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in the Digital Era

THIS WOMAN BRINGS FEMALE ART INTO NO MAN'S LAND



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Lolita Cros Tells Us How She Got Into Curating and Shares Some Tips to Boost Your Career

text by Lizzy Vartanian Collier

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Lolita Cros's journey to becoming curator of The Wing – a network of female-only community spaces that launched in the US in 2016 – seems kind of like fate. A member since the very beginning, she received an email from the space after having just quit her job in late 2016. "They sent out a mass email to all their members saying 'We're extending, yaay!'" explains Lolita. "So knowing their aesthetic, and knowing their taste, I reached out to them and said I'd be happy to help them with the art collection." The rest, as they say, is history. Within a six-month period Lolita had selected the work inside The Wing's Soho space, proving that if girl wants to get somewhere, there's no harm in asking for that job said the organisation in question didn't even know they needed to fill.

Lolita grew up between Paris and Casablanca, somewhere she explains where it's a little difficult to become a curator in the modern sense. "I had a really great art history teacher when I was living in Paris. I had never felt as much joy in a class, and so I was like OK, that's like a job that people do, art something!", she says. "But in France it's a little harder to have a career in a field outside the one you studied. It's kind of determinate, like if you study art history for five years then you have to become an art history pro, and therefore probably a professor, which I never really wanted to be." She says she feels lucky to have been in the States by the time she was finishing high school so that she could study art history as a major and not worry about her future if she didn't stay in the field of art history. "My best friend's father had studied art history in college and then went on to open a perfume company", she says. "So I knew it had nothing to do with my future. I could have fun for four years and if necessary I'd find another job, and it turns out that within those four years I really discovered my calling."

Lolita first started curating in 2010; organising group shows while at university, ensuring to also curate an exhibition in New York along the way. "I wanted to figure it out, to learn what it's like to curate a show there", she says. "It's very different to a tiny little village in upstate New York." These early shows were with artists that Lolita already knew and liked. "I was getting a sense of working with an artist one on one", she adds, "Developing their market and pitching their work in a personal way instead of being like 'everything's for sale.'"

At The Wing, all of the art is for sale, and all of it has been made by women. "I've always worked with both female and male artists", says Lolita. "But I never really paid much attention to it. Whenever I did a group show it always ended up being basically 50-50 male, female without paying any attention to it." This helped Lolita when curating a specifically female-focused environment, having already amassed a network of female creatives. That said, she explains that she is always researching to keep her eyes fresh and her finger on the pulse of what's being made today.

"It's pretty interesting to see what people connect with", says Lolita about the work at The Wing. "Because when I curate I really try to find work that anybody in the room can connect

Image credit: Alyssa Greenberg

with. So it's not only my aesthetic or obsession." Since The Wing is not a gallery space as such, the art-viewing environment is different. "The regular Wing-goer is not necessarily based in the art world", she adds. "It's really interesting to see what kind of questions and what kind of interests they have for it. It's very genuine. They're not in there to discover this hot artist, for all they know that artist is just beautiful and they didn't know it's a hot-cool artist." And, despite not catering to a predominantly art-oriented girl gang, the work does sell. "There is a lot of interest in very different types of artworks, even ones that I consider to be 'advanced' in understanding", explains Lolita. "Even people who don't end up buying, a lot of them are interested in saving up to buy it later." And, once a piece sells, another is installed in its place, with the whole curation of each space changing each year. "I just sold a piece yesterday actually in Chicago", says Lolita. "So I oversaw over FaceTime the de-install of the work, and a work from the same series is now hanging instead." Talk about curation in the digital age!

Besides the wing, Lolita also curates her own shows, having organised a solo show with Chase Hall last year. "He's an incredible artist", she says. "I've been selling his work but I haven't bought anything yet. I'm saving up." In addition to curation and big productions, her way of being able to work in more solo-specific ways with artists is by doing talks with them. These talks live digitally, with Lolita uploading them all to her YouTube channel. "It can go from an artist's talk with an audience, to a very intimate studio visit with a very selective group of curators or just collectors, or any kind of creative person who is going to be inspired by the work of an artist", she says. The highlights are edited into a three-to-five minute film that can be easily watched online. Since her first talk in 2014, Lolita is growing her film series, aiming to make a video at every event, some of which happen at The Wing. "It's to keep the conversation happening one at a time, instead of just one work with one hundred other works around it", she explains, "To give them their own voice. To press pause and give them the microphone."

When asked about the relationship she has with her artists and clients, Lolita explains that it varies depending on how long they've been working together. "On top of that, I have other clients who either have new homes or who are trying to buy certain types of art, or bigger corporations who need a lot of art for one space", she explains. "So for all these different types of requests I always submit what I think the best artworks are for that space, or for that client. I usually go back to the artists and ask what they have available." Once she sells an artwork, Lolita furthers her relationship with the artist, not only as a curator but also as a consigner.

Talking about Lolita's day-to-day work life, she says that there isn't really such a thing as an "average day." "My days can either be a total nightmare of running around and starting 40 projects, still working on the second one at midnight", she says. "But then the others I'm just installing and travelling, it depends." Lolita tries to wake up at a decent hour, "though I snooze forever" (don't we all), and then begins by checking emails and making a to-do list. "I have little stars for each of the things I need to do

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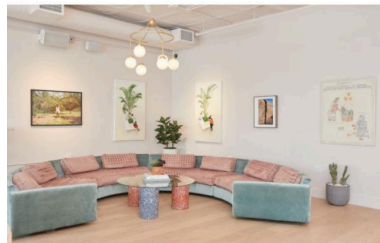


Image credit: Pamela Hanson, The Wing

and cross them off as I go," she says. "Whenever I have studio visits, in times when I don't need to open a space and when I don't have a tight deadline, I try to have no more than one or two a week, otherwise it gets too crazy." She takes these visits in the evening so they don't mess with the rest of her day, before coming home, walking her dog, and trying to sleep before 2am. See, even super curators are like the rest of us.

But, I hear you cry, is Lolita's advice for people wanting to get into curating? You may be surprised to hear, that she thinks you should throw a party. "I always tell young curators, or just young people when they're thinking of curating to maybe try different parts of those skills in different areas", she says, "Try to organize a party, because in a party you have to figure out sponsors, you have to figure out invites, you have to figure out flyers, it's very logistics based." She acknowledges that there are many different layers to curating: logistics, socializing, sales, pitching, an affinity for the arts and a good eye. "Not all these fields are from one person, they're all very drastic and different", she admits, adding, "If you want to play on the social aspect then maybe go to openings and see if you can go up to a person you admire and see if you can talk to them." She adds that it's best to start with smaller projects and then work out what your strengths are. "Most of the time finding artists is very easy", she admits, "So just start going to studio visits and one day you'll have an art crush, and with that art crush try to do a show together and take it from there."

As for her own art collection, Lolita explains that it's hard to buy when she knows so much about each artist she works with. "Every time I go to a city where I discover a ton of artists in one week, I come back and go 'I'm going to buy this and this and this'", she says. "But then I don't because I start having a different relationship with them and I start dealing with their artworks, and save the best one in The Wing, and I think maybe when the piece comes down I can buy it, but I don't want to take it off the wall because it looks so good." She says that she needs

to buy when it's on the wall or on the spot in the artist's studio or in a gallery or else she'll never buy it. That said, she does have pieces by Tessa Perutz – on display at The Wing's DC space – as well as work by Louis Heilbronn. "And then I sell a lot of pieces to my husband actually", she admits. "Which is much, much better than buying it for myself because then I'm more objective and I can buy stuff as a client and not as a personal gift." You've got to admire her honesty.

Lolita's art world heroes include Paula Cooper and Marian Goodman. "Not because they're women, but because they're honestly some of my favourite galleries, and just the way they have kept those artists", she says. "The way they have stood up when artists went with other galleries, just the type of art they have is incredible." She also cites Jack Shainman as having

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one of the best rosters in New York, making sure to mention "There are a lot of really talented people in the arts who are often in the shadows. There's a lot of inspiring people in New York." As for artists, she has tons of favorites that change all the time. "I like so many types of art that it's hard for me to narrow it down", she explains. "But I have said I want to name my daughter Lynette after Lynette Yriadom-Boakye, who is an incredible painter. The father of contemporary art to me is Manet, and I think she is Manet. Her paintings move me as much as Manet's paintings move me."

For now, Lolita plans to keep on doing what she's doing, with The Wing opening new locations seemingly all the time – they even have their first international space opening in London in September. "The one thing that's hard sometimes is to work with that many artists", she says,

"Because as I say, I do fall in love with one, and then can really connect with another one. And you have ideas that are separate from the hyper-production that it's [the art world has] been." That said, she is eager to focus on her own projects outside of The Wing too. "At some point I'd like to prioritize those solo, more intellectually driven shows", she admits. "With some of the artists that I've been working with." But, whatever comes next, Lolita's drive and passion to champion so many artists has led us to make sure that we'll be watching from front row seats.