

# ART HISTORY INSIGHTS

## MAY 2020

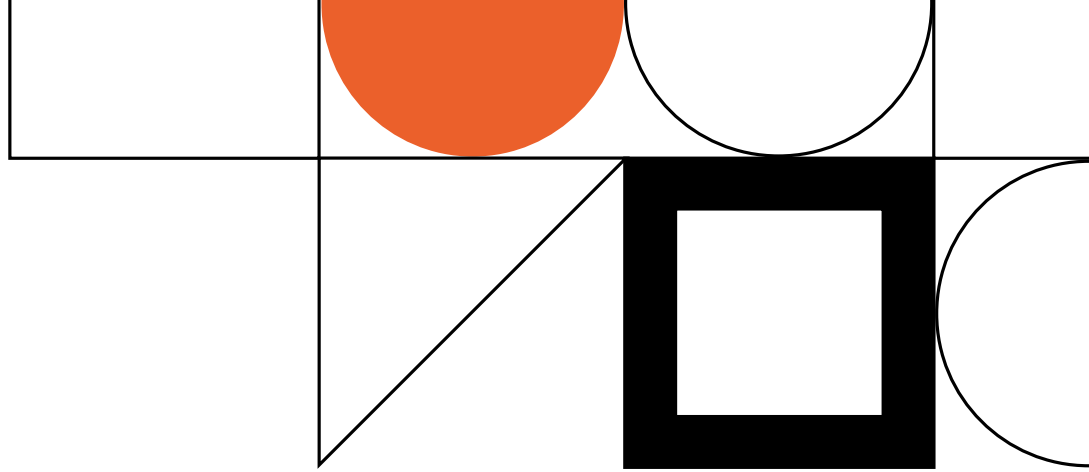
**The monthly newsletter that brings you selected articles of interest and opinion from the world of art history and visual culture. In this issue of Insights we reflect on the impact of lockdown, and what a post-pandemic future holds for arts, culture and education.**

### OPENING UP UNDER LOCKDOWN

Lockdown has inspired many institutions, artists and art historians to think and respond differently. People and places have been quick to make collections, art works and themselves available and accessible online. We have been invited to see, visit and participate in things we could never have dreamed of, such as seeing [cave art](#) in Northern Spain, visiting an [Egyptian tomb](#), a tour of the [Louvre](#) in Paris, or the [Hermitage](#) in St Petersburg. We have had opportunities to look closely, and closer still at masterpieces, by artists such as [Bruegel](#) and [Rembrandt](#). We have had private tours of [Artemisia Gentileschi](#) and Titian with curators at the National Gallery, enjoyed private art tuition with famous artists on TV, got inside the minds (and homes) of numerous scholars, and found new ways of engaging with [art history education online](#). But the best lockdown pastime must surely be the simple genius of [recreating art works in your own home](#), otherwise known as the 'Tussenkunstenquarantaine' (between art and quarantine) challenge, that was started back in March by the Getty Museum. Who knew that art and art history would inspire so many.

### ONCE IN A LIFETIME

Exhibitions closing and lost opportunities to see art will never compare to the loss of lives that Covid 19 has already taken and will continue to take. However, for many curators and museums it's not just the immediate impact of the lockdown on visitors and income that bites, it's the years of work and time that have proceeded once in a lifetime exhibitions that will never happen again. For example, 'The Ghent Altarpiece was never supposed to leave St. Bavo's Cathedral again. Not after the 15th-century masterpiece was nearly destroyed by rioting Calvinists in 1566. Not after its panels had been stolen at least six times: once by Napoleon, later by the Nazis (who took the whole thing).' But it did leave the cathedral and was exhibited alongside other works by Jan van Eyck at the Museum of Fine Arts Ghent throughout February before prematurely closing in March, not to be reopened'.  
<https://bit.ly/2DjxHxD>



## CAMP OR CAMPY

Susan Sontag's 1964 essay 'Notes on Camp' was the inspiration for this year's Metropolitan Museum exhibition, which opens with a Met Gala. This year's Met Gala offered up an array of art and fashion history prompts, not least around the notion of camp. But was it really camp, or just campy?

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/06/arts/design/van-eyck-ghent-cancellation-virus.html>

## 'WHEN WE FINALLY RE-OPEN MUSEUMS, HOW WILL WE FIND THEM TRANSFORMED?'

'The future of many museum operations—events, education, outreach—could hardly be more uncertain. Careers and livelihoods are on the line. Is this the end of the 'universal museum'? Will museums re-evaluate their approach now? Here are some compelling thoughts from art historian and curator, Professor Dan Hicks.

[https://news.artnet.com/opinion/dan-hicks-humanism-museums-1853346?utm\\_content=buffer0a8e4&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_source=facebook.com&utm\\_campaign=news](https://news.artnet.com/opinion/dan-hicks-humanism-museums-1853346?utm_content=buffer0a8e4&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook.com&utm_campaign=news)

## RE-OPENING MUSEUMS DIFFERENTLY

As Europe starts to re-open cultural institutions, what might we learn from their approach? In Austria the Kunsthistorisches plans to re-open its doors to the public earlier than anticipated with a pay-as-want scheme. The Director, Sabine Haag talks about their plans for the future. 'During the lockdown, museums were being very inventive with their digital tools and social media, but I think people will be hungry for a personal dialogue and emotion created by something that is in front of you...Collaboration is more important now than ever. All museums around the globe have the same mission: to serve humanity.' [Read more.](#) Meanwhile, in Italy, the Uffizi Galleries prepare to re-open to the public after over two months of lockdown. How do they plan to do it and what will be different?

<https://www.apollo-magazine.com/eike-schmidt-interview-reopening-uffizi-florence/>

## SURVIVAL TACTICS

Let's face it, life will not be 'returning to normal' anytime soon, or ever. And that's not necessarily a bad thing, but it does present many institutions, organisations and people with enormous, and possibly unresolvable challenges. How, therefore, do places adapt? Charlotte Higgins, chief culture writer at The Guardian suggests that 'The British arts after the pandemic may need to be rawer, more basic, more plugged into their communities than ever. And that might not be a bad thing.'

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/may/18/war-arts-stronger-covid-19-devastated-theatres-museums-imagination>

## MUSEUM EDUCATION, THE TIME TO SHINE

While museums around the world have chosen, or been forced, to lay off or furlough educators, at the Asian Art Museum the education department remains busily at work. What have they done differently, and why do they view museum education as vital right now? The head of contemporary art at the museum, Abby Chen, says, "I view the education department in a prominent role and position in art institutions and blending with the curatorial more seamlessly...Taking action now is way more important than talking about it. We need to embody that vision".

<https://hyperallergic.com/563185/asian-art-museum-education-covid-19/>

## YOUR INSIGHTS

We promote a broad and inclusive art history, and look to engage with as wide an audience as possible. Please get in touch with articles you think may be of interest for our newsletter. We welcome all content suggestions.

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