

# A new approach to space and time to design an alternative curatorial residency experience

CIMAM, the **International Committee of Museums and Collections of Modern Art**, in collaboration with **OCA — Office for Contemporary Art of Norway**, has successfully concluded the first ***StayHome Online Curatorial Residency*** program blazing the trail to a new residency format focused on fostering slow-thinking, enjoyable-reasoning, and strong-connectivity.

In November 2020, CIMAM and OCA launched an unprecedented curatorial residency project, in an exclusively online format, to adapt and add value to the **CIMAM Travel Grant Program**, given the new virtual scenario to which the Covid-19 pandemic has led us.

CIMAM's Travel Grant program is designed to **foster cooperation and cultural exchange** between contemporary art curators and museum directors in emerging contexts and developing economies. With the *StayHome Curatorial Residency*, **CIMAM and OCA have leveraged this new virtual environment's opportunities to transform it into an online residency** to support the curatorial and research development of contemporary art professionals residing in Norway, prioritizing professionals with Sámi or diaspora background.

This pioneering twenty-day online residency has been organized with the mentorship of three CIMAM Board Members, **Małgorzata Ludwisiak**, independent art critic, curator, Ph.D., **Saskia Bos**, art historian and curator, and **Agustín Pérez Rubio**, curator, 11th Berlin Biennale. They have focused on supporting, respectively, the development of the curatorial and research work of three grantees, **Nicole Rafiki**, artist and curator, **Inger Emilie Solheim**, artist, writer and curator, and **Susanne Hætta**, author, artist, and photographer, expanding their network of contacts and thus their vision of the project towards a more international and not so local scene.

## Projects, work processes, and testimonials of this experience

**Susanne Hætta** is an established photographer who is now researching historical Sámi photographic practice and emerging as a curator. She curated her first exhibition, 'ležamet', in 2020. Her ongoing research project was focused on early Sámi photographers with practices before 1975. The working process with her mentor Agustín Pérez Rubio, led to questions such as "Who were the Sámi photographers in the 1880s, 1920s, 1940s and

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1960s?” “How would a Sámi woman photograph her environment? What would she photograph if she had a camera?”

In Hætta's words: “The residency's professional outcome has been like ducking beneath the surface underneath an iceberg, glimpsing what lies beneath.” Susanne Hætta is truly grateful for this grant and will continue this work for the benefit of Sámi communities, future researchers, and future photographers and artists.

Her mentor **Agustín Pérez-Rubio**, comments on this experience: “The StayHome Curatorial Online Residency initiative has not been designed as a lesson from a tutor to a student but has been proposed **as a one-to-one relationship between colleagues who can help each other**, each from their own experience. In this sense, it has been essential to have an understanding of who the person is and the project you are addressing to help with advice, bibliography, and ideas to frame and promote it. This exchange has been very gratifying because I have also been the one who has learned and **enriched my knowledge in the field of Indigenous discourses**, in this case, Sámi.

However, the relationship that CIMAM and OCA have consolidated through this online residency goes far beyond the period itself, and I am sure that it has strengthened a professional relationship of colleagues for the future.”

**Nicole Rafiki's** ongoing collective project evolves around the 10 year commemoration of the 22 July twin terrorist attacks in Norway. Her curatorial project aimed to explore the concept of art as a tool for preservation and healing, and how these healing effects could be applied to the benefit of larger groups of society that have been routinely excluded.

Through conversations with her mentor, Małgorzata Ludwisiak, several insights emerged, such as **the current paradoxical situation of the upper-middle class in the Western Hemisphere facing issues once reserved for low-income citizens of the Global South**.

Nicole Rafiki highlights the support of her mentor, saying “she helped me define thoughts about the project on a practical level, but also my long term goals specifically. Exploring the curative or therapeutic aspect of art is a lifelong commitment”. Rafiki wants to continue **exploring how art can create multiple solutions to solve different issues in a society that needs to develop new patterns for an effective and sustainable cohabitation** of diverse communities with numerous and complex problems.

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In her experience as a mentor, **Małgorzata Ludwisiak** states: “Nicole Rafiki proposes a very original, hybrid approach to curating and artistic practice. Being herself Norwegian of Congolese descent, she coins this cross-culture background into an exceptional methodology using the therapeutic aspect of art. ‘Society needs therapy’ – as she said – pointing at both: **the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd, Black Lives Matter and anti-racist global protests on one hand, and a trauma after shootings in Oslo and on Utøya island on 22 July 2011**, which is still very vivid and not reworked. Her most recent, long-term project Good Mourning addresses these traumas, grief, and mourning, which are being dealt with within a series of workshops, blurring the boundaries of artist-public-artwork and melting these notions into a hybrid, performative community experience. For me personally, collaborating with Nicole during her residency was a very energetic experience. Her curatorial and artistic practice – of a non-object-oriented, performative, affective, and community-centered artistic practice – might deliver important tools and methodology to rethink or even transform the institutional model as we know.”

**Inger Emilie Solheim** has had several roles in the art scene in northern Norway since she moved back to the north in 2010. She focused her research on decolonization, dealing with political injustice, environmental issues, and focusing on the North. Her artistic practice diverse between creating her own art, writing texts and contributing to the art community in her hometown Alta by curating for the local art association. With her mentor Saskia Bos **they discussed materiality and methods, reflecting on the underlying concept and how material and concept work together**. These reflections helped shape the concept of her upcoming exhibition in Iceland, a duo exhibition, and an environmentally-themed performance. Inger Emilie recognizes that this opportunity “it has bettered my professional career by making me more focused. It has made me even more aware of the relation between the materiality and the concept. It has helped me formulate the texts, making me more discriminate in the choosing of words, making me less pretentious.”

The view of her mentor, **Saskia Bos**, on this initiative: “it has been a welcome experience to take part in the first series of on-line curatorial residency sessions offered by CIMAM in collaboration with OCA.

To counsel and mentor an artist/curator online is different from teaching, and also quite different from curating, as the digital contact with the mentor is somewhat more text-based. Yet, that has its advantages because of the time that can be spent to better understand one another, which, given the geographical and cultural distance is essential.

**The hybridity of what we too often call identity gets even more complex when an artist hesitates to ‘belong’ and prefers to reflect on the concept of hybridity itself, in this case finding herself in between Finnmark, Northern Norway, and Sámi people.**

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The idea of looking into her cultural heritage as well as defining a wider cultural 'territory', opened up new perspectives for me, as well as it did for her, as she disclosed. Also, an artist translates this into visual and evocative vocabularies, rather than into texts.

Her focus on nature in times of climate change connects her locally-based experience to the rest of our world.”

### OCA concludes:

“We in OCA are delighted with the process and outcomes of the Stay Home Online Curatorial Residency as it has served to further significantly the curatorial practices of three emerging peers through generous dialogues with their mentors. The grantees have shown in this process that their ideas are not only welcome but needed to strengthen and expand the curatorial field in Norway, and that these ideas can also reverberate internationally. Furthermore, the grantees have established dialogues with their mentors which will continue into the future, as they build a relationship on a peer-to-peer basis. It has been a success, we could not hope for more, and we look forward to the future potential this project brings.”

CIMAM and OCA have appreciated the **grantees' great potential to influence the institutional art scene**, proposing interesting perspectives to the contemporary art industry. As part of the award, Susanne, Nicole and Inger have **become CIMAM Members**. Together with the mentors, they look forward to following the evolution of these projects closely, to finally meet in person at the next edition of **CIMAM's 2021 Annual Conference**, to be held next November in Lodz and Gdansk, Poland.

### About Office for Contemporary Art Norway (OCA)

The Office for Contemporary Art Norway (OCA) is a non-profit foundation created by the Norwegian Ministries of Culture and of Foreign Affairs in 2001. Its principle aim is to foster dialogue between art practitioners in Norway, including Sápmi, and the international arts scene, and support artists based in Norway in their activities around the world. As a result, OCA's discursive, exhibition, publication, residency and visitor programmes focus on bringing to Norway the plurality of practices and histories at the forefront of international artistic debates, as much as they are concerned with actively participating in such debates nationally and internationally. OCA has been responsible for Norway's contribution to the visual arts section of La Biennale di Venezia since 2001. In the forthcoming 2022 edition the Nordic Pavilion will be transformed into the Sámi Pavilion featuring artists from all sides of the Nordic nation state borders that divide Sápmi.

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### **About CIMAM – International Committee of Museums and Collections of Modern Art**

Founded in 1962, CIMAM's vision is a world where the contribution of museums, collections, and archives of modern and contemporary art to the cultural, social, and economic wellbeing of society is recognized and respected. Its mission is to foster a global network of museums and museum professionals to respond to the evolving needs of modern and contemporary art institutions, taking a leadership role on issues of concern by generating new and unpublished work that anticipates questions reflecting on the needs of the profession.

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