

COVID-19 / Coronavirus:

Art Market Quo Vadis?

It's weeks, months now since Coronavirus keeps the world in a stranglehold, threatenig to suffocate us. A tiny, invisible, ugly virus is proving to be much stronger, effective and powerful than all the gigantic, magnificent and impressive symbols and icons of our boundless consumer world, our unbridled liberalism and our rampant globalization. The coveted pot of gold at the end of the rainbow has moved into the far distance.

We shall overcome, no doubt. We will get a grip on this nasty spoilsport and free ourselves from its claws; and our success will be faster and less painful the more we act together and in solidarity. It will take longer, however, for the wounds and scars to heal; we won't be able to return to everyday life as if nothing would have happened. The break is too big; there will be a before and an after Coronavirus.

What will happen when it's over? Philosophers and futurists see humanity facing a grim, even dangerous future. The Italian thinker Giorgio Agamben puts it this way: "The virus infects not only individuals, but society as a whole." He is surely right. Also the pessimistic faction warns that fear makes us wild egoists. Does Coronavirus really give cause for hopelessness? Or, despite its brutal reign of terror, can it not have the opposite effect? The answer lies within us alone.

Why should the society after Coronavirus be more selfish than the society before the virus? Even more selfish, one might say. Wasn't it already selfish amid a superabundance which concealed selfishness by allowing everyone to get hold of what they liked? Unforgotten, amongst many other things, are the cruise ships with thousands of passengers saturating the shallow lagoon of the world wonder Venice, or the roaring parties of the rich and beautiful on their yachts in Mykonos, a few azure waves away from desperate refugees fighting for their lives on ramshackle rubber boats: brutal, primitive, prepotent. The total availability of everything, for everyone and at any time led to a total disregard for beauty and value. Vulgarity, decadence and ruthlessness as the symbols of an era.

Today, countless people around the world are sacrificing themselves for their fellow humans who have been afflicted by or exposed to the virus. They provide selfless help, putting their own safety at a risk. Nameless doctors, nurses and paramedics are working beyond the end of their strength - on and on, day and night. Common truck drivers, warehouse workers and supermarket cashiers are tirelessly engaging themselves to ensure that our supply is guaranteed, that our needs are covered. Governments and authorities, often hailed as obstacles to the supposedly self-solving neoliberalism, had to spring up monumental medical, health and economic emergency measures almost overnight. We are also witnessing how in everyday life people support people, they show consideration, accept drastic measures, explain them to their children. Together and united in the fight against the virus, together and united in overcoming the disaster, together and united for each other.

We should urgently use this viral state of shock, despite fear and need, also for reflection, about ourselves, about our future. This should also be the case in the art world, and even more so in the art market. The art world as a solidary global community with more idealistic and academic values and less dictated by the absolute imperative of the art market? The art market as a responsible international hub, based on mutual respect, tolerance and acceptance, and less of a zero-sum game, each for himself ... and against the rest. The art (again) as an authentic, profound and inspiring cultural asset, and less as a hyped speculative object or trendy luxury product? Such insight grows through fear and need, or more precisely: through resistance against that fear and need.

A new era will also begin for the international art market. Once successful structures and dogmas will be questioned, innovation will acquire a completely new meaning and necessity. The times of unrestrained greed for profit, power and new records will probably be over for a long time to come. What counts now is humility, cohesion and a sense of responsibility: equilibrium instead of polarization, pluralism instead of monopolization, participation instead of exclusion, unification instead of separation, sustainability instead of instant and monetary fame, depth instead of superficiality, dialogue instead of monologue, diversification instead of egalitarianism and repetition. Slower rhythm, greater attentiveness, stronger focus on the essential, deeper devotion.

Why shouldn't this work? The virus is extremely contagious and so is fear ... but even more contagious is hope. Man is a learning being. And even in these difficult and uncertain times, he will develop more than just a new vaccine.

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