

Faculty Relations

a compassionate-trickster exploration
of the social space shared by minted
members of the academic institution of art

by Salty Xi Jie Ng with faculty & staff
at College of Visual & Performing Arts,
University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth

What does the academic institution of art look like?

How do coworkers relate to each other?

What do they care about?

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Booklet designed by Salty Xi Jie Ng in 2021

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Heartfelt thanks to all faculty and staff who gamely participated in, helped with and warmly supported this project, notably Thomas Stubblefield, Lawrence Jenkins, Andrea M Fernandes, Anthony Fisher, Viera Levitt, Stacy Latt Savage, and Laura Franz.

Salty Xi Jie Ng (b. 1987, Singapore) co-creates semi-fictional paradigms for the real and imagined lives of humans within the poetics of the intimate vernacular. Often playing with relational possibilities, her interdisciplinary work proposes a collective re-imagining through humour, care, subversion, play, discomfort, a celebration of the eccentric, and a commitment to the deeply personal. *saltythunder.net*

P r e f a c e

This exploration began when I sat in on an impassioned faculty meeting (no meeting minutes were taken) and wrote down quotes that were emotional, personal, or referenced the social space. Using those quotes, I made a poem—the start of a series entitled Meeting Minutes that went naughtily into faculty mailboxes in printed slips. Positive responses received included someone delightfully sharing that someone else was guessing, through the poem-as-fragmented-record, who had said what during the meeting. Some other person said it felt like a mirror had been held up to the community. There were little smiles. Although I welcomed them, I suspect hesitant or averse reactions were not shared. Each Meeting Minute poem took courage to make by sitting in on meetings where I felt mildly intrusive and out of place, despite being encouraged by a few allies. I tried my best to make sure people were okay with being quoted anonymously. It was thrilling when someone would say, Salty better not write this down, or, let's see what Salty makes of this.

I envisioned this project to end with a faculty/staff hangout where folks could curate music, share food, and I would perform with the poems (see Score for an art faculty/staff hangout, page 26). When the pandemic hit, this inquiry necessarily morphed—the Exquisite Corpse poems are a tender, Covid-timed foray into inner worlds; Associate Professor Anthony Fisher and Gallery Director Viera Levitt contribute reflections on their mesmerizing (and distracting?) creative practices during meetings, which function like imprints of a social space processed through members' particular acts.

As the Artist-in-Residence of the art and design faculty, it felt important to create a project responding to the social context—in this case, the relational space shared by faculty and staff within the art academia universe they make their professional lives in. It was also my way of bringing those who provide and administer art education into the art itself, creating a reverse reflection that can hopefully create more questions about higher education and the real people in that sometimes distanced, elite circle.

With immense gratitude to all CVPA faculty and staff,
Salty Xi Jie Ng
Artist-In-Residence 2019-20
College of Visual and Performing Arts
University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth

Foreword

Throughout the four-year history of the New Directions artist in residence program, the College of Visual and Performing Arts at UMass Dartmouth has called upon social practice artists to re-imagine the relationship between the campus and the surrounding community. Though each artist developed unique strategies to accomplish this goal, the recurring thread of their work has been a commitment to collaboration. In identifying shared needs, pooling resources and acknowledging the value of the varied experiences and expertise of participants, these projects abandoned traditional hierarchies between artist and audience and in the process pushed against the boundaries of the university. While the ephemera left behind from these encounters can still be found in the hallways of the Star Store and CVPA building, it is the relationships that were fostered through these interventions that serve as the legacy of these first four years of the program.

It is for these reasons that arrival of the pandemic in Spring of 2020 presented such a monumental challenge to Salty, our artist in residence at the time. While community engagement in a strict sense may have proved impossible, Salty nonetheless called upon adapted strategies of engagement such as exquisite corpse and non-traditional forms of documentary to preserve the spirit of the program while turning to academia itself as her collaborative partner. The result is a publication that acts as both an indirect snapshot of faculty life and a historical record that bears witness to the extraordinary interruption to daily life that the pandemic posed. Though only a small part of her work, readers will nonetheless find in this book glimpses of Salty's creative spirit and the inquisitiveness that drives her process even as the artist attempts to disappear within its pages. We are eternally grateful for her presence during the 2019-2021 academic year and the many contributions she made to our community during this extraordinary time.

Thomas Stubblefield
Associate Dean
College of Visual and Performing Arts
University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth

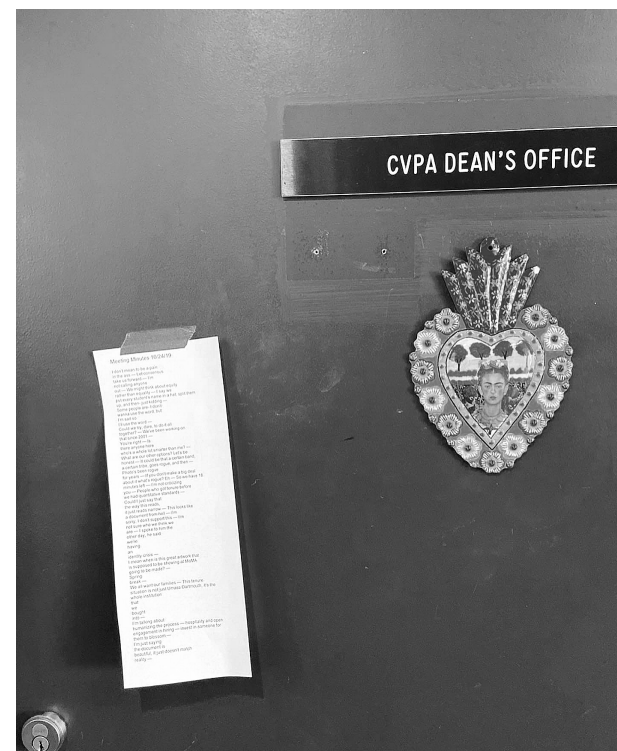


Meeting Minutes 10/24/19

I don't mean to be a pain
in the ass — Let consensus
take us forward — I'm
not calling anyone
out — We might think about equity
rather than equality — I say we
put every student's name in a hat, split them
up, and then- just kidding —
Some people are- I don't
wanna use the word, but
I'm sad so
I'll use the word —
Could we try, dare, to do it all
together? — We've been working on
that since 2001 —
You're right — Is
there anyone here
who's a whole lot smarter than me? —
What are our other options? Let's be
honest — It could be that a certain band,
a certain tribe, goes rogue, and then —
Photo's been rogue
for years — If you don't make a big deal
about it what's rogue? Eh — So we have 18
minutes left — I'm not criticizing
you — People who got tenure before

we had quantitative standards —
Could I just say that
the way this reads,
it just reads narrow — This looks like
a document from hell — I'm
sorry, I don't support this — I'm
not sure who we think we
are — I spoke to him the
other day, he said
we're
having
an
identity crisis —
I mean when is this great artwork that
is supposed to be showing at MoMA
going to be made? —
Spring
break —
We all want our families — This tenure
situation is not just Umass Dartmouth, it's the
whole institution
that
we
bought
into —
I'm talking about
humanizing the process — hospitality and open
engagement in hiring — invest in someone for
them to blossom —

I'm just saying
the document is
beautiful, it just doesn't match
reality —
We just keep fighting for it —
I don't know what
to do — Well I have done all
three, and it eats
you up — I don't know
if our intention to look at the whole
human matches the rhetoric of
institutions these days — This document does
assiduously avoid numbers — For those of
you who don't know, I didn't
get tenure.
I did not
get tenure.
The first time I
applied — I'm sorry
that happened to
you and I was right
there with you — It was the worst year of
my life — We don't wanna be judging
ourselves this way — It feels
terrible — So, where do we go from
here?



Meeting Minutes 11/21/19

I.
We're missing a leg

All in favour

Opposed

Abstain

II.
I say fuck all the time and I don't
want the administration knowing— Actually
I only say it twice a semester

We're broken hearted by this
would make unanimous decisions
would talk it out
That was our strength

Morale

Reasonable living

Collide

The next thing I know, I've been
going from 8am to 5pm with
nothing in between

Woohoo!

I agree. I agree

too. I

agree too. How

and why. How and

why.

III.

There's also good news which I found out about yesterday: "Everybody's jealous of CVPA" — I didn't have to hide anything. I used to be so embarrassed and I'm not anymore,

I

feel

great

For bad news as of right now I'm allowed to tell you that — Enjoy the cookies — It's fine — It's fine, you've already reviewed — It's down to nine pages everyone.

Pretty

remarkable

Thorny

before

It says, faculty has met performance listed in column C. We should collectively agree

This is who

we are. We are

not checking boxes.

This is a

roadmap. They're

not absolutes.

Thank you so much for the extra time you put in it It would be nice to get it over with and vote One of the ways to find out if this document's any good is to use it My brain doesn't work very well right now You only need to be very good in either teaching or scholarship and excellent in the other I mean if we really wanted to be kind to ourselves It's idiosyncratic

It

belongs

to

you

Meeting Minutes 12/5/19

(raises arms and whoops)

(hits table emphatically three times)

(chews gum, blows white bubble)

(draws a steaming cup of tea
with a calligraphy pen)

(matching colors of wine red, bark
brown, sky blue)

(middle finger gently crosses over
index, uncrosses, crosses, uncrosses,
rests half-crossed)

(with teal gray mechanical pencil, traces six
two-inch lines using notebook spine as ruler)

(stares at phone screen wallpaper for
three seconds)

(gets teary)

(throws out a coin)

We should have her flip the coin

I knew we'd get complicated

Whatever spot design doesn't take, we can
split into two spaces 'cause we're used to crap
lighting anyway

Will you people please get out of your silos?

As a therapist once said to me, fair is not
always equal

Sometimes fair is fair

So are we still going to flip the coin?

This is funny

Salty's gonna make a really good
poem about this

faculty
& staff
exquisite
corpse
poems

When the pandemic hit the US in March 2020, everyone started working from home, and I (Salty Xi Jie Ng) abruptly left for my home country of Singapore. This project had to shift; it felt important to respond to the pandemic in some way, and to connect faculty and staff across lockdown as they slogged away at online learning. Faculty and staff were invited to partake in an exquisite corpse writing exercise via email, which several took to enthusiastically.

They were prompted to write two lines of reflections/thoughts/feelings on anything from the Coronavirus, quarantines, academia in this time, distance learning, and home life. The second line was passed to the next person to inspire their two-line response, and each collective poem would roll on in this manner until it didn't.

1/4

The sun gently warms empty playgrounds,
Spring flowers open to no audience...
Best friend on screen- not live
Those not that close- still missed
Truth is shame and science leaden
Hold dear the slippery things
Yowled jeer, "the betwichey Ducklings,"
"Yo, where does this part fit, man?"
There are clearly many emotional stages to quarantine.
I wonder which comes next?
Although I think the sun might completely control my optimism.
Though 0101101001s resonate 'round the greening orb in a tocktick,
that new sphere - like an orange studded with cloves at Christmas -
Unconsciously sensing all that is familiar is a possible breach
A cloud of robot molecules swarming like gnats on a hot day
Streaming in silence and Zooming in digital;
How long will I be on mute?

By Alan Thompson, Anthony Fisher, Charlotte Hamlin,
Jessica Fernandes Gomes, Lawrence Jenkins, Paula
Medeiros, Ronald Sherwin, and Shingo Furukawa

2/4

Anomie, unmoored in a place and time, isolated globe--drifting
Clicking, Zooming, eating, CNN— remote world,
—archiving and ordering my small world
I move around these quarters like captain of a barkentine,
Through the yaws and swells the bulkheads hold me, forward we go.
Gulls yap their urgent warnings under a daylight moon
The winds race as the years dawdle on, too familiar to know

By Bruce Maddocks, James Lawton, and Janine Wong

3/4

Greybrownbronze pushed aside.
Birdsong, yellow trumpets, palebright baby leaves.
A green lattice lawn chair sits upon early spring grass
The tiny chirp in the floor as I walk by
The anxious thunder of heels down the stairs
Stop short to eat another mini waffle
Artistic works endure, recent works promise, tragic stories die
Morning — cloudless, windless, appearing, waking, crashing ...
will it always be this way?
Twenty-four hours that hold what feel like hundreds.
And here are the things I've most appreciated in this time:
My sourdough starter, my pet, my hungry friend
Spreading exponentially but without fear
Finding pleasure in the little things: reconnecting with friends
With ourselves, as days and nights bleed one into another
Taking deep, cleansing, refreshing breaths
And making yet another trip to the freezer for more ice cream
And piled on Spoons of Goey Chocolate Fudge.
Back to the fridge, for some whipped cream and a cherry.
That fridge has seen way more of me than usual.:)
Another resolution gone to shit.

By Andrea M Fernandes, Charlotte Hamlin, James Lawton,
Jason Loete, Laura Franz, Rebecca Uchill, Ross Schlemmer,
Susan Costa, Suzanne Schireson, and Viera Levitt

4/4

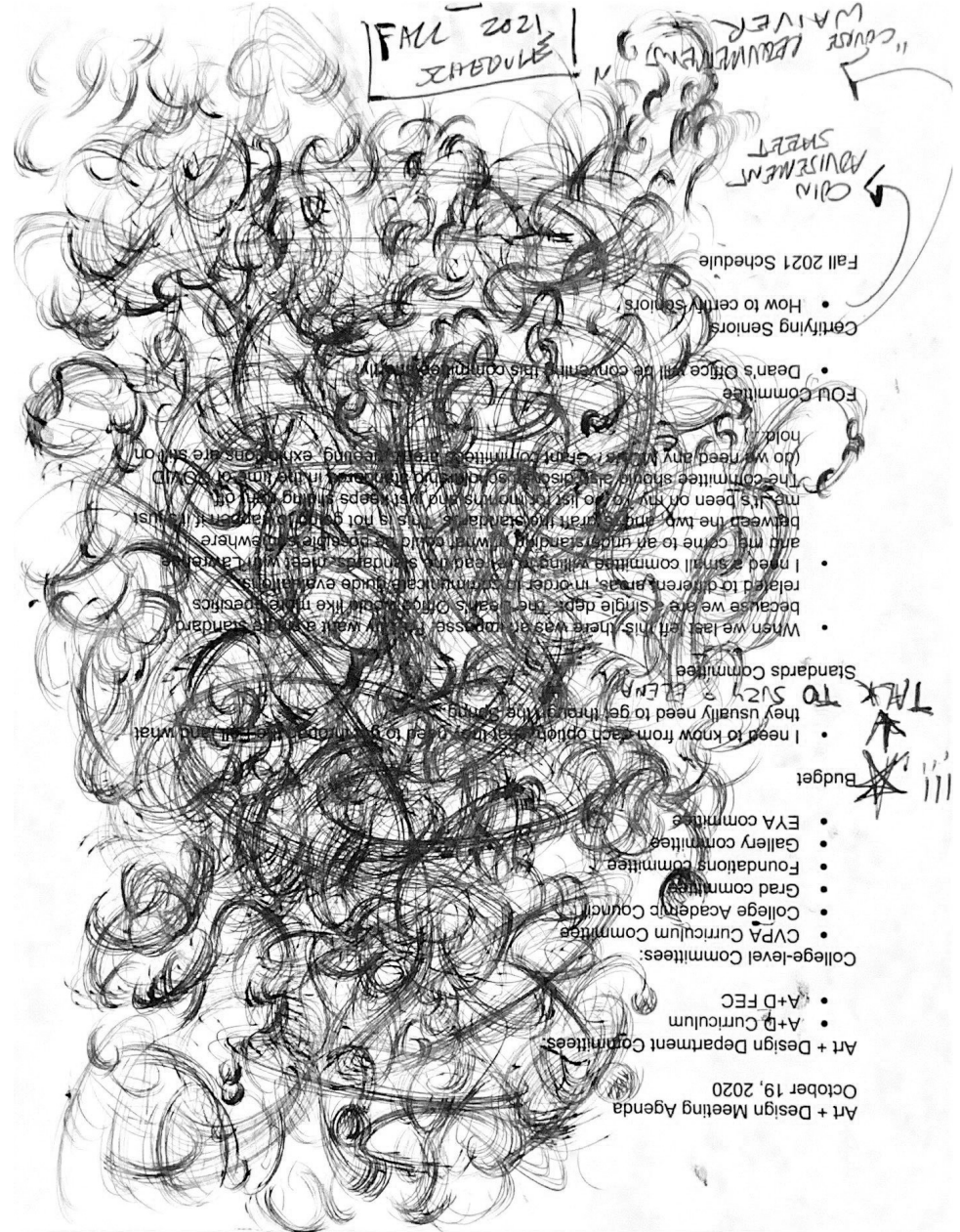
Oheless, sshellhope, lessshope, hopeless, hawpless, hapless, hopeless.
Now is the time for every communard to begin drafting plans for the
nucleus of a new society.
Nuclides nicely knitting nocturnal neurosis.
Navigating natural nuisance negating nurture.
The tangle twists and turns, fading in the shadows of the evening.
A sunny day, a breath of light.

By Aaron Bourque, Elena Peteva, and Travis Neel

“Faculty meetings are once a month in the late afternoon when everyone’s done teaching for the day. Most faculty are cordial and considerate but not entirely alert after the long slog. These meetings seldom quicken one’s pulse but I still need to transmute nervous energy somehow, so I compulsively scribble. I usually scribble on the meeting’s agenda sheet with hundreds of random, interconnected ellipses at a frantic pace. Ellipses are my favorite shape to draw... it’s a simple and wonderful pleasure to quickly create depth and space on a flat piece of paper. An elemental exercise that I still consider some kind of magic. I burden my studio work with a lot of hopes, desires, ideas but probably really paint and draw for the simple miracle of creating illusion. I never keep these meeting scribbles but happily found this one as an example.”

Anthony Fisher

Associate Professor, Art & Design,
University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth





*College Retreat Hat
January 16, 2020,
9am-4:00pm*

“I like to do something with my hands during the meetings. Knitting seems to be the most therapeutic activity to accompany the faculty meetings. A tangible result of the time passed, it creates a sense of accomplishment in its physical manifestation. It also seems to channel some ancient feminine instinct to create something out of nothing, as I see on the faces of my colleagues watching me work—as if the final product was a manifestation of the collective wish for comfort created through this meditative, repetitive activity.”

Viera Levitt

Gallery Director
University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth

*Staff Meeting and
Mandatory All-College
Meeting Hat
March 4 2020, 10:30-
11:30am & March 5,
2020, 5:15-6:30pm*



*Staff Meeting
Mandalas for the Yarn
Bombing Project
April 1 2020, 10:30-
11:30am, Zoom*



Score for an art faculty/staff hangout*

by Salty Xi Jie Ng

(*pre-pandemic, please make own pandemic adjustments)

Book sterile meeting room on campus. Rearrange chairs in several circles, put tables mostly away. Decorate room with fairy lights and streamers. See if a few faculty/staff will make cookies, snacks and drinks. Label each with the name of the person who made them. Gather images of personal creative work from faculty/staff to make a slideshow.

Invite faculty/staff at a reasonable timing to socialise with their coworkers. Expect most to be too busy, not interested, or too shy. Ask each person who arrives to add to a collective playlist of favourite party songs.

Let them mingle, relax and eat for a while, as the slideshow runs with the collective playlist.

Ask everyone if they will each speak for a minute about their art practice or any creative practice in their lives that their coworkers probably don't know too much about. When that is done, ask everyone to describe a creative project that they dream of accomplishing while entrenched in their academic lives/jobs.

See if anyone wants to dance.

This is what the
academic institution of art
looks like sometimes.

#tenure #artprofessor
#artacademia
#artadmin #coworkers
#covid #lockdown
#homebasedlearning

