

Art Market | Galleries

Survival in the age of pandemics

Galleries that weathered the Spanish Flu relied on close communication

By Brook Mason

A study conducted by *The Art Newspaper* has found that a third of galleries (33.9%) do not expect to survive the coronavirus crisis. Yet, surprisingly, the 1918 Spanish flu pandemic had little impact on the livelihoods of some dealers. Then, as now, the key to survival is to keep clients close—and competitors closer.

The London gallery Colnaghi only mounted three exhibitions in 1918 and 1919, yet turned a tidy profit. Sales records show that in those two years, the Singer sewing machine magnate Robert Sterling Clark paid £16,000 (£250,000 in today's money) for Rembrandt's *Crucifixion*, on top of a Claude Lorrain and a Hans Memling portrait. He then also bought a Jean-Antoine Watteau drawing, and one by Albrecht Dürer for £5,200. "All the big American buyers expected discounts," says Jeremy Howard, Colnaghi's head of research and academic projects—a sentiment that rings true today, as some smaller galleries are reportedly offering works at a 30% to 50% reduction.

Sales never slowed for the New York antiques dealership Stair & Andrews, recalls Colin Stair, whose great-grandfather co-established the firm. "Endless clients sought 18th-century English furniture. By the 1920s, a flood of great antiques was available," says Stair, adding that wealthy families like the Kennedys, the Firestones and the Fords

would buy up entire rooms of furniture.

A La Vielle Russie, established in 1851 in Kiev, left for Paris in 1920, during the Russian Revolution. "We sailed through, even though exhibitions were never on the calendar," says Mark Schaffer, the fifth-generation director. Clients included the Grand Duchess Xenia (sister of Nicholas II), King Gustav of Sweden and Farouk, King of Egypt. Pavlova, Nijinsky and Jeanne Lanvin also shopped, as did Marjorie Merriweather Post, whose winter residence Mar-a-Lago now belongs to President Trump. Hollywood producers and stars like Douglas Fairbanks and Marlene Dietrich also visited the gallery. Blairman & Sons fared well, too. Founded in 1884 in Wales, the firm expanded to Harrogate and London prior to 1920, says Martin Levy, whose great-grandfather established the antiques dealership. "All three galleries attracted gentry," says Levy. The total take for 1918? A tidy £10,000, the equivalent of 20 small London houses then. "Just like today, remaining in close contact with clients ensured success," Levy adds.

Of course, close contact in quarantine was fraught, and many competitors found comfort in corresponding by post. In a letter from 1918, Colnaghi's senior partner, Otto Gutekunst, wrote to Charles Carstairs, then-director of Knoedler in New York: "One is a prisoner in one's own country... We live so quietly, never go out in the evening, and only see a few friends at our house once in a while." It seems even 100 years ago, isolation felt interminable.



Colnaghi, on New Bond Street in 1912, offered clients discounts

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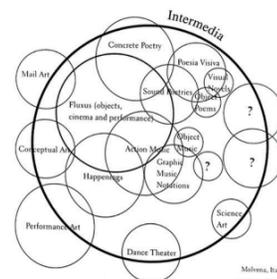
New commercial exhibitions—online and by appointment

Spotlight on Michael Wolf

Flowers, Hong Kong

Until 25 July

Now might not seem the time to be opening new galleries, but London-based Flowers launched its first Asian outpost in late May, with an exhibition of the work of Michael Wolf (1954-2019), the German photographer who lived and worked in Hong Kong. Fittingly for these confined times, many of the works concentrate on the homes of Hong Kong residents, viewed from the outside in. The show blends three of Wolf's series, which form an ode to the city: its residential and industrial exteriors in *Architecture of Density*; groupings of found objects in back alleys in *Informal Solutions*; and a release from the oppressive metropolis in the skyscrapers of *Cheung Chau Sunrises*, taken every morning for two years. **A.B.**



Dick Higgins

James Fuentes, New York

15 June–31 July

By the time he was 30, in 1968, Dick Higgins had his hand in a number of new, radical forms of creative production—from poetry and performance art, to music and publishing. A standout figure in Allen Kaprow's *Happenings* cohort and co-founder of the Fluxus movement, Higgins's work defies simple categorisation. This exhibition, presented online and by appointment, offers a selection of rarely-seen works from the artist's foundation alongside others from personal collections, and marks the gallery's debut presentation of Higgins' work after years of representing his wife and Fluxus collaborator, Allison Knowles. **M.C.**

Alice Tippit: Pallid Carrier

Patron, Chicago

27 June–29 August

After successful exhibitions across the US, including at Grice Bench in Los Angeles in January and a dual presentation by Nicelle Beauchene and Rachel Uffner in the online edition of Frieze New York, Chicago-based Alice Tippit's exhibition of new paintings and works on paper at Patron is the first show in the gallery space since lockdown. It derives its title from a type of snail that cements stones, shells and debris to its soft shell, creating elaborate edifices that house fleshy, tender bodies. **M.C.**



From top, Michael Wolf's *Architecture of Density*, Dick Higgins's *Intermedia Chart* (1995), Alice Tippit's *Stag* (2019)

In the trade

AUCTION HOUSES

Nina del Rio, Sotheby's vice chairman, Americas and head of museum, private and corporate art services, now oversees the auction house's advisory services following Allan Schwartzman's departure. Schwartzman, the co-founder of the advisory firm Art Agency, Partners, has moved into a strategic consulting role for the firm.

Phillips has appointed Jonathan Crockett as chairman of Asia, and Elie Massoutis as head of design, France, and senior international specialist.

Harold Porcher has been appointed as head of the Modern and Post-War art department at Swann Auction Galleries.

Thom Pegg, owner of the St. Louis, Missouri, gallery Tyler Fine Art, has opened Black Art Auction, the first US auction house devoted to selling work by black artists.

ARTIST MOVES

Mrs. gallery now represents Elizabeth Atterbury, Sarah Bedford, Chris Bogia, Meghan Brady, Mark Mulrone, Sarah Palmer and Carolyn Salas.

Titus Kapfar is now represented by Gagolian.

Tyler Mitchell is now represented by United Talent Agency.

Hollis Taggart now represents Hollis Heichemer.

Stephen Friedman Gallery now represents Holly Hendry, Leilah Babirye and Marina Adams.

Hauser & Wirth now represents Ron Mueck.

Roberts Projects now represents Wangari Mathenge.

Marc Straus now represents Marie Watt.

König Galerie now represents Chiharu Shiota.

Cécile B. Evans is now represented by Château Shatto.

Galerie Lelong now represents Juan Uslé.

David Kordansky now represents Adam Pendleton.

Monya Rowe Gallery now represents Aubrey Levinthal.

Grimm gallery now represents Tjebbe Beekman.

THE GALLERIES

Flowers Gallery has opened a Hong Kong gallery at 49 Tung Street.



Elie Massoutis (above) brings international expertise to Phillips; Mrs. signs on Meghan Brady (below)

Xavier Hufkens has opened a third exhibition space in Brussels, at 44 Rue Van Eyck.

Ben Brown Fine Arts has moved from Hong Kong's Central district to 202 The Factory, Wong Chuk Hang.

Kwai Fung Hin Art Gallery, will relocate from its current location in Hong Kong's Central district to West Kowloon next year.

Hanart TZ Gallery has closed its location at 12 Pedder Street in Hong Kong but will continue to operate from Hanart Square in Kwai Chung.

Edward Ressle will open a gallery in Shanghai at 205-215 East Beijing Road this month.

FAIRS

Becca Hoffman, formerly the director of Outsider Art Fair, is now Intersect's new managing director, overseeing three art fairs: Art Aspen, SOFA Chicago and Art Palm Springs.

New Art Dealers Alliance has launched a profit-sharing online fair that runs through 20 June, bringing together work from 200 galleries.

Untitled, Art will launch a VR edition of the fair this summer with Artland.

