

Kate Bryan on the art world in action

Soho House's Head of Collections shares all the ways you can support artists now

Art has always provided light in times of darkness and, as Kate Bryan discovers, our global creative community is coming together like never before to foster new means of exchange, find new kinds of opportunities and give back to society in unique ways.

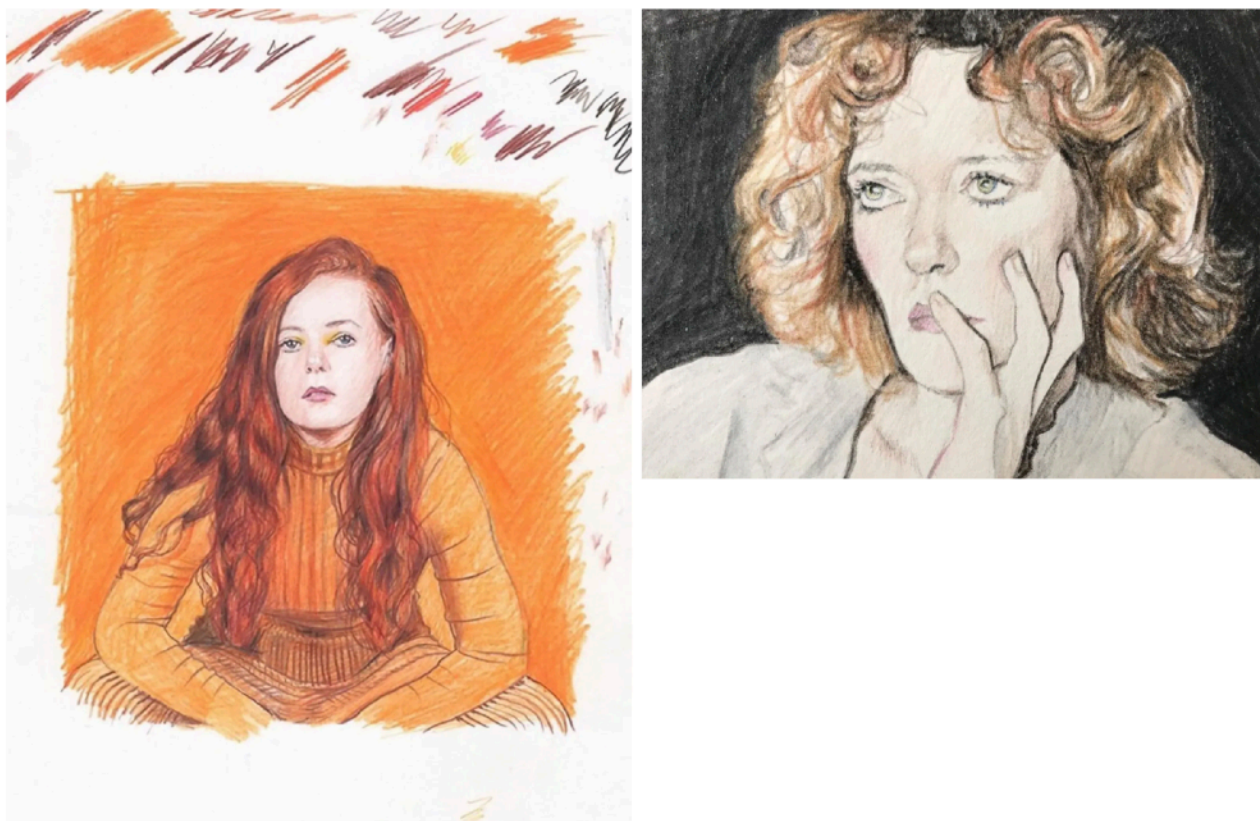
By Kate Bryan Top image: 'Untitled Silicone' by Rayvonn D'Clark, courtesy of Guts Gallery Monday 4 May, 2020 Short read

In the first days of lockdown, I was extremely encouraged by the rapid and inventive responses by artists to create ways to share and sell their work. Artists are at the zenith of the creative industries and the vast majority have no financial safety net, relying on every sale to keep their practice going. With exhibitions, residencies and open studios cancelled, the financial outlook was bleak. But what slowly became even more impressive as the days passed was the receptive and massive audience for artists on social media, not to mention the manner in which charitable initiatives took off.

One of the first enterprises to offer some hope was dreamt up by artist Matthew Burrows with [#artistsupportpledge](#). The premise is to sell more for less and give back to the art community directly. An artist will post artwork they are happy to sell for £200 or less, excluding shipping. And once they reach £1,000 worth of sales, they pledge in an honour system to acquire artwork by another artist who has posted as part of the scheme. In its first month, more than £9m worth of sales were reported and the hashtag has gone global.

Many artists have also introduced a charitable component. Nina Mae Fowler takes portrait commissions that cost £200 and gives £100 to food banks, already raising nearly £20,000. A beautifully simple project was devised by Tom Croft. [#portraitsforhsheroes](#) offers free portraits by artists to NHS workers. In less than two weeks, thousands of artists have been matched with an NHS worker to have their portrait painted as a mark of respect and thanks from the creative world. In a time when mental health charities are being stretched more than ever, established artist Rachel Howard has made her [Black Dog edition](#) available for £50, with all of the proceeds going to Samaritans UK.

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Clockwise from top: Drawing portrait by Nina Mae Fowler; 'Cassie Beadle' by Nina Mae Fowler; 'Chronicles', 2020, by Sam Jackson, courtesy of Project Papyrophilia; 'Future No', 2020, by Graham Dolphin, courtesy of Project Papyrophilia

In The States, a major campaign was launched by street art giant, Shepard Fairey, along with Nancy Spector, the Artistic Director of the Guggenheim. [Amplifier](#) encourages artists everywhere to submit work that raises awareness about fighting COVID-19 and honours healthcare workers. It includes funds to disseminate the artworks that are selected, which included projecting them onto New York hospital buildings.

With such initiatives making things more transparent and easy to find, it's an amazing moment to start buying art or adding to your collection. Works on paper photograph well, are possible to make at home when artists can't get to their studios and are easy to post. The gallery, Charlie Smith London, created [Project Papyrophilia](#), an online exhibition that presents work on paper for £250 each, all A4 size. And [Paper Patrons](#) is an Instagram platform that offers small works on paper, all priced at £50, to help support emerging artists.

Exhibitions are going online but, while this has been possible for some time, what's crucially different during lockdown is to encourage a social element, a key component of the real art world. [Guts Gallery](#), a platform that supports underrepresented artists, hosts online private views at specific times, and encourages feedback to the artists with prize incentives. [The V-Art Show](#) has incorporated Zoom studio visits, where people can get chatty with wine. [Art of Social Distancing](#) is an ambitious Instagram platform that highlights cancelled exhibitions, collating them in one place, with the aim of building a large audience in lieu of a physical one for the time being.

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One of the most charming innovations to pop up overnight was [Isolation Art School](#), which brings art classes to the public. Created by Keith Tyson, one of the UK's most respected artists, the Instagram account invites artists from all media to give tips and video tutorials. It's already a runaway success, helping those who are home schooling, as well as artists now missing classes and people who would like to get cracking creatively.

Each week of lockdown brings new innovations created around a kitchen table, with more and more opportunities being discovered for both artists and art lovers. Most recently, [The Sequestered Prize](#) for isolation self-portraiture was launched, offering artists the opportunity for their work to be seen by an esteemed panel of judges, not to mention a physical exhibition later in the year. Thinking of how we move forward in an environmentally conscious manner, the [Sustainability First Art Prize](#) invites radical ideas from artists in response to the question: 'How do we build from the current corona crisis towards a more sustainable future?'

We are all learning to work differently and seize the opportunities the digital world affords us in such challenging times. I think we can learn a lot from artists. Whether it's buying a piece of art from an artist in lockdown in Italy who you might otherwise have never heard of, or putting a loved one forward for a free NHS hero portrait, the art world is ready to hear from you.

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