From metamuseum to metaverse: Exploring institutional and individual art curation practice in digital gaming experience

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The emerging concept of the metaverse has attracted significant attention from art museums and galleries. Perceiving the metaverse as a digital and virtual platform that improves accessibility and interactivity in the new generation of the Internet, museums have explored various future-oriented technological experiments. This presentation will investigate existing discussions on the metaverse within the museum sector, and observe the design of digital interactives initiated by institutes and individuals that resembles the hypothetical metaverse experience. In particular, it focuses on current achievements and difficulties through case studies of interactive art presentation in video gaming experience. It also aims to identify possible trends and gaps in future research and practice.

Featuring two key case studies, the collaboration between Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery (BMAG) and Occupying White Walls (OWW), as well as artist-led exhibitions and events in Animal Crossing: New Horizons (ACNH), the presentation will compare the institutional and individual practice of art curation in the digital space. Then, it aims to align the digital immigration of material exhibits in OWW and ACNH with experiments in born-digital museums, which explore the curation of digital artwork beyond the material traditions of the sector. Through these case studies, the presentation wishes to investigate how the concept of the metaverse is embodied and translated through these experiments, and review how far we are from a decentralised, interactive, and accessible metaverse-utopia. It will also raise a question for future researchers and practitioners: where are we going next, to achieve the metaverse of museums and galleries?
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Xiaozhou Li is a current PhD student at the University of Sussex, UK, with academic background in museum studies and Romantic literature. Her doctoral research explores how video games reconceptualise museums and inspire museum practice. Xiaozhou’s research interests include digital media and video games, museum curatorial practice, and participatory experience.

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