

GARAGE

“How Can We Think of Art at a Time Like This?”

In the midst of COVID 19 closures, writer-curators Barbara Pollack and Anne Verhallen debuted a star-studded, online-only art exhibition.

By [EILEEN CARTTER](#) | Mar 22 2020, 5:30am



Deborah Kass, *Emergency*, 2019.

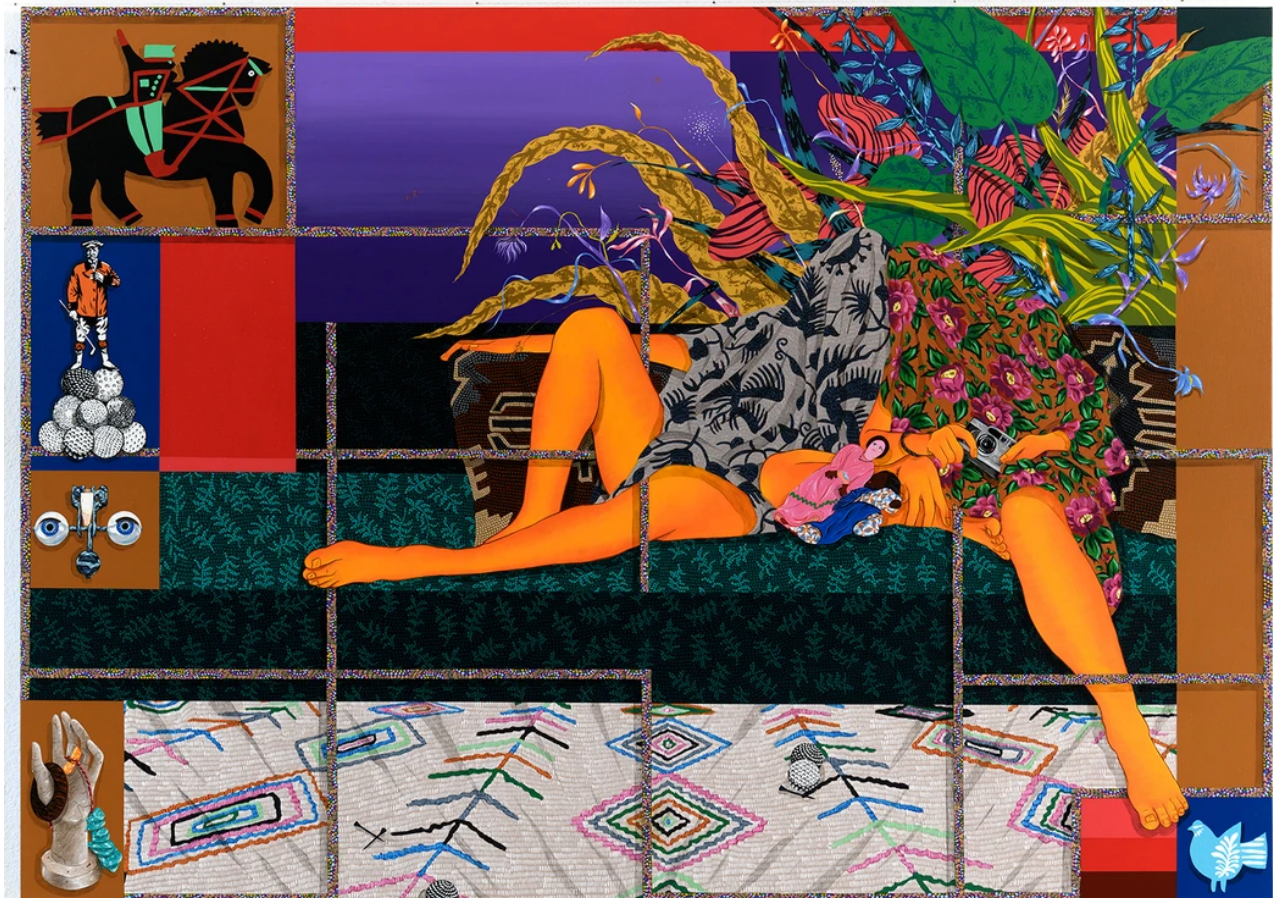
“We did everything in 48 hours,” curator Anne Verhallen said.

As museums and other cultural institutions around the world announced indefinite closures to quell the spread of coronavirus this past week, Verhallen and her co-curator, Barbara Pollack, opened a new online exhibition,

“Barbara and I were speaking on Friday and we really felt the need for something positive, a need for an outlet,” Verhallen tells me over the phone this week. The three of us are calling in from our separate New York apartments, remarking on the early-spring sun beaming through our windows and the birds chirping outside. “We had a very short conversation and we set everything in motion right after that.”

Their line-up, thus far, includes work by Lynn Hershman Leeson, Judith Bernstein, Janet Biggs, Miao Ying, Jacolby Satterwhite, Dread Scott and Jenny Polak, Kathe Burkhart, Amir H. Fallah, Aziz + Cucher, and Zhao Zhao. They plan to showcase an artist a day for the foreseeable future, which, Pollack said, “may be two weeks, two months, or through the election—or, depending on the results of the election, [it could] go further. If we have an election.”

By design, there’s no end date in sight.



AMIR H. FALLAH, "DELUSION & CONFUSION," 2019.

“The feeling of crisis has been going on at least since 2016,” Pollack said. They reached out to “artists who already, in their work, have been addressing three things: futuristic pessimism, political outrage, or psychic meltdowns,” looking to veteran artists as well as “a new generation of artists emerging globally who are dealing with things like the new rise of authoritarianism, and how coronavirus hit their countries first.”

“We have been leading up to this moment,” Verhallen said, “What’s happening right now makes all of these issues even more immediate, but also these events have created a sort of empty space for all of this change to actually happen. Right now is the perfect time for all of this to be set in motion.”

The curators wanted *How Can We Think of Art at a Time Like This?* to be a distinctly not-for-profit project: none of the works are for sale and there is no compensation for the artists involved (the exhibition, as their website states, “is not sponsored by a corporation, tear gas distributor, or pharmaceutical company”).



AZIZ + CUCHER, "THE ROAD," 2017.

They hope the website and exhibition will function like a public forum, inviting artists, critics, and viewers to interact in a comment section “commons,” encouraging the use of the hashtag #artatatimelikethis. As Pollack said, “People really need a platform to vent, or cry, or express themselves, or gather together [even] when social distancing is enforced.” For the curators themselves, Verhallen said, “working on this has helped us tremendously. It’s made us think positively.”

“I lived through 9/11 in New York, and Sandy, and the blackouts, and each one of these events raised the same issue,” said Pollack, who often curates shows in China, all of which were cancelled earlier in January. This time around, “I kind of knew the emotions and chaos [the cancellations] would cause before it hit New York.”

“We’re really aiming towards a global perspective on our website, because this is not a local crisis,” Pollack said. “This may be the new universal.”



KATHE BURKHART, "JUNKIE: FROM THE LIZ TAYLOR SERIES (X, Y AND ZEE)," 2016.

moment it can feel easy to forget. One could say, “How can you think about laughing at a time like this?” except, well, the internet has made laughter—and fury, in equal measure—relatively easy. Online, there’s always a steady flow of jokes, ranging from delightful to completely heinous, regarding our collective despair.

Maybe the internet can make it easy to think about art at a time like this, too.

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