practices that are involved in the making of a text. (Reinhart and Schendzielorz 2024; Black and Indych-López 2022).<sup>3</sup>

I will, in the following, address three aspects of peer review processes in relation to exhibition making: what is articulated and evaluated – reflecting what is valued and paid attention to, and thus recognised as part of an epistemological process; the peer-to-peer exchange as a form of solidarity, and sharing that becomes an epistemic gesture; and, the references that recognise the traces of prior practices – all while examining the possibilities for working with the exhibition as an alternative to peer-reviewed articles.

## **Museum Practices as Research**

### **– What is Paid Attention to, Articulated and Evaluated?**

Museums are not merely exhibition venues; they are research institutions that consider research, knowledge development, and critical interrogation to be

integral parts of their practice. Museums are subject to research obligations and engage in research collaborations with universities but their epistemic practices often differ from those of universities (Budtz Pedersen and Humanomics Research Center 2022, 8). As a result of the political harmonisation of research understandings, with e.g. the Bologna process, museums have been encouraged to align themselves with academic standards for research: originality, transparency and validity (Budtz Pedersen and Humanomics Research Center 2022, 13). This means that museums are increasingly required to document and publish their research through peer-reviewed channels, aligning to university standards of knowledge creation to produce quality data. Yet, museum research practice does not always correspond to the general concept of research as derived from the university sector. Museum research is often rooted in practical and experience-based forms of knowledge. It is therefore worth paying attention to the fact that much of the work that takes place at museums – working with and managing the archives, research into an exhibition subject, spatial reflections, material engagements, creation of educational material, collaborative efforts and so on – already have strong research strands (Fleming 2020). Experience and practice-based knowledges that philosopher Gilbert Ryle refers to as “knowing how” include tacit knowledges – such as how to work in archives or curate exhibitions (Ryle 1945; 2009). But they also include the epistemological inquiries involved in the more performative processes mentioned by Bolt, e.g., created by the relations facilitated in-between objects, artworks and audiences in an exhibition space. These practical, experience-based and performative epistemic practices entailed in exhibition work often differ from the theoretical and often written form of “knowing that” that dominates university research – a technical and theoretical epistemology that can be explained, defined and referenced, and found in, for example, peer-reviewed articles (Budtz Pedersen and Humanomics Research Center 2022, 36; Ryle 1945; 2009).

In the agreement text for a new reform of state-recognised museums in Denmark, released by the Danish Ministry of Culture on 16 May 2024,<sup>4</sup> it is acknowledged that:

Knowledge development is more than peer-reviewed research. General knowledge development, such as studies, analyses, leaflets, popular science articles, yearbooks or catalogues for exhibitions, is an important part of museums’ work. However, the parties recognise the working group’s assessment that this is currently difficult to support with quality data.

*(Ministry of Culture Denmark 2024, 6)*

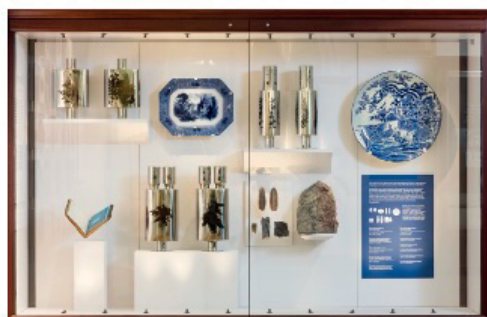
It is worth noting that although the committee recognises a need for a wider understanding of knowledge production within exhibition practices, the research and epistemic inquiry and practice that goes into, e.g. exhibition production, are not mentioned in the recommendations as potential sources of knowledge creation. The committee focuses instead on the byproducts and remnants of the exhibition, such as the exhibition catalogue and the exhibition, as objects of analysis. Thus, the report does not take into account the epistemological interrogation embedded in performative, practical and spatial knowledge-producing practices entailed in creating an exhibition (in the exhibition production, the exhibition space, the exhibition's after-effects). This may be partly due to insufficient data generation from these practices and activities – as they are often not accounted for. Hence, epistemological inquiry in the sense of what we pay attention to and articulate is never neutral. What we pay attention to in a work and knowledge creation process, and which of these processes we choose to articulate and thus value as part of knowledge production, matters. When working in the intersection of museological exhibition work and university epistemes, the performative process and the tacit knowledges of the “knowing how” risk being overlooked, as they are not as easily defined and do not fit into the general concept of research criteria of the university sector – which leads to the question of which practices, activities and processes are articulated in exhibition-making and what is regarded as quality data in this context.

Considering these vast, unacknowledged epistemological processes already embedded in the actual practice of creating exhibitions seems to underscore the importance of introducing more inclusive epistemic frameworks that encourage epistemic equity between university and exhibition practices – not as a checklist of inclusion, but as an ongoing practice of attention, emphasising the importance of being aware of which kind of spaces for knowledge creation are facilitated and what we are trained to notice. Which gestures, processes, or practices do we pay attention to, choose to articulate and thus communicate to others – and which remain suspended in the realm of the inchoate or the dismissed?

### **Reflections on Epistemologies, Practices and Peer-Review Processes**

Metrics of assessment – that is, what is chosen to be evaluated and, therefore, paid attention to both as knowledge contribution and in a knowledge creation process – reflect what is valued as knowledge in academic practice, practice-based art studies, and exhibition making. Developing procedures that allow (art) exhibitions as alternatives to peer-reviewed articles entails reflection on evaluation metrics and what legitimises these epistemologies. To validate the (art)





Bloom installation, the Horniman Natural History Gallery, Horniman Museum and Gardens

## Research Contribution and Recognition

### Research insights and contribution:

The Bloom exhibition makes clear just how intimate and sometimes uncomfortable some of the linkages between the historical narratives of collecting, wealth and museological concerns actually are. The work set out as a somewhat quirky looking chequerboard of highly glazed paintings that mimicked porcelain but it quickly became apparent that these objects also contained other narratives connecting environment, mortality and loss with beauty, situating the work in a complex set of discourses. The accompanying publication provides a further exploration and articulation of these insights.

### Dissemination:

#### EXHIBITION

The Horniman collection of artefacts and natural history is of nationally recognised significance and this interpretative installation had a wide reception. The visitor numbers for the Horniman over the period of the exhibition (9 July – 6 December) were in the region of 600,000.

#### BOOK

The Bloom book was launched at an event on Saturday 14th September at the Horniman Pavilion. 400-450 copies have been sold.

#### REVIEWS

The book and exhibition have been substantially covered in external reviews, including:

Ben Miller, 'Exquisite 19th century sun prints illuminate the Horniman's Natural History Gallery', Culture24, 11 November 2015 (<https://www.culture24.org.uk/art/painting-and-drawing/art541132-edward-chell-statement-horniman-anna-atkins>)  
An artist's statement providing further insight into the creation and realisation of Bloom.

[1] Excerpts from the PDF report submitted to the REF on Edward Chell's Bloom exhibition, 2021, showing examples of images and accompanying text. Image: Screenshot of the report.

exhibition and its production as knowledge creation, rather than mere dissemination or illustration of conducted research, ways of articulating and documenting these processes as active forms of epistemological inquiry are needed.

While such practices are not yet established in Denmark, efforts to introduce formal evaluation criteria for exhibitions as research and epistemological contributions have been implemented elsewhere. In the UK, art schools have worked to broaden the definition of research to include non-traditional formats. While the REF, the UK's national system for assessing the quality of research in higher education institutions, includes exhibitions as valid research outputs, it also adheres to quantifiable measures within traditional academic boundaries.

The REF2021 guidelines specify that submitted materials should communicate research questions, methodologies, insights, and dissemination strategies. Assessments may include non-textual material, supported by written statements or portfolios, and must demonstrate how the exhibition meets academic evaluation criteria (REF2021 2021).

The REF report does not provide feedback along the process of the exhibition coming into being, and rather than the peer review process operating as an unfolding of knowledge-in-the-making with peer assistance (as it does

with peer-review of journal articles), the exhibition is assessed by peers as an aftermath in a portfolio format. Here exemplified by the submission of Edward Chell's 2015 exhibition, Bloom, held at the Horniman Museum and Gardens in London [1] (Chell 2015). In Bloom's REF submission, the exhibition is reduced to a 16-page PDF document featuring both images and text that evaluates and accounts for the exhibition's research objectives, research questions, findings, methods, and processes. What is not considered here is the performative aspect of the epistemological inquiry and how the exhibition could contribute to and challenge academic practice through the spatial experience, the performative aspects of the exhibition space, the exhausting archival research processes, the sensual material engagement that creates new meaning in an exhibitionary practice, or the work with the unruly exhibition texts that escapes capture. The portfolio does not bring forth what Bolt calls the performative force of research in artistic and curatorial practices and their "capacity to effect 'movement' in thought, word, and deed" and I would add practices (Bolt 2016, 130). The emphasis remains on meeting academic norms rather than exploring exhibitions themselves as epistemic endeavours, and Chell's Bloom portfolio ends up as a report in which knowledge, already stabilised elsewhere, is transmitted.

This underlines a need to further reflect on what constitutes research and how exhibition practices can expand, and not only comply with, existing academic standards. This includes recognising the performative force of exhibitionary research practices and their capacity to generate movement in thought, language, and understanding.

Some of these performative practices have been taken into account in The JAR, an online exposition platform that utilises the digital medium to rethink traditional publication practices. JAR believes that artistic research can be assessed, while at the same time be recognised for its unique qualities. The journal therefore encourages submissions that address important issues or problems in an artistic manner that engages other fields.

The multimedia expositions in JAR allow for both the integration of text, as well as image, audio, and video, enabling authors to present artistic research in a non-linear manner and through multiple modes of articulation. While maintaining rigorous standards for evaluating submissions, JAR's review board includes both academics and practitioners from various artistic fields to ensure epistemic equity when reviewing diverse modes of knowledge creation across differing ways of knowing, practising, and publishing (*Journal for Artistic Research*, n.d.; 'Peer Reviewing and Artistic Research', n.d.). In the peer-review

process, JAR employs a single-blind peer review; the reviewer is anonymous, but not the author, since artworks often carry the ‘signature’ of those who created them. Once the editorial board has approved a submission, the peer review editor invites three potential reviewers, and the author is also invited to propose a potential reviewer, as an act of epistemic alignment, someone they feel is attuned to the specific logics, urgencies, and situated knowledges that the exposition is attempting to address. The selected peers then engage with the submitted material, holding a space for peer-to-peer feedback before the final submission (‘Peer Reviewing and Artistic Research’, n.d.).

JAR simultaneously embraces the unique performative qualities of artistic research and recognises that artistic work resists rigid academic forms. The review process therefore includes nine points, which instead of addressing academic rigour in the argumentation and findings, ask the reviewers to consider their own positionality in relation to the topic, the submission’s relevance based on the submission’s subject matter, its methods and outcomes, and if it lives up to its potential. How well do the design and navigation support the submission? And are there any ethical or legal concerns (Journal for Artistic Research, n.d.)? In their guidelines, JAR importantly emphasises that they are open to various methodological backgrounds, as long as they expose practice as research meaning “that the submission exposes, translates, stages, performs etc. the practice it presents so as to engage with its own meaning, to challenge existing epistemic horizons or to offer new insights.” (Journal for Artistic Research, n.d., 3). Once the submission is published, the author is invited to take part in an ongoing dialogue with a broader public through the comment section – a space where the author’s own positionality, alongside reviewers’ reflections, is made visible and held open. This gesture does not aim to finalise meaning, but rather to activate a shared critical space, allowing for further commentary, situated readings, and exchange of shared interest across different situated practices and realities (Journal for Artistic Research, n.d.).

With these points of attention, JAR emphasises peer-review process as an opportunity for continued deep engagement with each other’s work, particularly across different situated realities and institutional contexts. Its peer review process, therefore, validates epistemic inquiries as processual and ongoing encounters that adhere to both artistic and more traditional academic standards, encouraging cross-disciplinary approaches that open a space for new ways of knowing within both academic and artistic practices.

JAR touches upon core aspects of rethinking peer review, and some of the considerations and peer-review practices that JAR applies might serve as inspi-

ration for the work, with the prospects for working with the (art) exhibition as an alternative to peer-reviewed articles at Danish Museums. Yet, both REF and JAR neglect the complexity of spatial performativity and embodied tangible engagements and reduce the exhibition or exposition to its textual documentation or visual one-dimensional surface.

This raises the question: could one imagine an alternative form of peer-review for exhibitions? A practice of peer-review for exhibitions that draws on core values from academic peer review, such as iteration and critical engagement? But also a peer review that takes into account the reviewer's embodied experience of the exhibition and its performative and spatial processes – in the exhibition production, exhibition space, and its aftereffects? That is, not as an afterthought, but in the making of the actual exhibition. Of particular interest here are the practices and gestures involved in making the exhibition and the exhibition space in its material and spatial form, which rather than illustrating research outcomes can function as a dynamic site of epistemic inquiry.

### **The Curatorial, Curating at Cultural Historical Museums, and the Exhibition as Research**

In the context of cultural historical museums, the production of exhibitions is often understood as legitimate epistemic work, particularly when developed through interdisciplinary workshop formats. These formats foreground exhibition production itself as a space of research-in-action, creating opportunities for peer-to-peer engagement and feedback through practice-based exercises (Bäckström 2016; Vest Hansen, Folke Henningsen, and Gregersen 2019; Arnold et al. 2020; Bjerregaard 2020). Yet the minor gestures, the interstitial dynamics between situated practices and their reciprocal effects, where meaning, relation, and becoming often take form, tend to slip from view. In written accounts, attention usually gravitates toward the major gestures of practice-based processes, such as workshop structures and framing methods that produced the exhibition. In contrast, the exhibition space itself is often mediated as a relatively passive representation.

Unlike the cultural historical exhibitions, art exhibitions tend to neglect the articulation of the practice-based processes leading up to the physical exhibition; instead, they emphasise the exhibition space itself, as a space for epistemological inquiry and research in process (Sheikh 2015; Sternfeld and Ziaja 2014), thus perceiving the exhibition space as a space for critical engagement, as theorists and curators Nora Sternfeld and Luisa Ziaja write, as “a space of negotiation in which the meaning of words and things is not fixed but always open to

discussion” (Sternfeld and Ziaja 2014, 24). Here, the active research and epistemological entanglements are formed when curators, artists and audiences activate the interplay between the elements interwoven within the exhibition space and the various discursive contexts that implicitly or explicitly are played out.

To explore the exhibition as an alternative to traditional academic publishing, I propose combining these two traditions: the cultural-historical museums’ practices of legitimising exhibition production as epistemic inquiry and the art museums’ focus on the exhibition space as a performative space where multiple open-ended epistemic engagements are played out.

Art theorist Simon Sheikh deepens this inquiry by distinguishing between two translations of “research.” One is the French *recherche*, “understood mainly in terms of journalistic research” (Sheikh 2015, 37), which he associates with the more traditional research involved in curating an art exhibition. The other is the German *Forschung* “which implies a scientific model of research” (Sheikh 2015, 37), where the exhibition is not only “thought of as a form of mediation of research but also as a site for carrying out this research, as a place for enacted research” (Sheikh 2015, 40).<sup>5</sup>

To work with the exhibition as *Forschung* – as research – is to regard it, not as an answer to a research question, but as the activation of the question itself – a question that, as it unfolds, may contain no correct answers, but instead, multiple perspectives, contradictions and uncertainties. Rather than offering conclusions, the exhibition as research opens discursive and material spaces for epistemic inquiry, in which meaning is formed relationally in the exhibition production and in the exhibition space, with several possible outcomes.<sup>6</sup>

As such, exhibition as research becomes a research mode in its own right. It investigates different aspects of a subject matter through its practices, which presents different approaches and points of entry from the traditional peer-reviewed article that concludes by presenting research results and findings. Instead, the (art) exhibition as research explores its subject matter through performative inquiry, experimental processes and practices, inviting in diverse engagements, expertise and experiences. Here, meaning is formed in the researchers’ (curators, artists, and other practitioners involved in the creation of the exhibitions) interaction with the archival material, research into the exhibition subject, spatial reflections, material engagements, creation of educational material, facilitation of collaborative efforts, etc., as well as through the audience’s activation of the interaction between the exhibition elements. Here, the exhibition is a process, or something in process. In other words, the (art) exhibition as research becomes a performative act that tentatively acti-

vates and moves the subject matter of the exhibition instead of defining it and, with that, becomes a space for epistemic encounters and epistemic exploration, rather than a communication or dissemination of already produced knowledge (Arnfred 2023).

### **Applying These Considerations to a Danish Context**

A possible unintended opening towards working with the (art) exhibition as research and as an alternative to peer-reviewed articles in a Danish context might be found in the draft for an actual ordinance for the Danish museums. The ordinance was sent out to the Danish museums for review in 2024 by the Danish Ministry of Culture, following the agreement from 2024 mentioned above. In the draft, research is defined as follows: “Peer-reviewed research publications include published articles and monographs on topics within the museum’s area of responsibility and in the fields of education, conservation and museology. The research must meet the OECD core criteria for research” (Ministry of Culture Denmark 2024, 9). Even though exhibitions are not mentioned and only “traditional” academic publications are emphasised, an alternative to peer-reviewed articles and monographs might be found in the OECD “core criteria for research”. A more detailed explanation of what the OECD Frascati-Manual guidelines consist of and how they are implemented in the Danish context can be found on the website of the Danish Ministry of Higher Education and Science. In the OECD core criteria, research and what they call “experimental development” is defined as “creative and systematic work undertaken to increase existing knowledge and devise new applications of existing knowledge” (Ministry of Higher Education and Science, n.d.). According to these guidelines, a research activity can be engaged with both specific or general questions, as long as it fulfils the following criteria:

- New (To be aimed at new findings)
- Original/creative (To be based on original, not obvious, concepts and hypotheses)
- Unsure (To be uncertain about the final outcome)
- Systematic (To be planned and budgeted)
- Transferable and/or reproducible (To lead to results that could be possibly reproduced)

*(Ministry of Higher Education and Science, n.d.)*

In this context, innovation is perceived as:

A new or improved product or process (or combination thereof) that differs significantly from an entity's previous products and processes and is made available to potential users (product innovation) or adopted by the entity (process innovation). Innovation activities can take place in all sectors of society

*(Ministry of Higher Education and Science, n.d.).*

Even though these modes of defining research and research activities do not encompass the actual exhibition space, or for that matter, exhibition production, they might prove helpful in building an understanding of how exhibitions in themselves could be counted as academic research practices; when working with the researching (art) exhibition as an alternative to peer-reviewed articles, this includes practices of references accounting for and tracing epistemological processes and recognising the traces of prior practices in relation to an exhibition.

An example of such reference practices is the 2023 exhibition *Full of Days* curated by South into North, which engaged with Charlottenborg Kunsthall's 140-year history and archive (South into North 2023) [2]. Although created for a Kunsthalle rather than a museum, the exhibition's mode of working with references and its connection to Charlottenborg's extensive archive and surrounding myths makes it noteworthy. *Full of Days* exemplifies how art institutions can embody the OECD research criteria, offering transferable insights into exhibition-based epistemic inquiry, knowledge practices and recognition of prior practices, including those that have not only laid the ground for the work, but also those that have ruptured it, provoked it, challenged it and made it possible. *Full of Days*, without explicit intention, employed several of the OECD research parameters and exhibition research practices listed above: a carefully structured, budgeted, and planned research process, the uncertainties regarding how to approach the archive, what the exhibition team would be able to read out of the archives, and what the final outcome would be were untangled and unfolded. The idea was to engage with what the exhibition team encountered in the Charlottenborg archive and beyond, not merely as a gathering of data, but rather to bring forth counter-narratives, forgotten histories, and divergent perspectives. At the same time, it aimed to carefully engage with and analyse the material, exploring and experimenting with how the past could highlight aspects of contemporary and future urgencies.<sup>7</sup> To achieve this, novel methodologies were invented, such as Deep Publishing. Here, the exhibition team, through their collaboration with



graphic designer and editor Benjamin Åbäke, engaged with the vast archive, artworks and other material, as an examination of how to approach the exhibition production and the exhibition space as an expanded publication practice.<sup>8</sup> This engagement involved an analysis and selection process, from editorial and printing practices to the exhibition production and exhibition space – both as material contributions in the form of artworks, groupings of objects, and exhibition text, and as the ongoing dialogue that the exhibition production and the exhibition space had with Charlottenborg’s archive, forgotten (or obscured) histories, and new perspectives on these historical events, and how all of that interacted in the exhibition [2]. The team applied the layered formats utilised in academic publication practices, such as chapters, paragraphs, references, and footnotes, but instead of text on paper, these formats were applied to a mixture of historic and newly commissioned artworks and visual archival material.

[2] In the exhibition *Full of Days*, 2023 at Charlottenborg Kunsthall the artworks were, in addition to the exhibition texts, accompanied by copies of archival photos from various exhibitions and events that occurred during The Kunsthalle’s 150 years of history. The archival photos ran like footnotes along the walls of the exhibition, arranged to relate to and subtly comment on the nearby themes and artworks. Artwork in photo: Sahar Jamili, *Insight Out*, 2023 and Isabel Lewis in romance with Dirk Bell, *In Repair*, 2023. Image: Partial view of *Full of Days* exhibition space. Photo by the author.





The research that had gone into the archive was unfolded through video clips, artworks, exhibition pamphlets – odd objects and facts, myths, and rumours connected to these materials, performed through exhibition text and spatial engagements. For example, reproductions of photo material from the archive ran along the walls of the exhibition space as subtle footnotes and references to past histories and exhibitions, set in relation to the themes, artworks and archival material in the specific room. Additionally, new perspectives and an understanding of the vast archive of Charlottenborg's exhibition history were produced, highlighting forgotten (or hidden) aspects of the Kunsthalle's history: Kvindeudstillingen (the women's exhibition) that surprisingly little has been written about, or the documentation of a Nazi exhibition taking place in the big halls, showing another side of Danish behaviour during the German occupation of World War II. Through their inventive publication practice, the team behind *Full of Days* thus created novel modes of approaching the (art) exhibition as research that could inspire and inform work with the (art) exhibition as a possible alternative to peer-reviewed articles.

In this sense, exhibitions such as *Full of Days* already contain some, if not all, of the aspects outlined in the Frascati Manual. They can introduce new insights into the exhibition process and often engage in original and creative approaches to the exhibition topic. In the initial research, the curatorial approach to the topic is often uncertain and open-ended, and what will emerge from working with it is unknown. The process from the initial research to the finished exhibition is complex. It engages many different practices at various stages that are often well-planned and need to be budgeted. Additionally, new modes of working with exhibitions can be shared as curatorial methods. What is missing, then, is both the conscious articulation of these epistemic processes, from the minor gestures and practices that make the work-work,<sup>9</sup> to research questions, aims and context, methodology, insights, and contributions – but also addressing and acknowledging the performative force of the exhibition, taking into account the interactions in-between the different objects in the exhibition space, and how these interactions are experienced and activated through the researchers', curators', artists', and audiences' engagement with the exhibition in its different phases (such as: production, exhibition space and aftereffects). Such articulation enables communication to those outside the art world about how an exhibition can unfold as a research activity that adheres to, but also challenges and adds to, academic evaluation standards – thus making it possible to consider designated (art) exhibitions as an epistemic process and a research activity within scholarly practice.

Unpacking ongoing transparent and more opaque peer review processes, and unfolding possible modes of articulation for practices involved in exhibition making, as well as questioning how they are affected by theoretical, performative, and practice-based engagements is to consider how exhibition production, exhibition space, and the after-effects of exhibitions form part of epistemic processes and encounters. Thus, in relation to knowledge creation, this article does not merely try to position the (art) exhibition as an alternative to peer-reviewed articles as a discursive interaction or imagined event. Rather, the article seeks to emphasise the practical considerations as enacted epistemic inquiry that makes the work-work, moving the (art) exhibition as research from a space of presentation and representation to a space of activation (as a facilitator of epistemic inquiry through practice-based engagements).

## Conclusion

As discussed, when considering the evaluation standards above, peer-review processes run the inherent risks of a limiting, ensnaring academisation that threatens to entrench art and curating within sets of assumptions, rules, and norms that come with institutional validation, including Western knowledge epistemes, and systematic metrics for the evaluation of quality, validity, and originality. This framework could threaten to instrumentalise both art and curating, subjecting them to the logics of transparency and measurability that run counter to the opacity, ambiguity, open-ended reflections, fabulations, juxtapositions, and counternarratives that are often central to artistic and curatorial practices. Despite these inherent risks, peer-review processes do not consist solely of limiting criteria and gatekeeping; they also entail critical engagement and peer-to-peer assistance and exchange as forms of solidarity, where sharing becomes an epistemic gesture in the sense that every reviewer is also reviewed, their own publishing activities also subject to peer scrutiny and feedback. This allows knowledge to move, to be touched, and to touch in return – a process that allows selected peers to closely follow the coming into being of an article and provide ongoing critical reflections.

Could we begin to imagine a peer review process tailored to the exhibition as a research format? Not merely in terms of evaluating the end product, but in engaging with the exhibition process through its unfolding in the exhibition production, the exhibition space and in the exhibition's possible after-effects? This would involve input from external peers – not the collaborators directly involved in workshops or production, but rather a procedure founded in professional exchange with colleagues who participate in shaping the process: in the

early stages of idea development, where the research questions are formed; during the production phase, where the ideas for the exhibition are researched, tested and negotiated; in the construction of the exhibition space, where spatial thinking and material engagement intersect with conceptual work; and, finally, in the reflective phase, where the impact and after-effects of the exhibition are considered.

To a certain extent, this already happens, unofficially, in the in-between spaces of curatorial practices. Over a coffee, in the lunchroom, in e-mails sent in the wee hours of the morning. A curator shares an idea for a show-in-progress, another reflects with a colleague on the ethics of an exhibition subject, a third realises in the exchange with an exhibition technician, midway through the install, that the process has subtly changed their understanding of institutional responsibility. These exchanges are not marginal – they are the epistemic engine that makes the work-work. To formalise them is not to contain them but to create hospitable conditions for their visibility.

What if we stopped relegating these interactions to the informal and instead recognised them as the peer review that is already taking place? Perhaps it is then not about how to formalise this, but how to recognise it as a form of knowledge we already practice. The question, then, is not whether peer review exists within exhibition-making, but whether it could be made more visible, structured and articulated without reducing it to metrics, limiting criteria, checklists or textual reports. Could such moments of professional exchange – rooted in practice, dialogue, and shared reflection – be recognised as legitimate forms of peer evaluation? And in so doing, might we create a framework that values the knowledge embedded not only in outcomes, but in the temporal, relational, and spatial dimensions of exhibition-making itself?

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#### **ABSTRACT**

This paper explores the potential for art exhibitions to be recognised as an alternative to peer-reviewed academic publications, examining how exhibitions contribute to knowledge creation at the intersection of artistic, curatorial, and academic practices. It addresses challenges in museum research obligations posed by current academic evaluation metrics, and the institutional biases that prioritise textual documentation over performative and material engagements inherent in curatorial and artistic practices. Drawing on theoretical perspectives and institutional frameworks, the study discusses the impact of integrating practice-based art studies into academia. It investigates how exhibitions, beyond their traditional role as mediatory tools, can be recognised as legitimate sites of research production and research publication on their own terms. Hence the paper calls for a reconsideration of research assessment of museum practices in academic contexts, advocating for acknowledging exhibitions as possible alternatives to peer-reviewed articles.

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## NOTES

- 1 It goes without saying that the idea of working with (art) exhibitions as a practical-theoretical catalyst for new insights and different knowledge production and contribution is just one of several ways of working and approaching exhibitions and scholarly research. It is precisely as part of a whole that the (art) exhibition (as an alternative to peer-reviewed articles), contributes to the strength of academic research and the art world.
- 2 I include art and artists alongside curating and other exhibition workers. This is because artists often work as curators of exhibitions. Thus, practices entailed in curating are included in artistic practice, and many of the concerns addressed in theories about artistic research also apply to curatorial and other exhibition practices (O'Neill Paul 2012; Sheikh 2015). Furthermore, artists, curators and other exhibition workers collaborate closely and dependently when creating an exhibition. Thus, I will draw not only on museological and curatorial but also artistic practices and theories for this research project.
- 3 It should be noted that it is imperative to critically scrutinise and re-evaluate these criteria in terms of habitual biases and tendencies, such as Western, gendered, neurotypical, etc. – knowledge epistemes on which they are based and thus favour.
- 4 The working group included museum, business, and government professionals.
- 5 Here, Sheikh does not only refer to the research conducted on the subject matter before the realisation of the exhibition, but research as the activation of an unanswered (research) question in the exhibition.
- 6 The two types of exhibitions, “*recherche*” and *Forschung*, often overlap and are rarely as distinctly defined as mentioned above. However, it can be helpful to keep these two definitions in mind when exploring the possibility of the (art) exhibition as an alternative to peer-reviewed articles.
- 7 The careful engagement with and analysis of the material, exploring and experimenting with how the past could highlight aspects of contemporary and future urgencies, was reflected in the introductory text for the exhibition and in the exhibition texts displayed in the exhibition space (however, the methodologies behind these engagements, such as Deep Publishing, were not mentioned. This also points to some of the issues discussed in this article. How can we refer to these types of contextualising and knowledge-creating texts if they are not archived or included in the exhibition catalogue, especially when a catalogue is not produced, as is the case for many exhibitions, including *Full of Days*?
- 8 Deep Publishing is a methodology created by ÄBÄKE, a transdisciplinary graphic design collective founded in London in 2000 by Benjamin Reichen, Kajsa Ståhl, Maki Suzuki, and Patrick Lacey, that addresses extensive data sets and archives within editorial contexts. For the first time, this approach is applied not just for print, but to the creation of exhibitions and exhibition spaces. This methodology has also been used for other exhibitions as a way to interact with a museum’s vast collections and archives.
- 9 I use the phrase “making the work-work” by leaning on dancer and philosopher Erin Manning (Manning 2016, 65). In my use, the phrase refers to what moves the work from within – the processes that animate practice, that activate and propel it so that it does something. It is not only about the outcomes or decisions that result from work, but also about the movements and facilitations that allow those outcomes to emerge. Making the work-work then points to the recursive processes by which we work on something, attend to its unfolding, and create the conditions that let the work itself begin to work: to move, shift, and generate something in the world.