

Collecting

Visiting Art Basel From the Hamptons Will Test Online Model

By [Katya Kazakina](#)

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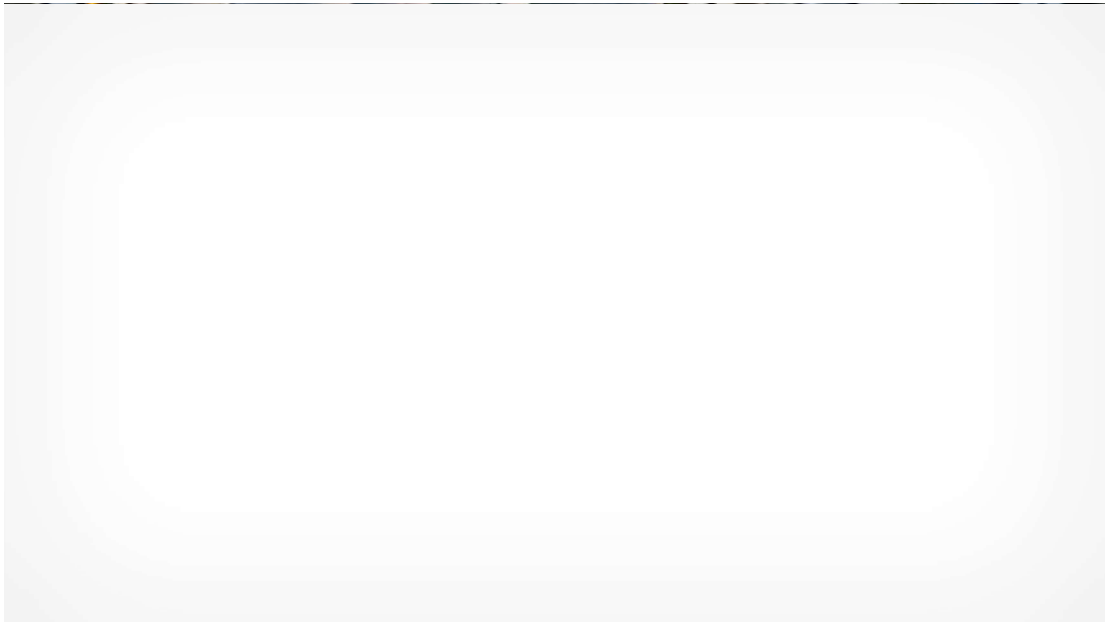
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- Galleries trying novel strategies to complement online sales
 - Johann Koenig launches competing fair at his gallery in Berlin
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For the past 25 years, Christophe Van de Weghe never missed the event that transforms a quiet Swiss town into the art world's epicenter each June.

Art Basel has become a destination for collectors, with more than \$3 billion of modern and contemporary blue-chip works offered. As an exhibitor, Van de Weghe spends as much as \$200,000 to ship works by Pablo Picasso, Alexander Calder and Jean-Michel Basquiat from New York, insure them, pay for the booth, host client dinners at Chez Donati and stay at the Three Kings hotel. On the eve of each VIP opening, he jumps into the frigid Rhine for a 3-mile swim.

PUBLICITÉ



But the art dealer isn't taking that plunge this week for the fair's 50th edition because of the coronavirus pandemic. Instead, buyers are invited to virtual booths, starting with Wednesday's VIP opening. The fair's online viewing rooms launched in March with mixed results.



“Figure with Banner” (1978) by Roy Lichtenstein Source: *Van de Weghe Fine Art*

Van de Weghe is participating from the Hamptons, where many wealthy art patrons fled from Manhattan, and just opened a small gallery in East Hampton, displaying many of the works featured in his Art Basel online viewing room. One of them is a 1978 Roy Lichtenstein painting, priced at \$7.5 million.

“Everybody is a VIP here,” Van de Weghe said.

Plunging Revenue

Some galleries that recently reopened are using their spaces to exhibit works offered at Art Basel's online viewing rooms. The stakes are high. Online platforms became a lifeline for galleries and auction houses during the lockdown. More than 150 U.S. galleries expect second-quarter revenue to plunge 73% from a year earlier, according to an Art Dealers Association of America survey.

Wealthy buyers snapped up works by emerging talents during the lockdown, asking for discounts of as much as 30%, according to dealers and advisers. But pieces above \$5 million were a much harder sell because collectors usually want to see them in the flesh.

"Do you think anyone will buy an \$8 million painting online?" Van de Weghe said. "I don't. You need to see the presence of it."



A new \$8 million sculpture by Jeff Koons sold online. *Source: David Zwirner gallery*

Art Basel will test this notion.

About five hours into the fair's VIP opening, David Zwirner gallery said it found a buyer for a new \$8 million sculpture by Jeff Koons, "Balloon Venus Lespugue (Red)," which was offered only online. Skarstedt gallery will offer a Willem de Kooning painting for \$8.5 million online and at its new East Hampton branch.



An installation of paintings for Art Basel online at Richard Nagy gallery in London. *Source: Richard Nagy*

In London, Richard Nagy hung works by Kees van Dongen, Egon Schiele and Henri Matisse at his gallery's reopening on Monday. They'll be featured on Art Basel's website, with prices as high as \$5 million.

Rival Fair

Applicat-Prazan, a Paris gallery focusing on postwar French art, installed six paintings in its Left Bank showroom, which reopened last month. Titled "Online NOT Only!" the presentation includes works by Pierre Soulages, Serge Poliakoff and Zao Wou-Ki. Clients received an email with a catalog and video.

"What's important for them is to know that we are not just putting 'stuff' online," said owner Franck Prazan.

That approach didn't work in March, when the gallery uploaded images of available works during Art Basel Hong Kong, Prazan said. None sold. Curating a real-life exhibition has already made a difference. A client bought an abstract 1956 canvas by Poliakoff, priced at 780,000 euros (\$876,000) and another work by Karel Appel priced at 480,000 euros.

In Berlin, Johann Koenig went a step further, launching a separate art fair at his gallery in the former St. Agnes church.

Titled "The Messe in St. Agnes," the event features about 300 pieces. They include his Art Basel presentation as well as works consigned by other galleries, collectors and artists without gallery representation. By the second day, red dots appeared beside many of the offerings.

More than 1.5 million euros of art sold, Koenig said.

(Updates with Zwirner sale in 10th paragraph.)

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