

artscope

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ART IN THE TIME OF



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PARIS, FRANCE
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LOS ANGELES
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HAUSER AND WIRTH
NEW YORK, NEW YORK
HAUSERWIRTH.COM

DANA NEHDARAN
NEHDARAN.COM

OLAFUR ELIASSON
OLAFURELIASSON.NET

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
OF ART
NEW YORK CITY
METMUSEUM.ORG

RANIA MATAR
RANIAMATAR.COM



READY OR NOT, IT WILL CHANGE

WHERE DOES THE ART WORLD GO FROM HERE?

The parties are over. The art fair is dead. As during the Black Plague, worldwide travel and commerce has abruptly stopped. Museum tours and artists' talks are virtual. The latest buzzword, "viewing rooms," showing artists' work online, are the new art fair. We save the work we like, and "trash" the rest.

Technology has been valuable in visualizing the virus and making it "real." The virus cannot be seen as were the buboes of Black Plague. When we cannot visualize the virus, computer and artist's images of the virus make it visible, confronting us, scaring us.

Art will document these times, but not yet. Like drawings of hunted

Rania Matar, *Mia and Jun*, Allston, Massachusetts, 2020 from *Connections Across Barriers*, Portraits at the Time of COVID-19. Courtesy of the artist and Robert Klein Gallery.



Dana Nehdaran,
Woman in Robe
(from *Storyville*),
2020, Oil on canvas.
Courtesy of the
artist.

bulls in the Lascaux and Altamira caves, by which we acknowledge the existence of those who drew them, and drawings of royalty inside and outside the sarcophagi of ancient Egyptian rulers — art will always be a testament to what was.

From Mary Shelley's "The Last Man," where a written history of the demise of the human race that destroyed all but one is found written on leaves in the Sybil's cave near Naples to Stephen Vincent Benét's "By the Waters of Babylon," where New York City is only recognized

after a catastrophic natural disaster and flood by the remaining lion sculptures outside the New York Public Library, and the Easter Island sculptures proclaiming "We were here," lost civilizations, fictional and real, are remembered and acknowledged by their remaining sculptures, literature and visual art. However, it will take time for the best artists of today to produce work that reflects this time.

As galleries struggle to survive, only the best work will be shown. Museums will be forced to unload artwork, keeping only the best. The Louvre will protect the Mona Lisa, Géricault's "Raft of the Medusa" (depicting a catastrophic shipwreck), the Rembrandts, da Vincis, Vermeers, and the Egyptian, Greek and Roman collections.

Outdoor sculptures are still viewable on our exercise walks, as are buildings and outdoor installations of rock and steel, such as Lee Ufan's testament to the survival of rock and steel, currently viewable outside at the Hirshhorn Museum plaza. We will still look at Roden Crater curiously, as we do Stonehenge, wondering about its purpose. As we recover, these works will still be there, but the surroundings will change, as

we miss spring and summer. Outdoor art will remind us that it survives, in all times, under all conditions, for when we emerge from our houses.

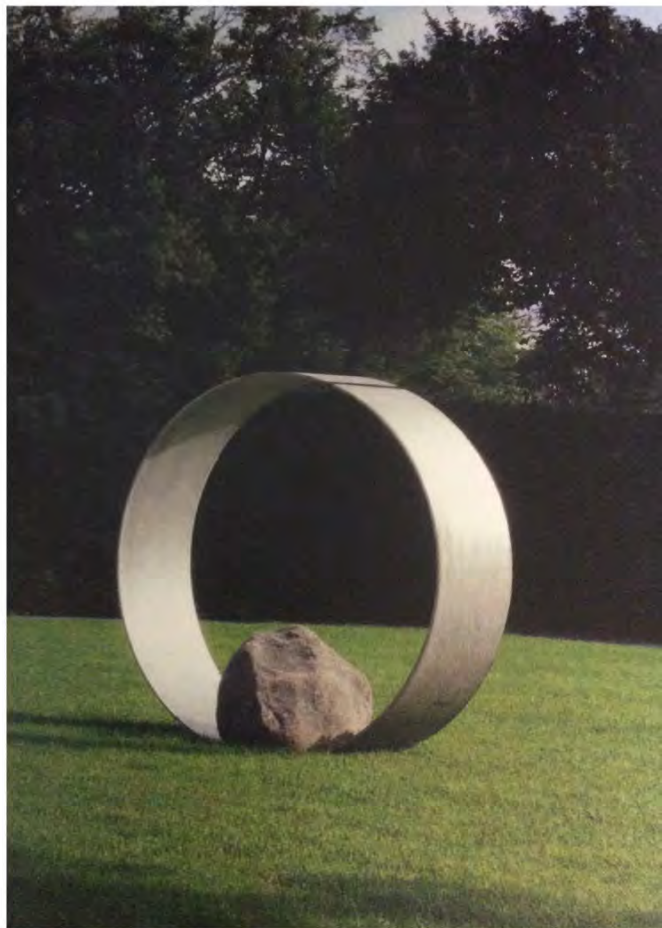
Craft will survive and proliferate, as artists produce useful objects. Patterns and codes encased in craft material and objects, as in Hauser and Wirth Somerset's display of craft vessels, will be rediscovered and made new, as craftspeople perfect their craft and research

new materials and techniques. Painting will survive as viewers see our practice: a tactile art when touch is prohibited.

As galleries try to financially recover, they will feature the artists who are really good, and which the public recognizes as excellent. That is the art worth saving and buying. As museums and other public institutions limit their spending, they will only invest in the excellent. There will be a place for other artists to create, but perhaps not to exhibit in galleries or museums. This might limit MFA programs, as future artists realize they must be excellent to pursue art for financial remuneration. Lesser art will be available, as it is now, to those wanting to decorate their virtual offices for Zoom sessions, but art will be divided into important and decorative. There will be a place for both.

As we recover, we will seek joy. Brightly colored landscapes and flowers, as in the recent work of David Hockney and Alex Katz, will be sought after. Artists will paint and photograph blue skies, resulting from less pollution from fewer cars and planes; clear water with fish and fauna apparent and plants emerging from untouched land, resulting in a new romanticism.

Art will change. We will revise our artistic taste to that which we most value, and which exhibits and advantages our humanity, resulting in a new humanism. After the Black Death, caused by Bubonic plague during the middle 1300s, medieval patterning and symbolism was gradually overtaken by humanistic portrayals, including Bartolo di Fredi's



Lee Ufan, *Relatum-Ring and Stone*, Hirshhorn Museum, Washington, D.C., 2019, stainless steel, stone. Courtesy Hirshhorn Museum.

1388, "Presentation in the Temple," now at the Louvre, Paris. Giotto di Bondone's student, Bernardo Daddi, painted the "Virgin Mary and St. Thomas Aquinas and Paul" in 1335, combining Byzantine patterned clothes with volume and full figures (now at the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles). Guariento di Arpo's panel in a church in Padua, painted during the second

half of the 14th century, depicts a poor, naturally painted Madonna sitting on the ground, depicting social history, documenting the real.

Artists to whom I have spoken are going deeper into their own practice or forward with projects planned for future exhibitions. James Turrell continues to unearth his land art masterwork, the "Roden Crater" observatory, from a dormant volcano in the rural American West. At Hauser and Wirth, Rashid Johnson is creating "Untitled Anxious Red Drawings" using oil stick on rag paper, to reflect his anxiety during the present time. Olafur Eliasson, considered for this year's top Frieze prize will surprise us. I remember

viewing his artificial "Little Sun" from the balcony at Turbine Hall, seeing people stretched out on the floor appearing not as beachgoers but rather, black, dead bodies under an unrelenting sun, perhaps caused by a hole in the ozone layer. I wonder where he will take his work now. I know it will be relevant, as he references environmental crises.

If there is a blueprint for the future of art, it was devised by the best-selling artist of our time, now exhibited in a current exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, (closed to the public until the quarantines are lifted) where he has perpetuated images of Birkenau, the notorious

concentration camp. Making four paintings from seven photographs taken by a Polish Resistance Group in 1944 and smuggled out by Polish woman, Helena Daton, Gerhard Richter painted over the images, scraping and reapplying until the faces of the dead were shadows underneath the layered paint (2006). His nine-foot plus square paintings preserve history and memory underneath ruptured surfaces layered over them, but allow the human stroke and psyche to prevail. Richter said, in the documentary film shown at the Hirshhorn Museum's 2005 Richter retrospective, and in "Atlas," where he was asked why he had never before painted from photographs he had of concentration camp survivors, that he "couldn't figure out how to do that."

In that vein, Dana Nehdaran, in New York City, paints from photographs of prostitutes in Storyville, an old red-light district in New Orleans, showing

Alberto Giacometti, *Caroline*, 1963, oil on canvas. Landau Fine Art, Montreal, Canada. Photograph by Nancy Nevet.



women who risked their and their clients' health to survive economically, as essential workers now do. He memorializes them in paint, lovingly touching brush to canvas.

Rania Matar, a Boston photographer awarded a Guggenheim fellowship for her work photographing female adolescence and womanhood, told me that she now photographs women behind screens and windows, as they cannot come out to pose. While she has changed her practice to accommodate present times, other artists, including Raida Shahin in Amman, Jordan, told me that she is using this time to slow down and look at her work and evaluate it as she is blocked from other activities.

Artists, in the midst of devastation, cannot yet portray, nor memorialize. I think of Francisco Goya's paintings, fields of decapitated heads, painted after the executions. I think of former President George W. Bush's paintings of fallen soldiers from the Iraq war. I think also of the hero paintings — Jacques-Louis David's paintings of Jean-Paul Marat and Napoleon, but in this crisis, artists are not yet painting the heroes. They see these heroes daily on television screens, our current gallery — Governor Andrew Cuomo, Dr. Anthony Fauci, the many health care workers who exhaust themselves and face dangers to save us. But inundated with images and glued to the screen watching them does not yet allow the reflection required to portray them in artists' media. Krzysztof Wodiczko's many memorials were created

after the fact. Alfredo Jaar's photographs, created in the present, serve as posters to locate the disappeared but do not yet reflect the emotional outpouring required in the act of painting, touching brush to canvas, when one cannot touch another.

Artists often work in solitary environments but are inspired by the outside world. It will be a while before artists can go out and even more, before they can process what they see and feel. This is the reason they work on preplanned work now and are thankful for ongoing projects. The artists who know that and churn ideas for work in their minds will prevail; the Mark Bradfords, Olafur Eliassons, Alfredo Jaars, the Petah Coyne's, the Sam Joneses. The galleries will exhibit the older work that instills empathy with those depicted, or admiration for heroes long gone, that uses paint and sculpted stone and wood, natural materials, to connect us to the past and each other.

When artists finally go into the world, they will memorialize and express, and hopefully empathize, and will see the clearer air, the return of birds and flowers and friends. No longer the art party, we will know what is important and that will become the work of artists and galleries.

Nancy Nesvet