

THE DEATH OF THE GALLERIST - PART II

December 19, 2018
NORDIC ART AGENCY

Following the first blog post in this series I have spent the last few days considering the imminent death of gallerist or at least the death of the physical gallery. It became clear that some research from the current new breed of art industry players and new future faces was required to support the contemporary online trends. If the traditional gallery is slowly becoming obsolete and the online gallery and auction house platforms are becoming more dominant, is the need for a gallery, rather like the need for the high street, dying out? Possibly galleries are morphing into the new cross platform omni-channel world supported by most luxury goods in the marketplace, a multilayered marketing experience merging the online world with the offline experience. Surely buying a work of art is different from buying a Gucci handbag or a Louis Poulsen designer lamp? Or possibly not?

I have chosen to explore two interesting players on the Instagram space who having been making significant waves on the online world of art over the past few years, the Unit London and PAINTGUIDE™.

Unit London, is currently London's leading artist-led gallery space. It was established in 2013 by millennial art dealers Jonny Burt and Joe Kennedy whose Instagram bio claims they are *Championing the world's most gifted artists* and they currently boast 310,000 active followers. They have made a name for themselves and their gallery, Unit London, by harnessing the attention of today's device-addicted art lovers.....

On the other end of scale, small to medium size galleries and art advisories also appear to be thriving in the new art buying landscape. **Morgan-Davies Art** is a small, stylish art consultancy based in London with over 20 years of experience in the art world. Founder Natalie Morgan-Davies runs an online gallery, collaborates in various ways with art fairs and offline events but has no permanent physical gallery space.

Social media and an online presence for Morgan-Davies Art is currently more about branding & company awareness as only a small amount of actual physical sales are driven exclusively

through online channels. Social media is valued a key tool for testing the market response to new artists and artwork and is useful for generating awareness and marketing art fairs and exhibitions but doesn't support her primary business model as an art advisor.

So would a permanent physical gallery space support Morgan-Davies Art more?

It would certainly contradict the type of business I wanted to create. I wanted a more affordable portal for clients therefore offering my clients more affordable art work, that excluded such gallery costs. Having no physical space opens up a more direct relationship with the client where I am able to show art work within an interior/home setting rather than the same four gallery walls. Rather than a permanent space, I prefer pop up exhibitions. This allows for far greater diversity and enables my artists to be exhibited in different, changing environments. It also gives clients a fresh perspective and allows them to see how different spaces and interiors can enhance or change an art work. It keeps things fresh.

Natalie Morgan-Davies

Though sales are becoming more frequent through the website it is typically only for a particular type of art. Graphic works sell well online, as do photography and monochromatic works, which all reproduce well digitally. Natalie Morgan-Davies explains,

Oil on canvas and colourful, textured pieces are more of an online challenge for all the obvious reasons. However that said, repeat clients are starting to buy online, where they are familiar with the artist's style already – so an online purchase is less of a gamble. But many clients still like the face-to-face element.

To date Morgan-Davies Art's most successful event experience on or offline was a recent collaboration with a stylish bar & restaurant located in London which reaped positive experience on many levels. The unique, large and airy space, coupled with the central location, added to the success. Large abstract canvases by artists Henrie Haldane could be exhibited together as an entire collection against a nice aesthetic.



Abstract artwork by Henrie Haldane at No.29 Power Station West, London

This was a unique show – as finding a ‘gallery’ in the appropriate location that could accommodate so many large canvases would have been nearly impossible, especially with such an ‘interior’ setting. This was such a beautiful and relaxed venue where people could meet for coffee, brunch etc. It led to many more interactions with buyers & interior designers. I genuinely feel that the additional meetings & sales would not have happened in a more formal gallery space.

Natalie Morgan-Davies

For a small, yet experienced player such as **Morgan-Davies Art**, the omni-channel flexibility works well. Offline they take advantage of freedom of movement supported by an online marketing strategy, building and retaining a client base whilst allowing new client interaction with art events in a non- traditional setting. They keep the costs down which ultimately means that they can compete more closely with the purely online platforms with minimal overheads and the artist sees a better return.