



"IT IS THIS INQUISITIVE NATURE THAT MAKES MARSH SUCH AN EXTRAORDINARY CURATORIAL MIND"

It was during her teenage work experience, while stuffing envelopes at the Royal Academy, Antonia realised that if she wanted any interaction with artists the only role for her would be as curator. Her tenacity to succeed is palpable. She shares a story from studying a BA in Art History at Bristol University: "Everyone on the course had this joke that all art history girls ended up working in media. I remember thinking 'no way! I have to do this' - I had a real fire under my bum. There were about forty-five students on the course, only three of them boys, I think out of all of us, only me and one other woman now work in the arts. After I graduated I went to work at a gallery called 20 Hoxton Square Projects, owned by Alex Dellal." Antonia's honesty and lack of pretention around contemporary art is inspiring. Reflecting on her time at 20 Hoxton Square she realised she struggled to harness the terminology needed to discuss contemporary art, which led her to rectify this by applying to her master's course. "I got on the plane clutching a book with Damien Hirst's Shark on the cover, called 50 Contemporary Artists You Must Know, or something like that! I thought, 'right I am leaving this country, this is my chance to go and see something else.'"

It is this inquisitive nature that makes Marsh such an extraordinary curatorial mind. Upon completing her master's, the late Leigh Markopoloulos, revered art critic and chair of the Curatorial Practice programme Antonia studied, advised her that instead of securing a job she should find her voice through practice. Antonia has followed this advice to the letter: to date she has staged over thirty exhibitions in bars, toilets, shower cubicles, tube stations, restaurants, and galleries. The majority of these exhibitions are themed around things we can relate to: food, sex, the body. "It was very instinctive and a madly productive time in the years after I graduated. I did as many shows as I could to figure 'it' out. The concepts underpinning them were instinctive. For example, I really care about young women in the arts so that's why I started a residency programme called Girls Only. The shows were quick because I wanted people to realise that things can be done at a really fast pace and on a budget. The themes were also innate. We're not talking about sex, there's so much sex in art, why aren't we putting all of this together? Food too." Antonia's reactionary and fearless nature has resulted in some of the most exciting contemporary exhibitions of the past five years, enabled by her commitment to bringing names together that help her to capture the zeitgeist. "Ed Fornieles, who I worked with early in my career, told me he was interested in the moment when something is just past cool, as he feels that is when it's most relevant.

That's really stuck with me, it really resonates."

The artists Antonia works with are fiercely contemporary and the connections she is fostering now will last a lifetime as her gallery and curatorial career grows alongside theirs. Describing one relationship with hushed tones, caveating that the artist wouldn't want the stories behind their work to enter print, it becomes apparent that Antonia is able to draw out these tales, and that it is her gift to help share them with the world. In turn, her guidance and support changes the course of the work she is showing: "With one of my artists I went on a studio visit ahead of the show and I said 'That's too much, you don't need everything. What happened to the idea you had before? Where's that gone? I loved that direction'. I could feel resistance on the studio visit, but then months later he thanked me, saying that he'd made his best work ever because I had asked where one element had gone. I work on instinct in my curatorial work, which is the opposite to my personal life where I overthink everything. Curating almost offers relief from that. I hope that when people come and see a show they're not going to overthink it, they've got to get it immediately."

There is a beauty in the unconscious and genuine nature in which Antonia operates. I look around The French House, where we have decamped for the after party of the Go opening. Antonia mingles with her guests checking that everyone is ok and has a drink, ensuring so and so has met so and so. I think how she resembles a modern-day Peggy Guggenheim. I also see similarities in the ways she and Isabella Blow are able to discover and nurture, bringing together amazing contemporary voices, from all different fields, and cultivating conversations.

While writing this, I text Antonia to ask for some more details about a dinner she has mentioned she is planning to host at her home during Frieze. Staccato messages pop through in return:

- "Flowers by William Farr."
- "Chairs and cutlery by James Shaw."
- "It is with Claire de Rouen, books all over the tables."
- "Food Rochelle Canteen."
- "I will rehang the art by Soft Opening artists."
- "Set design by Derek Hardie-Martin."
- "I am still looking for an accordion player."
- "Save the date."