

Art World Roundup: silver linings in Venice and COVID-19 effects



A view down a canal in Venice. Courtesy Flickr Commons.

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In this Art World Roundup, we've got some of how the art world is reacting to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as some unexpected silver linings to social distancing. The highly-anticipated Macklowe auction that called on auction houses to send in their bids is postponed and Cuban artist Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara has been released from jail while Paddle8 has filed for bankruptcy.

CALLING ALL CONSERVATORS

Erma Hermens, technical art historian at the Rijksmuseum, took to Twitter yesterday to announce that while the Rijksmuseum is closed, thus stopping conservation efforts, the museum will be donating their unused masks and gloves to hospitals and practices experiencing shortages. Hermens also called on other museums and conservators to follow suit to help out medical professionals around the globe. Conservators use facemasks to protect themselves against toxic materials found in or used on artworks they work with. Gloves, while also protecting their skin, helps protect artworks from the oils and dirt on the hands of conservators. However, as COVID-19 (<https://www.art-critique.com/en/2020/02/art-in-the-time-of-coronavirus/>) continues to spread, the medical field is experiencing a shortage in these kinds of supplies. Other museums, including the Stedelijk Museum and the Van Gogh Museum are also donating their supplies during this unprecedented time.



Prof Erma Hermens    
@TechArtHisRijks

#CoronaVirusChallenge As the @Rijksmuseum is closed our conservators collect their supplies of #facemasks and #gloves to donate to doctors practices and hospitals. Do the same! RT This please! Every little bit helps! @IMWD2030_ @IIC_ @vangoghmuseum @mauritshuis @Stedelijk

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PADDLE8 FILES FOR BANKRUPTCY

Paddle8, an online auction house established in 2011 and later merged with Auctionata in 2016, has filed Chapter 11 bankruptcy. This move followed a March 10th lawsuit against Paddle8 filed by New American Cinema Group, a non-profit organized by the late filmmaker Jonas Mekas, claiming that the auction house has withheld funds raised during a November 2019 auction. *Artnet News reported* (<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/paddle8-bankruptcy-1806951>) that Paddle8 expected ‘to resolve all of these situations quickly and amicably,’ but the decision to file for bankruptcy has the New American Cinema Group concerned. It is also reported that Paddle8 owes money to A-list celebs like Justin and Haley Bieber and Jay Z’s Shawn Carter Foundation as well as the Rema Hort Mann Foundation.

THE MACKLOWE AUCTION IS POSTPONED THROWING ADDING TO AN ALREADY TENSE DIVORCE

Last month, auction houses were asked submit their bid for the chance to auction off 65 works worth millions from the collection of Harry and Linda Macklowe (<https://www.art-critique.com/en/2020/01/macklowe-collection/>), who are in the midst of a hairy divorce. Sotheby’s, Christie’s, and Phillips were among those throwing their hat in the ring, but Michael Findlay, the art dealer charged with overseeing the matter, has decided to postpone the auction as COVID-19 continues to spread. In a statement (<https://news.artnet.com/market/macklowe-collection-auction-postponed-1808241>) from Findlay, it has been ‘decided to pause the process of selecting an auction house because of the current international situation stemming from the COVID-19 virus. In due course, Mr. Findlay will decide when to proceed.’



Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara’s performance “The Flag Belongs to Everyone.” Courtesy of Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara.



After nearly two weeks in jail (<https://hyperallergic.com/546096/luis-manuel-otero-alcantara/>), Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara, a Cuban (<https://www.art-critique.com/en/2018/12/tania-bruguera-and-fellow-artists-released-from-cuban-jail/>) performance artist, was released but still faces charges. On March 1st, the artist was arrested near his home in Havana for a number of alleged offenses including the 'desecration of patriotic symbols,' which related his 2019 work *#LaBanderaEsDeTodos* for which Otero Alcántara wore a Cuban flag for a month. During his arrest, Claudia Genluie, an activist and Otero Alcántara's partner, was reportedly hit and thrown to the floor by police officers as she attempted to record the confrontation. A petition, initiated by artist and activist Coco Fusco, demanding Otero Alcántara's release was signed by more than 3,300 people (<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/cuban-artist-luis-manuel-otero-alcantara-released-jail-1806882>). While Otero Alcántara is out of 'preventative prison,' the state has not dropped the charges against him and his court date has yet to be set.

VENETIAN CANALS ARE THE UNEXPECTED SILVER LINING TO SOCIAL DISTANCING

Major cities around the world are looking like ghost towns as people are self-isolating and practicing social distancing (<https://www.art-critique.com/en/2020/03/social-distancing-doesnt-mean-art-distancing/>). It has made for some incredible sights, but one of the most intriguingly wonderful side effects to the pandemic is that the canals in Venice, which are usually murky, are once again clear (<https://nypost.com/2020/03/18/venice-canals-are-crystal-clear-after-coronavirus-lockdown-in-italy/>). Italy has been one of the hardest hit countries and in Venice, where tourists usually run rampant, you can now see fish swimming through the canals and swans have come back. Why you might ask? With no tourist and fewer people out and about, there are fewer boats traveling (<https://abcnews.go.com/International/venice-canals-clear-fish-coronavirus-halts-tourism-city/story?id=69662690>) between the city's islands so sediment has had the chance to settle. In other parts of the world, pollution levels have severely decreased, too. While COVID-19 is nothing to be taken lightly and people continue to be affected by the virus, daily, Venice (<https://www.art-critique.com/en/2020/03/kapoor-features-vantablack-for-the-first-time/>) has shown a silver lining to the current state of affairs.



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