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ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

The Art World Tiptoes Back, With Virtual Sculpture and Chatty Avatars

Nina Chanel Abney, Anton Bakker and Jacolby Satterwhite unveil work as galleries and museums reopen; 'Art doesn't wait, trembling in a corner, for things to change. Art finds a way.'

By [Kelly Crow](#)

Sept. 7, 2020 3:00 pm ET

The art world typically reconvenes after Labor Day, with participants flocking to museums, galleries and fairs to socialize and suss out the season's potential breakout artists and blockbuster exhibits. This fall, curators and dealers say they expect a trickle of guests, not crowds.

Art lovers have already masked up and returned, in reduced numbers, to New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art and other places. More institutions are set to reopen by Halloween. But the atmosphere is subdued, with auctions still largely being conducted online and fairs such as Art Basel Miami Beach canceling last week. However, artists didn't cease creating during the lockdown. Here is how their work is changing—and where you can find it this season:

FALL ENTERTAINMENT PREVIEW

Fall is weird this year. But that doesn't mean it is canceled. The Wall Street Journal distills the trends shaping the fall entertainment season in a series of stories this week about what's coming in [books](#), movies, TV, [music](#), art and new media.

Going Virtual

Expect a season dominated by artists who have been holed up at home, making work with whatever is handy or experimenting with software that lets their work glow online.

Buzz is building around "Imaginary Friend," New York painter **Nina Chanel Abney's** first augmented reality sculpture project, which just opened. Whenever people in several U.S. cities

approach one of the artist's hotspots, like the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, a free app on their phones will reveal avatars who can stand nine stories tall and are designed by the artist to hang out and chat.



Nina Chanel Abney's 'Imaginary Friend' uses a free app that allows viewers at various hotspots to see an outsize avatar designed by the artist.

PHOTO: NINA CHANEL ABNEY/ACUTE ART

Dutch artist **Anton Bakker** just recreated some versions of his twisting, looping sculptures so that they only exist online, yet audiences can virtually walk around them in an exhibit called “**Alternative Perspective**” at New York’s National Museum of Mathematics. On Sept. 24, New York artist **Jacolby Satterwhite** will reveal his latest trippy piece of virtual reality, “**We Are In Hell When We Hurt Each Other,**” at his gallery, Mitchell-Innes & Nash. Audiences must show up to see the video installation.



'Krusty O's,' a work by Tom Sachs, whose show of paintings opens Nov. 5 in New York.

PHOTO: TOM SACHS/ACQUAVELLA GALLERIES

SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS

Where are you discovering and appreciating art during the pandemic? Join the conversation below.

In the analog realm, artists who usually work in various media are rediscovering their paintbrushes—including **Tom Sachs**. This New York artist is known for his cheeky critiques of fashion and retail branding, at one point creating a gold-leaf Hooters menu. Isolated at his home in Queens, N.Y., he said he redoubled his focus this year on painting, which sometimes entailed sending his canvases via car service to studio assistants quarantined elsewhere.

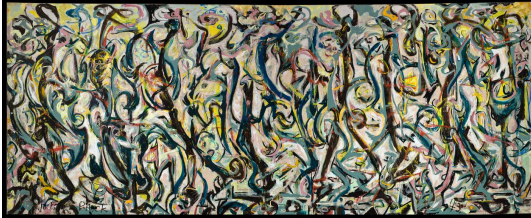
The new paintings pay homage to several brands and TV icons whose humor comforted him during lockdown, including Krusty the Clown from “The Simpsons” and the dog Brian Griffin from “Family Guy.” The artist’s first show entirely composed of paintings opens Nov. 5 at New York’s Acquavella Galleries. Mr. Sachs, now back at his studio in SoHo, said he didn’t touch up the drips and smudges in the new works because he wanted people to “look at my art and know a person was there.”

No More FOMO

As museums reopen, plenty will be dusting off exhibits they launched and then promptly closed when the pandemic hit. In New York, **Jordan Casteel**’s show, “**Jordan Casteel: Within Reach,**” will reopen Sept. 15 at the New Museum, and **Donald Judd**’s retrospective will be up through Jan. 9 at MoMA. Washington’s National Gallery of Art has extended its Philip Guston show through next fall, and Chicago’s Art Institute has reopened its shows

of Renaissance master **El Greco** and Parisian **Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec**.

Homegrown exhibits also abound, as curators comb their permanent collections for works and spare themselves loans or shipping hassles. Quite a few of the J.M.W. Turner landscapes in the Tate's fall exhibit in London hail from the museum's holdings. In New York, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum is pushing back its planned fall show of Venezuelan sculptor Gego by a few years. But the museum has delved into its permanent collection for sculptures by **Lynda Benglis**, **Richard Serra**, **Maren Hassinger** and others who were all inspired by the same abstract master: **Jackson Pollock**. That group show will open when the museum does on Oct. 3, and it is joined by a companion display of a rare Pollock mural the Guggenheim borrowed from the University of Iowa before the pandemic hit.



'Mural,' a 1943 work by Jackson Pollock, who inspired artists who will be in a group show at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum.

PHOTO: THE POLLOCK-KRASNER FOUNDATION/ARTISTS RIGHTS SOCIETY (ARS), NEW YORK

'Art Finds a Way'

Powerhouse galleries typically kick off the season with high-profile September shows, but many have pushed back the biggest ones to October or November. On Oct. 14, Levy Gorvy will open a major survey of works by Arte Povera giant **Michelangelo Pistoletto**, who at age 88 just went back to work after recovering from Covid-19. Hauser & Wirth has a small show of **Luchita Hurtado** works opening Sept. 10 and plans highly anticipated exhibits of **Jack Whitten** and **George Condo** on Nov. 5.



'Mask III: For The Children of Dunblane, Scotland,' a 1996 work by Jack Whitten, the focus of a coming show at Hauser & Wirth.

PHOTO: THE JACK WHITTEN ESTATE/HAUSER & WIRTH

Halsey McKay Gallery in East Hampton, N.Y., is showing emerging artist **Wilmer Wilson IV's** silver gelatin prints of crumpled bedspreads. "We've all been kept indoors for months, and there's no better metaphor for that than your bed," said gallery owner Ryan Wallace. Pace Gallery in New York will try to kick off the season with a Sept. 18 show of minimalist **Robert Mangold** and a huge "Circus" sculpture by **Jean Dubuffet** and on Oct. 10 Gagosian will open its **Theaster Gates** show.

Other galleries are courting day-trippers by hosting shows in unusual places. Art and design fair Object & Thing is teaming up with galleries Blum & Poe and Mendes Wood DM to install works by **Alma Allen**, **Sonia Gomes**, **Mark Grotjahn** and others throughout the



Wilmer Wilson IV's '5:56,' (2009-2010) captures the lines and curves of a wrinkled bedspread.

PHOTO: HALSEY MCKAY GALLERY & WILMER WILSON IV

glassy, New Canaan, Conn., home of architect and industrial designer Eliot Noyes. (Saturday tours can be reserved online between Sept. 15 and Nov. 28.)

Marc Glimcher, Pace's president and chief executive, said he isn't sure art lovers will be ready to visit galleries after Labor Day, but he is programming exhibits anyway. "We can't just push everything off indefinitely," he said. "Art doesn't wait, trembling in a corner, for things to change. Art finds a way."

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