

# ARTFORUM

SLANT

## LETTER FROM PARIS

May 12, 2020 • Mara Hoberman on the reopening of the Parisian art world



Walter Pfeiffer, *Untitled*, 1979, inkjet print on satin paper RC, 23 1/2 x 15 1/2". Photo: Sultana.

**THE LOUVRE** was the first to go. On March 1, the world's most-attended art museum (averaging 15,000 visitors per day) went dark after some three hundred staff members walked out over concerns about the transmission of Covid-19. Although this initial closure lasted only three days, by March 14, the museum had announced it was shuttering again—this time indefinitely, in accordance with the government-ordered

nationwide shutdown of all nonessential businesses in France.

After more than eight weeks of lockdown, France is poised to begin loosening its strict stay-at-home orders. Starting Monday May 11, current restrictions on movement throughout the country will be expanded from a 1-kilometer to a 100-kilometer radius from one's primary residence. Shops and services including art galleries (but not large museums) will be allowed to reopen as long as they respect certain protective measures. Galerie Sator, Jocelyn Wolff, In Situ Fabienne Leclerc, Air de Paris, Joseph Tang, Marcelle Alix, Galerie Vallois, Daniel Templon, Ropac, Crevecoeur, Hussenot, Praz Delavallade, Galerie Papillon, Galerie Allen, and Gaudel de Stampa are among the many galleries that will begin greeting people again in the coming days, in person. And now, "no touching" applies to more than just the art.

But getting back to business as usual in the Parisian art world will take more than simply throwing open the doors and stocking the front desks with masks and hand sanitizer. Back in early April, the French gallery association Comité Professionnel des Galeries d'Art issued a press release with the grim estimation that one-third of French galleries might permanently close before the end of 2020 as a result of the coronavirus. The state has since stepped in with emergency funding, including 600,000 euros earmarked for public collections to purchase work from French artists or galleries negatively impacted by the coronavirus due to cancelations of exhibitions and art fairs. Still, many feel that President Macron has not done enough to help the country's cultural sector. Faced with potential financial ruin, galleries have had to find new ways to promote themselves, their artists, and one another.

By exposing the delicate interconnectedness of the art world ecosystem, the crisis has fostered a sense of solidarity between Parisian art dealers—many of whom have turned to each other for resources and support. The past two months of confinement have spurred virtual collaborations and forged new curatorial and financial partnerships. Advertised mainly via Instagram, the group show "Not Cancelled: Paris" brought together sixteen of the capital's galleries for a weeklong online "event" from April 26 to May 3. Spearheaded locally by gallery Sans titre (2016), the project made use of a digital platform developed and provided free-of-charge by Austrian design firm Treat Agency. Following in the footsteps of "Not Cancelled" events in Vienna, Berlin, and Warsaw, the Paris edition showcased artworks, virtual studio visits, and interviews by artists

represented by Air de Paris, Galerie Allen, Antoine Levi, Art : Concept, Balice Hertling, Crève-cœur, Exo Exo, Joseph Tang, Lily Robert, Maelle Galerie, Marcelle Alix, Mor Charpentier, Nathalie Obadia, PACT, Sultana, and Sans titre (2016). Some sales were made, including an untitled 1974 photograph by Zurich underground documentarian Walter Pfeiffer: an alluring close-up of a dewy clavicle that was a sight for socially distanced eyes. Overall, many gallerists were grateful for the opportunity to try out a new online model and for the chance to network, even if only among themselves.



**Robert Brambora, *Untitled (FI 1)*, 2020, oil, gouache and pencil on wood, copper, 29 1/2 x 43".** Robert Brambora, *Untitled (FI 1)*, 2020, oil, gouache and pencil on wood, copper, 29 1/2 x 43". Photo: Sans titre (2016).

French megadealer Emmanuel Perrotin and Paris newcomer David Zwirner have both offered support to their smaller and therefore more financially vulnerable colleagues. Zwirner, whose gallery has already hosted virtual viewing rooms for select galleries in New York, London, and Los Angeles, has announced that Platform: Paris/Brussels—which will provide galleries in both cities a chance to spotlight works by a single artist in their stable on Zwirner’s high-traffic site—will go online May 22 and last one month. Perrotin is generously offering its prime exhibition space in central Paris to twenty-six local galleries for three months. Aptly titled “Restons Unis (Let’s Stay

United),” this multipart exhibition will roll out in consecutive two-week installments between May 23 and August 14 at the gallery’s rue Saint-Claude location and online. A show of this scale and scope is important not only for the exposure it provides to the artists included—among them Boris Achour, Pia Camil, Mark Dion, Rokni Haerizadeh, Ramin Haerizadeh, Piotr Makowski, Ad Minoliti, and Hesam Rahmanian and Bruno Perramant—but also because it will bring much-needed work to framers, transporters, installers, fabricators, and other subcontractors whose livelihoods have been gravely impacted by the pandemic.

There will be no vernissage for the group shows at Perrotin, nor at any of galleries reopening next week in Belleville, the Marais, Saint Germain, Pantin, and Romainville. Not being able to gather for these traditionally crowded and convivial celebrations will no doubt undermine the morale of artists, collectors, and dealers alike. But socially distanced gallery-going will spark different kinds of joy and meaningful experiences. Uncrowded exhibitions make idyllic settings for quiet, intimate, and thoughtful exchanges for viewers. And, for dealers, hopefully, plenty of lucrative ones too.

But how and when collectors and the general public get back to making their rounds of gallery visits remains to be seen. Hopefully the bonds forged across Paris these past weeks—via phone calls, Zoom sessions, and emails—will prove to be strong, lasting, and fruitful. For now, as galleries throughout the city get ready to open their doors, the common mantra seems to be: *Restons unis!*

— Mara Hoberman

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