New Platforms for Art in the Current Environment

informalityblog

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We have entered a paradigm shift in socializing. Always prepared to adapt, the art world is trained for moments like this. Making do, building bridges, and the like are all points of movement that serve its ultimate goal; getting people in front of an artist's work. Informality spoke with Social Distance Gallery, Remote Collaboration, and Young Space (yngspc), three separately distinct groups based in the Midwest taking viewers out of the physical gallery and placing them in front of the screen. Places like Kansas City, Missouri, Cincinnati, Ohio, and northeastern Wisconsin, see these innovative ideas occurring in this realm more and more. These endeavors are not only free but well-positioned to flex their creativity without being bound by a high-dollar revenue stream that many coastal galleries and institutions rely upon.

The physical gallery space is being called into question. Certainly not on the chopping block – the in-person experience will not be eliminated, at least not yet. However, we need to acknowledge that this platform is the artist DIY of the future, and that is where the art world's ability to adapt is put into praxis. At this very moment, while much of the globe is self-isolating, people are making time for art online. Instead of ensuring the striving artist remains tasked with shouldering the burden of doing it themselves, a need for better public arts funding has never been more relevant.

Artists now separated from the spaces and institutions that display their work, have to alter drastically the way their practice unfolds. End of semester shows for BFA, and MFA students are either postponed or canceled. During this temporary crisis, numerous online platforms for viewing exhibitions have sprung up, creating a new standard for how we are going to re-experience art going forward.

Arguably, Instagram's platform performs as a virtual docent, although their policies on nudity strain the limits of artistic freedoms. But more intentional structure for virtual exhibitions ultimately has been encouraging. We are here to highlight a few of these efforts by people who are seeking to provide a platform for artists and help those artists navigate this alteration.

Benjamin Cook, artist and adjunct professor at the Art Academy of Cincinnati, started Social Distance Gallery for his graduating students at the start of March. In an email exchange with Informality, Cook told a familiar story; "The usual end of semester shows were canceled, and students were rightfully upset."

Cook thought it would be interesting to use his studio practice of image-making and dissemination to address the issues of his student's canceled shows. Says Cook, "by further exploring how images of physical works are experienced, a new form of presentation is possible. Students collaborating on final thesis projects include choreographers, dancers, and directors that are working together." As long as it's a BFA or MFA thesis show, Cook will accept it.

Work by Jacob Z. Wan. Image courtesy of the artist.

The work gets posted as it comes into Instagram. "Students work with their colleagues to gather all of the information and send it together. Some students have solo shows, though." Cook's posting regiment is an easy-to-follow pattern. He succeeds in creating "a bracket of

color to indicate a single show, positioning student work to allow for three images. With IG handle, name, title, medium, size, and date posted in the caption, then the next student's show is displayed, with colors matching title blocks.

"I see the project as existing in a specific time—the engagement, community building, visuals, etc. Whether classified as performance, dissemination art, social practice, relational aesthetics, or a host of other categorizing terms doesn't seem necessary to me. I'll let others decide that if they want to."

Informality asked how the digital and physical experiences relate to one another on a platform that has its limitations. The internet can reach a lot of people who couldn't otherwise be there. Still, it does also flatten, or distances, the experience. "The limitations of a digital platform only exist concerning a technical default," says Cook, "in this case, a gallery."

Work by Ash Goodwin. Image courtesy of the artist.

Questions of democratization online are raised. Informality founder, Melaney Mitchell, points out, we are witnessing a "collapsing (of) the class/access system of the art world."

"Viewing a work of art in any setting is an experience. Those experiences can have many forms. A lot of the art I see is through a screen. It is a specific experience that differs from a physical one but still creates emotional and intellectual reactions. If I see a work in a gallery,

after already having seen it online (setting a default), It is the gallery that is limited."

Cook continues, "I cannot share the work with my friend unless they are there next to me. I cannot take the work off of the wall or floor and bring it home with me to view in a setting I am more comfortable in (unless I buy it). I cannot expect people from other parts of the world to know that it exists. (One cannot) say that a digital version of a work is better. I believe that framing the dialog in terms of what is lost, sets up a hierarchy which does not reflect reality."

Work by Sarah May Taylor. Image courtesy of the artist.

The reactions are positive. Cook says hundreds of students, faculty, viewers, and even a local politician have reached out to voice their support. There is a shared feeling of excitement among students; they will be able to share their work after all.

Lastly, says Cook, "I do not see my role in this as a curator, and I am not here to judge what is a right or wrong way to present a work. As my previous response would indicate, I think a lot about the documentation of work. I believe any artist today needs to consider that and make the decision for themselves."

In comparison, though a similar endeavor to Cook's, Kate Mothes began Young Space (yngspc). Currently based in Wisconsin, this idea was born during her graduate schooling at the Edinburgh College of Art at the University of Edinburgh, in Scotland, circa 2014. What began as an Instagram account to share the work she was experiencing all around her, has now developed into yngspc.com, a submissions-based interview platform showcasing work by artists and students.

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Kate Mothes

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As her project grew exponentially over the years, there has been plenty of adaptation to the original idea. Mothes is focusing on using this platform to help students find "space" for their BFA and MFA exhibitions by working with several united student groups and university art programs. Having been following [@yngspc](#) on Instagram for quite some time, far before the limitations brought on by this pandemic, it was no surprise she was executing a similar idea.

"I've always been interested in the experimental nature of art, and that period–longer for some than for others–of just trying to 'figure it out' is so interesting, and I wanted to keep that spirit in everything the platform does or is involved in."

Yngspc is sort of the umbrella term for a multifaceted practice that relies on the virtual connectivity the internet can provide. "I think of Young Space as more of a dialogue, or a 'call and response' than necessarily any sort of established model, plan, or program."

As a platform that focuses on giving space for its artists' and writers' voices, In light of the efforts of Informality as an online-only platform, this resonates with yngspc efforts to create a flexible platform for its collaborators, if you will. Mothes' on and offline work has generated a platform where she is more than a curator. She would call herself a "facilitator." It has been essential for her to "think of the project taking [her] places, not the other way around so that it's always responsive to the community of artists and art workers."


Wolves by the Road: Emma Fineman, Aly Helyer, Yulia Iosilzon, Francisco Rodriguez Pino and Anna Jung Seo, Assembly House, Leeds, UK, May 16 – June 5, 2019. Image courtesy of Kate Mothes.

The prospects are positive, especially when an artist can be adaptable in the endless stream of artwork, finding its way from physical to numerous digital places. Making space for art is crucial, but it is equally important to understand the relationship between the two, as projects like these straddle the line defining "place." Mothes points out that the internet is the very reason this is possible.

Says Mothes, "The accessibility element is crucial: online shows don't require artists to ship work, therefore opening up the possibility of showing huge installations from Japan or South Africa or Alaska without having to move a single thing. It also allows everyone with an internet connection to 'visit,' no matter where they are."

There is a unique negotiation involved, not only portraying the work but the layout of the exhibition as well. Mothes states, "Unsurprisingly, 2D work shows well online," and this is even more true for the new genre of post analog painters. But seriously, it makes sense to register a flat surface against a flat-screen. There is undoubtedly a challenge with showing anything else. Still, Mothes says that these new platforms "are also often pushing new boundaries and are perhaps the most exciting when it comes to thinking about how the internet can facilitate contemporary art practices and exhibitions. I think we're ultimately limited by this understanding of exhibitions presented in rooms, and we tend to present online exhibitions in the same way, somehow within a container–a webpage or website, an Instagram account, a virtually simulated gallery space, etc." And, to speak to the issue of algorithms, Mothes continues; "popularity shouldn't be confused with good art–just because something doesn't get a lot of likes and comments doesn't mean it's not smart, moving artwork."
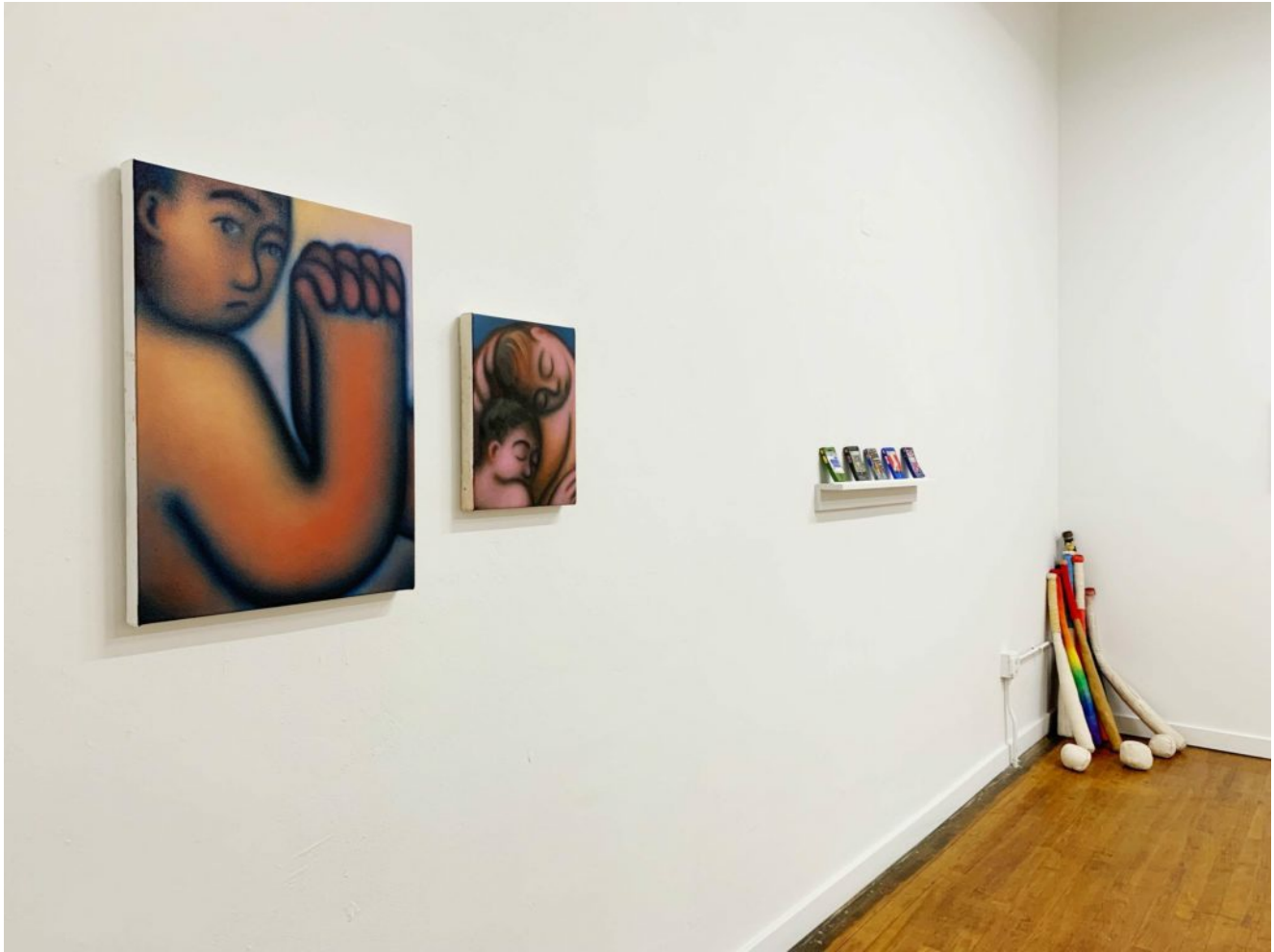
Dreamboat: Justin Liam O'Brien, Colin J. Radcliffe and Mark Zubrovich, Real Tinsel, Milwaukee, WI, September 6-October 12, 2019. Image courtesy of Kate Mothes.

Mothes has also had a positively overwhelming response to yngspc so far and is meeting virtually with schools primarily in the US and Canada to assist educators in students to find innovative ways to share crucially essential bodies of work. "For me, it's more about providing resources and sharing in the community." Mothes created a spreadsheet of information and resources that are available virtually right now. In this spreadsheet, there is also a link to a form for anyone to add their initiatives.

David Alpert is an "arturator" based in Kansas City who runs Reality Club, an identity he developed, with a mission "to work together with open minds and compassion to explore reality through the arts." This idea originated as a response to an open call in 2018 at the now-closed Open House Space. He unfolded this idea into the event of a spacetime variety show and has since collaborated with several artists and organizations to make music with various cross-disciplinary programs that include inquiries around meteorology, constellations, and the local landscape.

Promotion image for *Remote Collaboration* by David Alpert.

Until recently, [they] had a few regularly occurring programs: a film series at Stray Cat Film Center, a reading group, and a series of rare book tours." The project in the discussion is Remote Collaboration, which will take place in the Reality Club Library, a room in Alpert's apartment He says it is "kind of all over the place, but it includes a collection of artists' books and a collection of exhibition catalogs." Remote Collaboration is the first exhibition to take place in this makeshift space.

It is vital to know, Alpert says, that his inspiration derives from Hans Ulrich Obrist's show, Hôtel Carlton Palace, Chambre 763, and, more specifically, Andreas Slominski's work in that show. In 1993, Obrist curated that show in the hotel room for the month he was living

there. Slominski sent Obrist instructions via fax every day. To maintain this element of collaboration throughout the exhibition, Alpert says he thinks of himself "as a tool for the artist. Not a simple tool like a hammer, but more like a biological computer…You can give [him] instructions that are as specific or as vague as you choose, and the results will vary accordingly."

Most importantly here, this project is "a direct response to the constraints of the current pandemic." Alpert affirms, these limitations are not new, and now they have found another way in which to be so limiting. The specificness of these constraints the pandemic has presented an opportunity for this mess of projects, and fuels Alpert's interest in responding to and working within constraints. Though frightening, he says, "Remote Collaboration might be an attempt to understand [the] current situation better. I'm not sure." If there is one thing we can be sure of, it is the uncertainty that has sprung to the forefront of all public-facing professional practices where standards are now in flux.

Screenshot from the video of the performance, *Casting a Taoist Spell of Prosperity,* by JC Franco.

How will Remote Collaboration deal with this shift of mediums, and space, and of representing the details of the work? Alpert shares that "how each work presented will be idiosyncratic to that work. For JC Franco's work, I created an altar per his directions, and I recorded a performance that he directed. I then shared that on the exhibition website. Currently, the altar is set up as an installation in the library."

So, though no one can physically visit for at least a month, this is an opportunity for that innovation, both Cook and Mothes share as essential to negotiating these projects. Alpert continues, "I am interested in how the work changes from the artist's directions to my

attempt to follow them, and finally into the "final" work…If the artist has created a drawing, painting, sculpture, etc., they cannot send me that work directly, and they can't install the work. They have to reform that work into something that they can carry. I then have to translate what they sent in to work again, and I have to install it and share it."

Installation image of *I made some coloring book pages if you would like to print them out and color them in* by Paige Nicole Gordon. Image courtesy of David Alpert.

The saturation point of all this streaming content has yet to be determined. Our base viewing habits are being challenged. The online platform continues to be ripe with potential for ongoing weirdness and innovation and on a far more level playing field. In contrast, anyone with internet connectivity has a seat at the table. The critical discourse will continue to thrive here, separating the tight from the trite. Artist Justin Beachler, whose work invests heavily in the digital influence on cultural aesthetic trends, says, "The pandemic might get internet artists out of the galleries and back onto the internet where they belong."

If the massive amounts of communication between organizers, curators, artists, and writers right this second could be quantified or visualized in one place, it would probably blow a fuse. This surge is overwhelming, a mix of hope and fright. The pressure for an artist to participate in online programs could be daunting. Yet, many of those artists might beg for the connectivity that could be substituted by the internet. Pursuing this practice for the sake of remaining adaptable, the unpredictability of the art world, stacked against the volatility of the world at large, it is essential organizers continue to listen to the needs of artists of all demographics and the best way to portray the work. Authorship and its relationship with the internet can be complicated, but thankfully it makes it at least a bit easier to communicate from anywhere. So, go forth and participate, share, check-in on your introverts and extroverts, make art, buy art within your means, write about art, *stay at home, and wash your hands.*