

STYLE

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ILLUSTRATION: NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE

Once rarely spoken outside exhibitions, the term 'curate' has become a code word among the aesthetically minded, who seem to paste it onto any activity that involves culling and selecting

BY ALEX WILLIAMS
NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE, NEW YORK

The Tipping Point, a store in Houston that calls itself a sneaker lifestyle shop, does not just sell a collection of differently colored rubber soles, along with books, music and apparel. No, its Web site declares, the store "curates" its merchandise.

Promoters at Piano's, a nightclub in the Lower East Side neighborhood of New York City, announced on their Web site that they will "curate a night of Curious burlesque."

Eric Demby, a founder of the Brooklyn Flea swap meet, does not hire vendors to serve grilled cheese sandwiches, pickles and tamales to hungry shoppers. He "personally curates the food stands," according to *New York* magazine.

And to think, not so long ago, curators worked at museums.

In more print-centric times, the term of art was "edit" — as in, "a boutique edits its dress collections carefully." But now, among designers, disc jockeys, club promoters, bloggers and thrift-store owners, curate is code for "I have a discerning eye and great taste."

Or more to the point, "I belong."

For many who adopt the term, "it's an innocent form of self-inflation," said John McWhorter, a linguist and senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute. "You're implying that there is some similarity between what you do

and what someone with an advanced degree who works at a museum does."

Indeed, these days, serving as a guest curator of a design blog, craft fair or department store is an honor. Last month, Scott Schuman, creator of The Sartorialist, a photo blog about street fashion, was invited to curate a pop-up shop at Barneys New York.

The term "curator" was not intended to be hyperbole, said Tom Kalerian, the men's fashion director for Barneys. Consulting closely with the photographer, a former fashion retailer, the store stocked just the right items to help shoppers achieve the elegant, eclectic look The Sartorialist regularly features on its site.

"It was precisely his eye" that made the store want to partner with him, Kalerian said. "It was about the right shade of blue, about the cut, about the width of a lapel."

Curtis Macdonald, a Brooklyn, New York, musician, also says that "curate" precisely describes his job: hiring bands for a local site.

"When given the opportunity to curate an evening of music, choosing the right bands is very similar to curating a museum," Macdonald explained in an e-mail. "Since I, the 'curator,' choose personnel based on a particular aesthetic, I am able to think of creative ways of presenting music beyond the traditional 'call up

a venue and ask for a gig' way of presenting."

Indeed, invoking the word can be good for one's image and business, said Karuna Tillmon James, 30, who has a background in fine-art photography and recently opened a shop selling designer clothing in Brentwood, California. Its name: Curate Couture.

"I knew that people in the know would gravitate toward it," James said. The name signals that hers is not just another secondhand-clothing shop, she said, "selling stuff that was gross and old and had been crammed in trunks for years. It would have very specific pieces, selected purposefully."

Summon the word "curate," she added, and "people know you're going to get it."

Pretentious? Maybe. But it's hardly unusual for members of less pedigreed professions to adopt the vernacular of more prestigious ones, said Geoffrey Nunberg, a linguist at the University of California, Berkeley.

For instance, he said, the term "associate" originally tended to connote a partner or a work colleague who shared "a position of authority with another," as the *Oxford English Dictionary* puts it. The description has expanded to include employees at all levels of the organization.

In the case of curate, which the Oxford

dictionary simply defines as "to look after and preserve," its standard "museum" meaning dominated until the mid-1990s, when references to curating hotel libraries and CD-of-the-month clubs started to pop up in periodicals, said Jesse Sheidlower, a lexicographer with the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

After 2000, nontraditional usage of the word took off. And as it continues to grow in popularity, others must adopt it, too, or face the consequences. For example, if all the rival nightclub promoters are "curating" parties, Sheidlower said, you don't want to be the one left "hosting" one.

On the Web, the word — and the concept — have taken particular hold. Etsy, the shopping Web site devoted to handmade and vintage goods, routinely brings in shelter magazine editors, fashion designers and design bloggers to serve as "guest curators."

Even news-aggregator Web sites, like Tina Brown's Daily Beast, promote themselves as cultural curators.

"The Daily Beast doesn't aggregate," Brown says in a statement on the site. "It sifts, sorts and curates. We're as much about what's not there as what is."

In fact, curatorship of photos culled from Flickr pages, or of knitted scarves on Etsy,

can be an artistic pursuit in itself, said Virginia Postrel, a cultural critic and the author of *The Substance of Style*.

"Because there are more things to put together," she said, "the juxtapositions become a big part of the interesting experience of those things. It is a creative activity in itself."

The talent for choosing among countless objects is not very different from the work of collage artists — or top DJs, explained Scott Plagenhoef, the editor-in-chief of Pitchfork.

"Certainly things like structure, flow, revelation, juxtaposition and other elements of deejaying and mixing are considered an art," said Plagenhoef, who served as an unpaid "curator" for the All Tomorrow's Parties music festival in England.

And what of actual museum curators themselves? Are they offended by the democratization of their title?

"Maybe the use of 'curate' to refer to extra-museum activities is just metaphorical, akin to the way we use the word 'doctor' as a verb," Laura Hoptman, a senior curator at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York, wrote in an e-mail message.

"It doesn't really bother me," she said of the trend. "Actually, I'm hoping its popularity will spawn a reality television show."

[F A S H I O N]

Lindsay Lohan dares fashionistas to love her

All eyes were on the star of 'Herbie Fully Loaded' as she made the transition from clotheshorse to couture house muse at Emanuel Ungaro's fashion show

BY JESS CARTNER-MORLEY
THE GUARDIAN, PARIS

Once upon a time, the world was a simpler place, and the person who took a bow at the end of a catwalk show was the person who designed the clothes.

At the end of Sunday's catwalk show for the Parisian couture house Emanuel Ungaro, staged under the Louvre museum, a 23-year-old blonde and a 35-year-old brunette strode the catwalk holding hands. But all eyes and, more crucially, lenses rested on just one of them: Lindsay Lohan, the actor who is perhaps better known for her frequent stints in rehab, her multiple drink driving arrests and very public love affairs than for her work in films such as *Mean Girls* or *Freaky Friday*.

Lohan took the bow as "artistic adviser," a role defined by the Ungaro boss, Mounir Mouffarige, as being "a dancing, swinging, living doll" and "a moving advertising campaign" for the brand. Lohan herself has said she "oversees" the work of the woman who took the bow with her, Estrella Archs, 35, a veteran of the Prada, Hussein Chalayan and Nina Ricci design studios, who was appointed chief designer alongside Lohan.

Visitors to the Emanuel Ungaro studio during the hectic last days of preparations for this collection noticed that while Archs put the finishing touches to the clothes, Lohan was nowhere to be seen. Not that Lohan was neglecting her duties: she was to be found on Twitter, fulfilling her role by inviting celebrity friends such as Lily Allen to the show.

It would be too easy to dismiss Lohan as window dressing. She may not have cut patterns or pinned toiles, but her influence could be seen throughout this

collection. Whether this is a good thing is very much open to debate: there were dresses in the collection that one could all too easily believe to have been created by a designer with no experience or training.

Ungaro appointed Lohan because it wanted attention, and it certainly got its wish. The scrum of photographers, television crews, bloggers and journalists jostling to get close to Lohan after the show almost brought down the temporary wall built to divide the backstage area from the catwalk.

Willingly or not, Lohan certainly attracts cameras. Despite her tender years, she has crammed a lot into her life, and her metamorphosis from wide-eyed Disney starlet to hard-living, bisexual adult guarantees the Parisian brand some dark and edgy Hollywood glamour as well as the dangerous whiff of past scandals.

The Ungaro heritage is one of femininity and romance, ideas that historically have been represented on the catwalk by delicate, refined fabrics and finely drawn floral patterns. Yesterday, the same message of femininity and romance was broadcast, instead, by a recurrent theme of lovehearts. There were large black plastic heart-shaped earrings and cute velvet heart-shaped evening bags; there were black hearts printed all over a cream blouse and red ones on a short skirt; there were blue hearts picked out in sequins all over one black evening jacket and heart-shaped cutouts decorating another. There was even a pair of heart-shaped stickers that went some way to preserving the modesty of a model dressed in an open jacket with nothing beneath. To sum up the new Ungaro brand identity, then: there were a lot of hearts. It was perhaps



Above: A model displays a creation by Spanish fashion designer Estrella Archs and artistic adviser Lindsay Lohan for Emanuel Ungaro's ready-to-wear spring/summer fashion collection on Sunday in Paris.

Left: Spanish designer Estrella Arch, left, and Lindsay Lohan close Emanuel Ungaro's ready-to-wear spring/summer fashion show on Sunday in Paris. PHOTOS: AP AND AFP

the first catwalk show that could be happily summed up on Twitter, which was quite possibly the intention.

Micro-mini skirts and leggings in bright ruched satins pointed to the direction of the new artistic adviser: Lohan is often photographed in almost nonexistent skirts and already designs a range of leggings under the label 6126. (The name refers to the birth date — 1 June 1926 — of Marilyn Monroe.)

"I feel like there's a correlation between everything I do, whether it's pop

music or film," said Lohan last month when her Ungaro role was announced. The actress, pictures of whom looking "tired and emotional" are frequently found in the tabloids, underlined this synergy yesterday by bursting into tears halfway through her catwalk turn. As Lohan found herself overcome with emotion in front of the photographers, Archs could be seen gripping her hand and guiding her firmly backstage.

The shock appointment of Lohan is seen as a bold — even desperate — roll of the dice for the house of Ungaro, which has struggled to find a voice in fashion since its founding designer retired in 2004. A succession of talented designers have taken on the role since then — Peter Dundas is now at Emilio Pucci, while Giambattista Valli designs a successful label under his own name — but none have succeeded in making Ungaro creditable or profitable.

In a world in which prestige is paramount, linking the Ungaro name with a tabloid celebrity is a huge risk. But the label hopes that the swarm of paparazzi who follow Lohan on her late-night exploits can provide the kind of buzz and excitement that late nights in the design studio with safety pins and sketchbooks have failed to spark.

Mouffarige, the chief executive, might be said to have form in making unconventional appointments. Twelve years ago he replaced Karl Lagerfeld with a 25-year-old Stella McCartney as chief designer at Chloe, a move much mocked at the time but which turned out to be shrewd. And from Victoria Beckham's sell-out dresses to Kate Moss for Topshop, celebrity fashion has proved hugely popular with consumers.