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2020-05-25

Arts management

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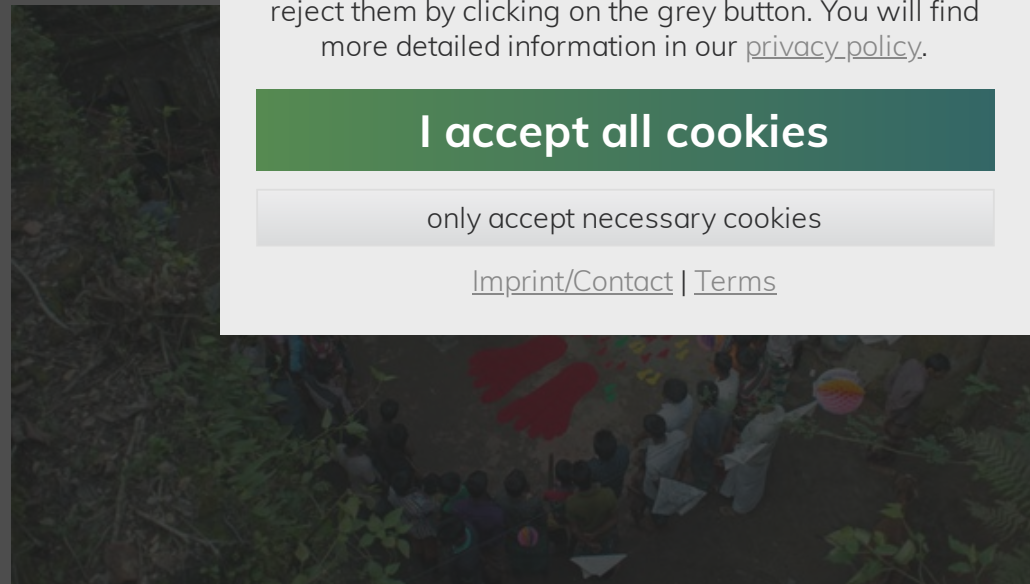


### Authors



#### Sadya Mizan

is an independent curator and researcher from Bangladesh. She is the founder and director of the URONTO Artists Community (2012) and one of the founding trustee of Art Initiatives BD (AIB). She has



Performative work by Indian artist Abhimanyu Dalui at Uronto residential art exchange program 7th episode. © urontoarchive

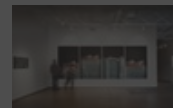
Italian actor, artist and cultural entrepreneur Giovanni Morassutti and Bangladeshi curator and researcher Sadya Mizan have been collaborating in 2019 in the

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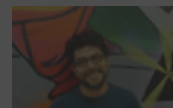


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been collaborating with several art spaces and collectives in Europe and in the US including International art residency Art Aia - Creatives / In / Residence.

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#### **Giovanni Enrico Morassutti**

is an Italian actor, director, artist and cultural entrepreneur based in Berlin. He is the founder of the international art residency Art Aia - Creatives / In / Residence and the project space Art Aia - La Dolce Berlin where he hosts artists from over the world. Giovanni has been on the selection board of the Uronto Residential Art Exchange Program in 2019.

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International project Uronto - an Artist-Led Open Collective in Bangladesh with a residential exchange program. In the following interview, they share its outcomes for international arts management, curatorship, cooperation, and similarities and differences between art practices in the Western and the non-Western world.

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#### **Sadya: What is your understanding of the intersection of curation and arts management in the European context?**

Giovanni: I have the feeling that curatorship in Europe is becoming more and more an academic field confined to institutional settings. The problem is that the process tends to be very analytical, requiring to apply the knowledge of contemporary art theories, mainly connected to criticism of visual art forms. This can lack a more intuitive interpretation of artworks, which in my opinion would allow a better understanding of the artistic process. I also believe that it is important to integrate the knowledge of different disciplines in the development of creative communication between art and society, as well as it is fundamental to learn how to communicate with the audience. In terms of arts management, I see, especially in Berlin, many people and art collectives inventing and testing new formats. Many project spaces, including my pop-up gallery Art Aia - La Dolce Berlin, are interested in opening up intellectual borders between different cultures by independently managed residency programs and cultural exchanges. The intersection happens when there is an interest in interpreting art production in a wider context.

Sadya: I completely understand the consequences of the academic process focusing too much into art history and feeding art critics while ignoring the need for interactive communication. In Bangladesh, on the other hand, there is only a very poor presence of curatorial practice, no curators in art infrastructures, no curatorial studies in any art institute - matter of fact, we have such few numbers of such institutes at all and all of them with a classical colonized curriculum. Some of the artists with strong passion and dedication are coming in front line action as independent curators or arts managers, mostly learning by doing. I look at this also positively as a kind of freedom but in the long run we do need institutional training, not necessarily in art history but in other related segments. Especially nowadays the freedom of self-taught curatorial positions in Bangladesh is being corrupted by few practitioners to survive in the shrinking pot of opportunities ultimately contaminating the importance of a curator and arts manager.

**Giovanni: You have also been working in the USA and Europe. What is your perspective on these countries and on their ways to deal with arts management?**

Sadya: I think the USA and Europe have two different processes of dealing with arts management as they have a different range of facilities to operate. The common fact, however, is that both regions have the infrastructure to train arts managers and identify creative leaders. A well supporting financial structure gives them the privilege to hire arts managers for their projects. In Bangladesh it is mostly one person doing it all, and even if you have funding it is very difficult to find good arts managers as there are no opportunities to train or motivate possible leaders. In Western countries, if you want to start a project and if you spread the word you can expect to have professionals to reach out to you. You do not always have to spend time and money in trial and error just to figure out the strategic planning and the primary team. Arts management is a less challenging position in Western countries as it is backed with knowledge and training. This made me realize that if we had such infrastructures in Bangladesh - where we have achieved so much without any of those facilities but only with a little bit of motivation and learning programs - we could go far in the future.

I would love to work with European arts and cultural professionals more often. First of all, it is easy to get funding for them, honestly. I think Europe provides you with many opportunities to explore, adapt, and innovate. Then it allows learning about many professional aspects that I won't be learning anything about in other regions. Though in terms of creative solutions I think developing regions are more exciting to work with as they face more challenges and are forced to come up with new approaches. Working in Europe is more sustainable, for sure, but I also like the professional aspect there. When I collaborated with Art Aia - Creatives / In / Residence and with you as a co-curator for Uronto's latest project, we had very clear communication, very simple straightforward processes and approaches. In some South Asian region's professionalisms in arts management are sometimes so obsolete, this completely kills the energy and motivation. So, if I summarize, sustainability, professionalism, and clear commitments make me very much interested to work in Europe more in the future. Following that, I am interested to explore the mix of cultures due to the migrations in the region and some of the contrasting social realities through artistic investigation.

**Giovanni: How do arts and culture in Bangladesh ensure that Bangladesh is not an icon of poverty?**

Sadya: The art practice in Bangladesh is very intense and has a lot of potential. But the lack of cultural policy creates challenges for creatives to ensure a positive global identity for the country. I also believe that the poverty icon, which signifies an overpopulated country failing to provide fundamental rights to the majority of its citizens, is a diplomatic choice which a group of people is maintaining to ensure certain benefits are coming in. Additionally, it doesn't let a sustainable cultural policy grow. We have only a few private art organizations which are coming up with annual or bi-annual events. Those events bring in a large international audience to Bangladesh and create a strong global presence of Bangladeshi art and culture. But such an event also mostly focuses on commercially successful works.

The exciting practices are happening in independent initiatives and collectives who are creating their networks and promoting the real Bangladeshi art and culture globally. For example, I formed URONTO Artist Community in 2012 as an open platform for contemporary experimental exchange of artistic thoughts and also to uphold social responsibilities through art. We bring local and global artists together and take them to rural areas to co-exist and co-create. Each participating artist throughout local collaboration becomes an ambassador of the real Bangladeshi art and culture. Other collectives are also initiating international exchange, physical or online programs, seminars or art camps, mostly based on self-motivation and very limited financial sources. These activities are slowly contributing to the larger identity of the country, positioning local art scenes in reputed platforms, yet without a legal functional infrastructure it will always be a limited range of achievements.

**Sadya: How was your experience of collaborating with URONTO in 2019?**

Giovanni: It has been a real pleasure to deal with you in curating the 8th and 9th episodes of the Uronto Residential Art Exchange Program. Selecting all these interesting artists enriched my understanding of different art practices and topics. I was also very impressed by the commitment of South Asian artists, for example when hearing the artist of the Bangladeshi theater group Prachyanat stating: "...Actors had to make use of all their memories, no matter how painful or private. This made their performances genuine. Actors would come closer to knowing the truth about themselves which is an important path to self-knowledge... ". It reminded me of method acting and showed the similarities of arts practices in different parts of the world.

I was also impressed by the way you were able to manage the collaborations between all these different artists and disciplines interacting with the local community. While we were selecting the participants, we were both looking more at their dedication and commitment to creativity rather than their academic studies or achievements. I also think that you gave a possibility to them to learn organically from each other. Setting up teams with artists and curators of different disciplines to me was another learning experience about management in different sectors in a more inclusive dimensional way.



Dreamcatcher & Tapestry by Bangladeshi artist Tasmin Chowdhury at Uronto residential art exchange program.

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**Sadya: How does arts management take place in your practice, as you have also been involved in theater and films as an actor? How does it blend and benefit?**

Giovanni: I believe that my experience as an actor and a theater director helps my arts management practice since I am used to work with other people in an artistic environment. Important qualities like communication skills, confidence, intellectual curiosity, and discipline are equal in both fields, and managing or curating an art show or an art residency is kind of similar to working in a theater production or a film. As a visual artist myself I also find many benefits from my experiences as an actor as well as from

my acting training in New York. The creative process is very similar. It all starts with a vision and a dream, regardless if it is about a character, an artwork, or a project.

**Giovanni: Would you agree that huge and prominent events in Bangladesh, such as the Dhaka Art Summit are opportunities for artists to push contemporary art beyond the country's traditional notions? What is your experience with them through your practice?**

Sadya: Dhaka art Summit is organized by the Samdani Art Foundation, which was founded by the young collector couple Rajeeb and Nadia Samdani. It is a bi-annual event and the biggest art event in Bangladesh for the last eight years. The summit brings a large international crowd to Dhaka and intends to promote the contemporary art scene of Bangladesh in parallel to international practices. Though I am a bit critical about a few things about Dhaka Art Summit, as it puts more emphasis on the international art scene than on the local one and a large part of it are international works. It feels like artists make them look good to add value to their collection. The much-needed networking among local practitioners and visiting international scholars are not well-programmed, and commercial competency is prioritized in their strategic planning. The young art scene, which the international galleries and museums can't reach without local patrons, were largely missing during the first three editions of DAS.

Then, from the fourth edition on, they came up with the idea of an artist-led Initiative forum which helped include the ground-breaking young art scene into the summit. I was invited to become a member of the forum representing UROnto and participated in the 4th and 5th edition of the Summit. My experience of working with them has left me with mixed feelings. During the 4th edition, when I first exhibited at the summit, it was a very demotivating and lonely struggle. We managed to create one of the most interactive booths at the summit while dealing with a serious lack of logistics and a mal-functioning management. We shared our feedback to them and in the 5th edition they improved the logistical support and created small financial support for each collective. Their ideas and approaches are well theorized, yet a mysterious rigidness exists in many things in the local context. I want to believe that they have the good intention to promote the Bangladeshi art scene but they fail to concentrate on important details due to the scale of the event. On that note I feel that they should consider keeping it a little more concise and focus more on the interaction and mutual exchanges of local and international creatives and intellectuals to ensure the development of the local artistic practices and infrastructures.

**Giovanni: Uronto is a really international project where you host artists from all over the world. According to your experience, do South Asian artists have the same priorities as Westerns artists? And what are the main focuses and/or differences?**

Sadya: In URONTO we wanted to have local and global artists coming together, so from the beginning we designed our activity as an exchange program where the platform would allow multidisciplinary practitioners to exchange about their artistic processes and motivate each other. Also, when we started, the international networks were highly controlled by private organizations. We wanted to break free from the protocols and create a more direct network to globally explore more artists and ground level organizations with exciting works.

If I understand your question correctly you want to know if I see similar approaches in Asian and Western artistic practice, right? In that case, I would say that there is a difference between a conceptual understanding and a materialistic approach but it's not necessarily especially the South Asian or the Westerns but highly depends on the discipline. In a few disciplines, the Western practitioners are far more advanced than the South Asian one, while again the Asian practice is very strong conceptually. I never intend to compare because my core focus has been to mix and match all the skills and create something unique out of the collective effort. So, we eventually blend cultures to create an organic learning hub.

**Sadya: Which new arts management practices and topics are going to be adapted in the near future in the European context?**

Giovanni: Arts management in Europe is trying to increase participation by testing new ways to improve the access to art. The use of the internet and new media technologies facilitates audience interaction. Also, there are more and more cross-disciplinary projects experimenting with new art forms, and there is a tendency to internationalization and cross border collaborations between artists and cultural managers. Artistic practices are also exploring topics related to the acceptance of various identities and cultures which in a way are also changing the cultural landscape in Europe. I believe that the art world will expand into a broader field and intertwine more and more disciplines and cultures setting new trends within the cultural field.

Sadya: I think that's an exciting future ahead. All arts disciplines and working in the arts in general is indeed very much interconnected. That's why from the beginning of my practice I have been interested in a multi-disciplinary approach. When we say artist, we mean anyone with creative skill and that also counts for engineers, psychologists, scientists and so on. We had amazing results by incorporating such wide dimensions in artistic interventions. For example, we collaborated with a science student passionate about robotics in our first exhibition in Dhaka, who created an interaction with our audiences which we never could have reached without that little twist of science and technology. In Bangladesh, interdisciplinary collaborations are increasing and have a huge potential for cross border collaboration, too. And since we are talking about arts management, I think the most important contribution of a proper arts management training in Bangladesh would be the understanding of the relevance of creativity and creatives for society by evaluation. We are adapting a lot of ideas, we are doing a lot, but we still don't have an evaluation process to understand the efficiency of creative investments, which is very important while we are collaborating beyond borders and across cultures.

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