

The curator is like an invisible hand who frames not only the art on display, but also people's perceptions of that art. In order to keep the hand invisible, he or she must take difficult decisions and do a lot of slog work, as several Fine Arts Students recently found out.

The students were selected to curate a public exhibition in March of Austrian painters Gustav Klimt and Egon Schiele, which had been suggested by the Austrian Consulate General to the government's Arts Promotion Office. The office asked the Department of Fine Arts to participate.

"As students we have attended many exhibitions and talked a lot about how they should be created. We viewed this as a great opportunity to realise the right way of creating an exhibition," third-year student Grace Cheng said.



Ms Grace Cheng (left) and Ms Candy Leung

The students were given free rein to select from high-quality reproductions of the artists and develop their own theme, but they also had to make the exhibition understandable to the public since it would be held in the Hong Kong Visual Arts Centre. It was at this point that they began to realise the complexities of their task.

Their theme was "bodies" and the title of their exhibition was "Fantasies and Crises" to convey the undercurrents in Vienna at the turn of the 20th century – a place teeming with radical ideas, immigrants, pornography, prostitution and Victorian repression, and a place also in the firing line of a coming war. All of these things influenced Klimt and Schiele.

"We had learned this information in an academic context and it was almost like a translation exercise to make it available to the public because we had to change our language," Grace said.

They deliberately avoided a simple biographical approach because they wanted to place the work of the artists in their socio-political context.

"For example, Schiele did a double self-portrait that shows the idea of the German doppelgänger – your double – who some see as a harbinger of death. This idea was very much discussed in Vienna at the turn of the century and Freud also wrote about it. It was part of the culture at that particular time and place," she said.

This information was provided in panels and a catalogue that the students wrote for the exhibition, but their work did not stop there. They also had to attend to practicalities, such as designing the publications, setting up a website, organising publicity, overseeing the exhibition layout and setup, and attending meetings.

Candy Leung, also a third-year student, was involved in the logistics. "I learned a lot about communications and management. It is interesting to curate an exhibition but it really involves a lot of tedious work. This made me understand more about the nature of the curator's role."

"It made me think more about how influential the curator is in terms of the cultural scene," Grace added. "Especially in a place like Hong Kong where there aren't many exhibitions. Curators are more important than I had thought in bringing art into public view."

The "Fantasies and Crises" curatorial team was led by students Candy Leung and Grace Cheng with Yu Shijia, Miles Dugan and Zhu Wenqi. Their project was mentored by Dr Yeewan Koon of the Department of Fine Arts and supported by the Knowledge Exchange Fund granted by the University Grants Committee.

FUNDED KE STUDENT PROJECTS 2012-2013

Curatorial Project: **Fantasies and Crises: Works of Austrian Artists, Gustav Klimt (1862-1918) and Egon Schiele (1890-1918)**

Team Leaders: Miss Candy Leung and Ms Grace Cheng
Mentor: Dr Yeewan Koon, School of Humanities

Step Out: **The Continuation of The HKU100 Student Arts Festival**

Team Leader: Miss Danielle Chin
Mentor: Dr Robert Peckham, School of Humanities

Development of information resources for clients with genetic conditions and healthcare genetic professionals

Team Leader: Miss Alice Yau
Mentor: Dr Olga Zayts, School of English

Towards the English language enhancement of children from underprivileged families in Hong Kong

Team Leader: Miss Ho Tsz Wing
Mentor: Dr Lisa Lim, School of English

Social Recording – Preserving the tangible and intangible culture of Viva Blue House

Team Leader: Miss Chan Chor See
Mentor: Dr Mirana Szeto, School of Humanities

Pilot Field Trip for Team Leaders

Team Leader: Mr Xiao Fei
Mentor: Dr Robert Peckham, School of Humanities