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THE CHANGING ART MARKET PARADIGM

Artists on Art catches up with Allison Malafronte

Artists on Art: The way society interacts and communicates is changing. The art market and collecting are also evolving. How do you see these two worlds affecting each other?

Allison Malafronte: Yes, whether we like it or not, the majority of the world is living online. More and more people are interacting, communicating, making purchases, conducting business, learning, consuming media, and networking online more than ever before. By the year 2020 there will be 7.8 billion people on earth and 68 percent of them will be online. That means about three billion more people will be entering the

online world in the next six years. This trend cannot be ignored, and it has implications for the art world as well. The move to an online model for art sales is a reality, and more and more collectors are using online galleries and auctions, artist websites and blogs, and sites such as Amazon Art, Saatchi Online, Artsy, Paddle8, and others to find and purchase artwork.

The disadvantage of the online art-sales space is that collectors don't always receive the education, personalized attention, or connection they need to make an informed purchase. They also don't get to see the artwork in person, live with it in some

way, or learn about the artist who created it, which I think is hugely important when you talk about a investment as significant and intuitive as purchasing art. If the collectors can't connect with the art or artist firsthand, there should be someone they trust who can make an educated recommendation for them.

AoA: Technology is allowing artists to both connect with one another more and present and sell their work through studio shows or full-blown online exhibitions. This has been an aspect of the art market for some time now, but how is it changing, and is it being elevated to the same or greater status as gallery or association shows?

AM: The good news about the New Media culture and online world is that the main currency of that space is content and connection. So creative people who are good communicators—visual or written—have a tremendous advantage in that arena. In terms of online images—websites, shows, auctions, exhibitions etc.—being elevated to the same status as in-person gallery shows, I don't think so. Art doesn't always fit as comfortably or naturally in the digital box as do other forms of communication. For example, we all know that the traditional print magazine is a dying art and that the majority of people prefer to consume content digitally or online through their smartphones or tablets. But art is a visual, sensory, and emotional experience. You will never get the same experience on a screen that you would get in high-quality print and you will never get the same experience in high-quality print that you would get in person. When you reduce all the things that make a painting alive—scale, color, harmony, atmosphere, the individual style and spirit of the artist, etc.—to pixels, dots, and RGB, it limits the viewer's experience. So, yes, the online space is a wonderful way for imagery to quickly get disseminated to a wide audience and peak people's interest and attention. But I hope these are just teasers or “trailers” to encourage people to see the art in person. And as a way to balance the online proliferation, I hope there will be more spaces and venues opening so people can enjoy art in real time, with real people, in real ways.

AoA: In a previous conversation, you mentioned the word “independent,” and that is clearly a big part of your thinking lately. What does it mean to you now?

AM: The word independent means a lot to me right now as both an artist and as a businesswoman. I have worked for corporations since I graduated college, and there are certainly benefits to being plugged into a big power source with larger budgets, resources, and employees than you have as an entrepreneur. But the general corporate structure—with its politics, bottom-line decisions, and lack of creative freedom—is not necessarily the kind of environment I thrive in. For this reason and others, I think it makes sense for me to have my own business right now. “Art Independent” is something I can always work on, whether as a full-time enterprise or as a small business simmering on the back burner while I move onto other industries and opportunities. It summarizes what I've done up until this point in the art world and allows me to share that experience with others. It's something that can grow and expand in any number of directions, based on what is right for the company, the industry, my audience, and myself in the future.

“Independent” is also a very strong word right now in society, business, and other industries. Book publishing is going independent, independent e-commerce is helping to fuel the economy, indie music remains extremely relevant, an increasing number of people are identifying with the independent party in politics. In the art world, independent pop-up shows are very popular, and I’m noticing a lot of artists coming together and organizing their own collaboratives, exhibitions, and projects. So this idea of freedom and independence in art, culture, and society is very powerful right now, and it’s a word that resonates strongly with me and with a lot of other creatives I know.

AoA: What are your hopes for Art Independent, and how does your past inform this new future?

AM: I hope to be able to help people find artists and artwork they really love and that resonates with them and means something to them. I hope to help artists find patrons and collectors who believe in what they are doing, understand their vision, and want to support it. I also hope Art Independent will play a role in creating value around work that is more interesting, intriguing, intelligent, and aesthetically compelling than what we’ve seen before.

In terms of personal goals and how my past plays into the future of this company, I feel I have a good amount of experience in and knowledge of the traditional representational-art community from my years spent as a magazine editor. But I am really curious about and want to be more connected to the larger contemporary art scene. Also, I feel I have a lot of connections among artists and practitioners, but I would like to build up more relationships and rapport with collectors and patrons. Art Independent is a way for me to accomplish both of these goals, and then bring those different groups together in interesting and appropriate ways.

“ *COLLECTORS NEED HELP FINDING QUALITY ARTISTS AND ARTISTS NEED HELP FINDING QUALITY COLLECTORS.* ”

AoA: Both artists and collectors lack expertise in certain areas. What are those areas and how does consulting bridge these gaps?

AM: I think what it comes down to is collectors need help finding quality artists and artists need help finding quality collectors. Also, gallerists, institutions, writers, curators, and other professionals in the art world often find their most inspired and meaningful connections come from face-to-face interaction or introductions. This is where an intermediary can be beneficial. We are inundated with unending information, imagery, and data these days, and sometimes we need someone who is more familiar with and knowledgeable about a particular subject or



Allison's curated exhibition, *Converge: Where Classical and Contemporary Art Collide*
New York, November 2012

person to help us cut through the clutter. Collectors may know what they want aesthetically, but they might not always have the ability or connections to find or ask for what they want. Also, most artists do not have the time or inclination to be hunting down patrons, schmoozing or networking, and taking inquiries from potential buyers that might not eventually come to pass. Most of them just want to paint. But once a genuine relationship is established and someone is being brought to them who has already been informed about who they are, what they do, and what they create, isn't that going to be a more worthwhile connection? That's because it's an informed connection. Being an independent consultant is almost like being a matchmaker. I start by going after the collectors and connoisseurs and learning as much as I can about what they're after and helping them define their goals. Then I match them to the best possible artist or artists for those goals.

AoA: Interior design and aesthetics seem to be an increasingly important aspect to the wealthy and collectors in general. Should artists consider this while they work, or is it an afterthought or exercise in connecting the right people to the right artist and specific works?

AM: Unless you are working on a specific commission, no, you shouldn't be overly concerned with interior design or decorative aesthetics. I'm a big believer in artists needing to paint what moves and inspires them most, and that they should spend their spare time filling up on things that feed their specific direction, rather than chasing any kind of trend. It's not always economically realistic or feasible, but the whole art-sales and representation process should work the other way: you paint what only you can paint in a way that only you can paint it and

someone will find a home for it. Now, if you are an artist who happens to love illustration and design and perhaps even have some training in those fields, by all means, be thinking in those terms as you paint. But in general, design is about demand and art is about freedom, so unless you are working on a commission with specific design parameters, there's no need to tailor your vision to anyone else's.

AoA: I would be remiss to not bring up the ever-present battle between representational (or traditional) and modern art. Are artists boxing the air here? I keep getting the feeling that the over-correction of modern art will level out and that “contemporary art” will combine excellence in modern thinking and technical skill. Traditional art will not rise in popularity or premier status, but just really good “contemporary art”—simply our world, represented exquisitely. The “Converge” exhibition you curated was perhaps a step in this direction.

AM: Right, there's no stopping the mainstream contemporary-art train, so resistance and whining is futile. The empires that were built by the dealers who branded and created value around artists such as Jeff Koons, Damien Hirst, Ai Weiwei and others did not happen overnight, nor will they fall or disappear overnight. It took decades and decades of underground, strategic planning before Larry Gagosian could get someone to pay \$12 million for Damien Hirst's shark in formaldehyde or for Jeff Koons' balloon dog to sell for \$58.4 million. Also, no major movement in culture or art comes into being without a specific reason and without reflecting something that is happening on a bigger scale with humanity and society (right,

wrong, or indifferent), so attacking it so that “it goes away” or so that people will forget it existed is also futile. But what is encouraging for traditional painters, I think, is that the current overinflated pricing and purchasing of the top tier is likely not going to be sustainable for that much longer. Even if those artists do stick around, there is a chance their value will begin to deflate. And when and if the proverbial contemporary art bubble bursts, the public will likely be more receptive to art that doesn't fully match the criteria of the failed system, because it no longer has the same value.

So, right, representational art will likely never reach the cult status of the current contemporary mainstream—does anyone really want it to anyway?—but I think it does have the potential of receiving more attention and patronage in the near future. Yes, I still think hybrid art in particular—elements of the current contemporary world and elements of the traditional world—is going to be the most palatable to both sides as things start to change, shift, and regain balance. At the end of the day, though, I honestly can't say for sure, and none of us can change or predict the contemporary-art-world trajectory any more than we can redirect the wind. So my advice to painters is just keep painting and let the historians and writers have the final word 100 years from now.



*Learn more about Allison and Art Independent at:
www.artindependentllc.com*