

From Craft to Code and Back Again: Rethinking Art, Materiality and Exhibition Practices in the 21st Century

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Interests: time-based media; curatorial discourse; spatial politics; symbiotic systems; interdisciplinary collaboration



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Special Issue Information

Dear Colleagues,

This Special Issue invites contributions that critically examine how exhibition practices are navigating the shifting space of materiality in an age defined by digital technology, algorithmic culture, and increasing socio-political instability. As immersive environments, machine learning, and generative AI become increasingly embedded in artistic and curatorial processes, we ask: what does it mean to create with and through matter today? How does this converse and critically interact with tools and platforms that are deeply entangled with extractive, corporate-military infrastructures and ideologies? Can the resurgence of craft, with its emphasis on process and embodied friction, be seen as an antipode to the automated solutions offered by machine-learning tools?

We are particularly interested in scholarship and practice-based research that interrogates the ethics of working with digital technologies at a time when major tech corporations (often aligned with authoritarian, anti-democratic ideologies) continue to abandon commitments to equality, diversity, and social justice. In the wake of increasing far-right influence within AI development and the growing militarisation of digital infrastructures, this Special Issue calls for contributions that do not treat technologies as neutral tools, but as politically charged agents with real-world implications for labour, the environment, and human rights.

Moving beyond simplistic binaries of digital versus physical, virtual versus real, or code versus craft, we invite authors to explore the creative possibilities and responsibilities that emerge in this complex territory. What forms of resistance, renewal, or reinvention

are possible within the curatorial field when technological tools are themselves implicated in canonical structures of oppression? How might the act of creation and exhibition become a space to critically reclaim, reimagine, or subvert technological engagement through materiality and care?

We seek contributions that may address, but are not limited to, the following themes:

- Curatorial methodologies that foreground material engagement and embodied knowledge;
- Hybrid exhibition formats that negotiate the tensions between virtual tools and physical practices;
- Critical responses to the politics of AI, generative media, and data extraction in creative practices;
- Case studies of exhibitions and/or artworks (such as sketches, drawings, comic strips, prints, and other material forms) that interrogate or reimagine the aesthetics and politics of algorithmic culture;
- Theoretical reflections on the entanglements of craft, code, and curatorial labour;
- New readings of materiality in response to ecological degradation, political violence, or social precarity;
- Curatorial strategies that engage with DIY, speculative design, or anti-corporate approaches to technology.

By foregrounding the renewed urgency of material practices and the ethics of technological engagement, this Special Issue offers a platform for reflecting on how exhibition practices are evolving at the intersection of matter, machine, and critical resistance.

We request that, prior to submitting a manuscript, interested authors initially submit a proposed title and an abstract of 200 words summarising their intended contribution. Please send it to the Guest Editors (e.papadaki@gre.ac.uk and erd46@cam.ac.uk) by 15th July 2025. Abstracts will be reviewed by the Guest Editors for the purposes of ensuring proper fit within the scope of the Special Issue.

The abstract submission deadline for this special issue has expired. Full manuscripts are due on 30 October 2025 and will undergo double-blind peer review.

Dr. Elena Papadaki

Dr. Eleanor Dare

Guest Editors

Manuscript Submission Information

Manuscripts should be submitted online at www.mdpi.com by [registering](#) and [logging in to this website](#). Once you are registered, [click here to go to the submission form](#). Manuscripts can be submitted until the deadline. All submissions that pass pre-check are peer-reviewed. Accepted papers will be published continuously in the journal (as soon as accepted) and will be listed together on the special issue website. Research articles, review articles as well as short communications are invited. For planned papers, a title and short abstract (about 250 words) can be sent to the Editorial Office for assessment.

Submitted manuscripts should not have been published previously, nor be under consideration for publication elsewhere (except conference proceedings papers). All manuscripts are thoroughly refereed through a double-blind peer-review process. A guide for authors and other relevant information for submission of manuscripts is available on the [Instructions for Authors](#) page. *Arts* is an international peer-reviewed open access monthly journal published by MDPI.

Please visit the [Instructions for Authors](#) page before submitting a manuscript. The [Article Processing Charge \(APC\)](#) for publication in this [open access](#) journal is 1400 CHF (Swiss Francs). Submitted papers should be well formatted and use good English. Authors may use MDPI's [English editing service](#) prior to publication or during author revisions.

Keywords

- exhibition practices
- materiality
- physical/virtual environments
- curating
- symbiotic networks
- contemporary creative practices
- new technologies
- curating
- visual communication