

Off the wall: the new galleries giving back

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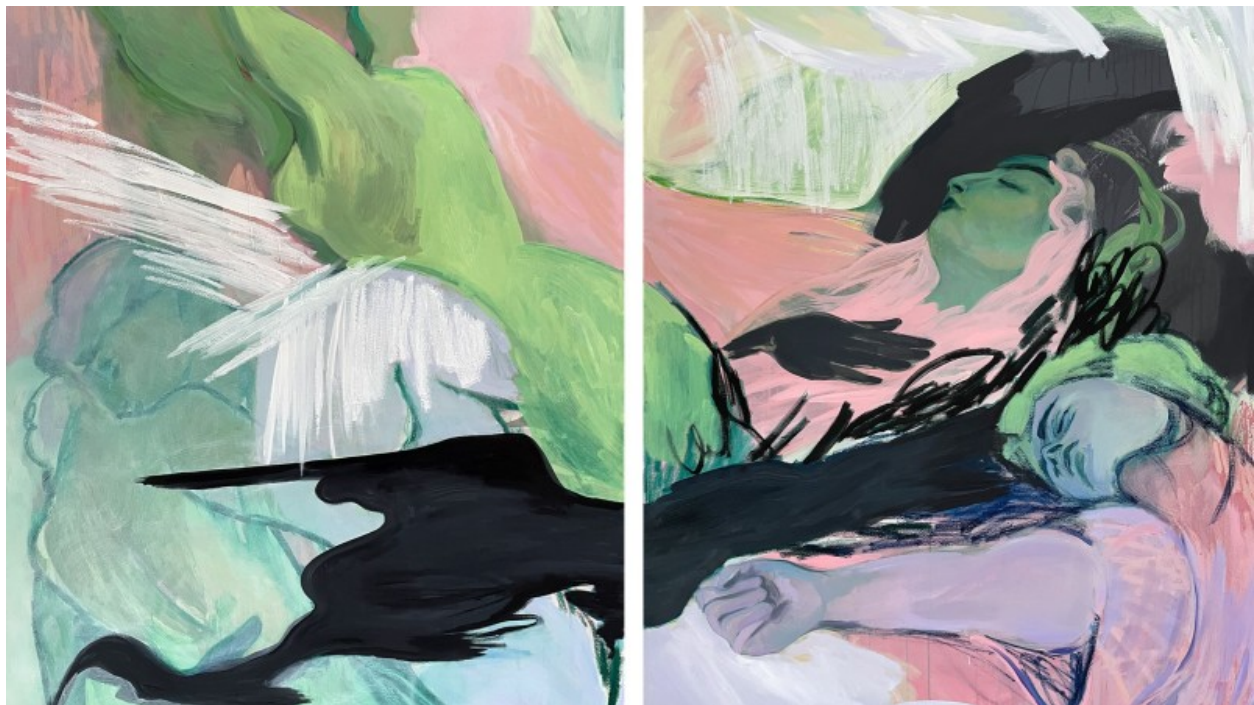
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Disillusioned with the traditional system, modern gallerists are rethinking ways to show – and sell – artworks



© Courtesy of Purslane | In fair Verona, 2021, by Amy Beager, at the Purslane gallery

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A black book of established art-world connections; a social calendar brimming with private views; a roster of artists who give you 30 to 50 per cent of the sale price; attendance at arts fairs round the globe. Up until now, the path to opening and running a commercial gallery has been well-trodden. Yet a new wave of individuals, disillusioned with the system, are creating new spaces that fuse art buying with more [philanthropic](#) models, and combine an eagerness for creative experimentation with political fire.



Wildwood Strain, 2021, by Jessie Stevenson, at Purslane gallery



| Successful businesses needn't be entirely profit-driven

Former model and Courtauld graduate 27-year-old Charlie Siddick set up Purslane gallery in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement in the summer of 2020. “Being of mixed-race heritage, watching the distressing footage unfolding in the US while being in lockdown, unable to protest, encouraged me to set up an art fundraiser for Blueprint for All [formerly the Stephen Lawrence Charitable Trust],” says Siddick of her bimonthly online shows that showcase artworks that range from £500 to £3,000, and donate 25 per cent of sales towards a roster of philanthropic causes. In Purslane’s model, the artist takes 50 per cent, and the gallery 25 per cent (unless the artist donates their percentage to charity, in which case Purslane does too). Exhibitions have included those by painters Joana Galego and Amy Beager, self-taught ceramicist Alma Berrow, and abstract painter Jessie Stevenson, whose work explores our relationship with nature – and many of the works sell out within 24 hours. “Successful businesses needn't be entirely profit-driven,” says Siddick. “I want Purslane to support young artists. And there’s always an opportunity to give back.”



Zoetrope II, 2021, by Margo Selby

Sophie Wood was also spurred by events of 2020 to set up a gallery, Among the Pines, that weaves philanthropy into the fabric of its business. A minimum of five per cent of profits support Mount Kenya Trust, which aims to conserve the elephant corridor between Mount Kenya and the Rift Valley. It is a very personal project: “I just want complete freedom to

represent work that gets my pulse racing,” she says. Notable artists involved include textile artists Ptolemy Mann and Margo Selby, ceramicist Celia Dowson and painters including William Balthazar Rose.



Ellie Pennick, founder of Guts Gallery © Aria Shahrokhshahi



For two London galleries, Home, founded by British photographer Ronan Mckenzie, dedicated to showcasing the work of BAME artists, and Guts Gallery, set up by Ellie Pennick in response to her own financial difficulties as an art student, restructuring the system feels particularly political. “The traditional art business model reflects socio-political austerity,” argues Pennick, who grew up in working-class Yorkshire. “A system that disproportionately benefits people who do not experience racial oppression, ableism, gender and class discrimination – to name a few. We flip the traditional power dynamics between gallerist and artist.” Her business venture specifically sets out to “champion” rather than represent British artists who statistically struggle in the art world. Artists Victoria Cantons and Sophie Vallance Cantor are two names to watch.



Textile artist Charlotte Edey, who is involved with Artists Support © Anna Stokland



“Artists are often left out of the philanthropic conversation,” says New York-based art historian Clara Zevi, who founded [Artists Support](#) last year alongside Oscar Tiné, a French multidisciplinary artist. “They are constantly asked to donate work, but they’re never asked what charity they want to support.” On this platform, collectors donate the total sale price to the artist’s chosen cause. All profits go to the charity, and the project is run pro bono. Artists involved include blue-chip names like Hiroshi Sugimoto, Stephen Shore, Michael Craig-Martin and Rose Wylie; emerging figures such as ceramic artist Katy Stubbs and textile artist Charlotte Edey; and artists such as Lorna Simpson, whose recent collage raised £35,000 for [Until Freedom](#), an organisation fighting institutionalised racism in America.

“Our initial motivation was to help the city we lived in and create a fundraising structure that could operate past the pandemic,” says Tiné. The NYC launch saw the duo raise more than \$75,000; a London launch followed and an LA outpost is set to open in February. “The art world creates so much wealth that it only seems logical to allocate some of this to help communities,” says Tiné.



A detail from *In the End the Beginning*, 2021, by Emma Talbot

The art market is notoriously tough, with the players involved as focused on deals, investment and status as much as on the art itself. It is this fatigue with the stage management and cut-throat energy that has inspired new gallery owners to start something

that works differently. “I felt overwhelmed as an art adviser trying to keep up with all the artists and exhibitions coming into my inbox,” says Alexandra Ray, co-founder of San-Francisco- and London-based virtual gallery [Eye of the Huntress](#), which launched in September 2020. “I thought, wouldn’t it be lovely to just have 15-20 amazing poignant or important works sent to me that I might actually want to buy as a collector. A sort of wishlist of covetable works.”



Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/mPQHWA8A02A>

She partnered with art adviser and curator Catherine Loewe to create a site hosting quarterly exhibitions of these 15-20 cherry-picked works. Working with the female-run virtual experience design studio and CGI firm INVI, the physical gallery space is replaced with a moving image video, accompanied by music. Their magical second show, *Her Dark Materials*, was put together by guest curator Philippa Adams, set in a disused railway warehouse in Buckinghamshire, and featured works by the likes of multimedia artist Charlotte Colbert, Max Mara prize winner Emma Talbot and abstract painter Trudy Benson.

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“This is a new way of experiencing art, and we want to stay at the cutting edge of this medium, both technologically and creatively,” Ray enthuses. Who knows if a new art-world order is on the horizon? These unconventional ways to buy art at least paint a different picture of the future.

Comments
