

The Art Gorgeous



“The Artist Is Online” Is Online At König Gallery König Gallery is mastering the digital space with their most recent show

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THE ARTIST IS ONLINE. PAINTING AND SCULPTURE IN THE POSTDIGITAL AGE is KÖNIG’s brand new international group exhibition curated by Anika Meier and Johann König. The show features 70 works by 50 artists who are at home on social media. Focusing on painting and sculpture, they react to new tech innovations. At the same time, the gallery is hosting a complementary project showing digital work by digital artists via the crypto platform Decentraland, a virtual world where users can buy, develop, and sell land and where tech-savvy users can explore a digital gallery set up with an avatar.

For the generation of artists born around 1990, working in the post-digital age has become a mashup of art-historical references, most evidently when influences from the Old

Masters, Surrealism, Pop Art and Post-Internet Art are merged together. Within the show femininity is deconstructed (Sarah Slappey, Rosie Gibbens) and masculinity is over-performed (Pascal Möhlmann, Evgen Copi Gorisek). While the cult of self-expression is celebrated (Chris Drange) and consumerism is exhibited (Oli Epp, Travis Fish).

Gallerist Johann König, curator [Anika Meier](#) and artist [Thomas Webb](#) answered some of our most urging questions:

In the past year, “online salesrooms” mushroomed but in the best case in a 360 degree view with jpegs and prices. The new show THE ARTIST IS ONLINE is far beyond that: You can visit the show in a dedicated gallery building on virtual land/ Decentraland. How did this come along and briefly, how does it work?

JOHANN KÖNIG: Decentraland is a 3D virtual world based on the blockchain and is owned by its users. Shahin Tabassi, an art collector and pioneer in the NFT space, bought a bigger piece of land because he wanted to build a museum for his NFT art collection. He offered us his land for rent because he was interested in seeing the traditional art world enter this virtual world. The German artist Manuel Rossner interpreted the brutalist architecture of the former church ST. AGNES by Werner Düttmann and Arno Brandhuber in his 3D model and built it up Decentraland. KÖNIG now stands on a piece of rented virtual land and is the first commercial gallery there. The digital visitors enter the space via their laptops, create and dress their avatars and walk around in a social space where they can meet and interact with people. We had about 150 visitors joining us for the opening, people were chatting with each other and explored the gallery and the art.

While there has been a flood of IG stories of participating artists sharing screenshots of the virtual gallery stroll, how do you make sure to also introduce less tech-savvy clients and collectors to such concept?

ANIKA MEIER: What does being tech-savvy mean these days? Aren't we all used to creating accounts and profiles on new social media platforms all the time? If you want to play Animal Crossing by Nintendo, you have to buy a switch and the game, you have to understand the dynamics of the game and have to learn to move around on your island. When it comes to Decentraland you enter the world via your browser on your laptop by creating an account, which only takes a few minutes. The social audio-app Clubhouse got popular over the last couple of months. Once a space is trending because interesting new things happen, people want to be part of it and invest time to explore and understand the new platform. When it comes to the NFT space, there's a new generation of collectors who have grown up on the internet and come to art through being online and through being excited about technical innovations. For less tech-savvy collectors it might not be a challenge to enter the space and set up a crypto wallet but to get familiar with the history of digital art. That's why we put together an Instagram Live program of conversations with some of the artists in the show and host rooms on Clubhouse to shift the focus from the auction records dominating the press to the art and the history of digital art. This week we co-hosted a KÖNIG TALK together with Rhizome, an institution that has played an integral role in the history of contemporary art engaged with digital technologies and the Internet. The topic of our talk was curating in the digital realm and we had experts in the field on stage, among others Hans Ulrich Obrist from Serpentine Galleries, Christiane Paul from Whitney Museum and Sabine Himmelsbach from House of Electronic Arts in Basel.

During last weekend's virtual "after party", guests could even chat with each other's avatars in a private space within the virtual gallery. With such gimmicks and possibilities in place: Do you still desire going back to the pre-
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covid world or might this replace an actual vernissage and become the new reality?

ANIKA MEIER: It's clearly not either or. Virtual worlds and digital art will not replace physical shows and traditional media such as painting and sculpture. Hopefully digital art will finally find its place in the traditional art world after all these years. Friedemann Banz from the art collective Banz & Bowinkel who has been working with new technologies since a decade said for them it feels like it's raining in the desert. In the early days people were shaking their heads when they started creating art with computers but they had a vision and believed in what they were doing. Finally all these visionary minds are seen and heard.

Last week we opened the show **THE ARTIST IS ONLINE. PAINTING AND SCULPTURE IN THE POSTDIGITAL AGE** at **KÖNIG** in Berlin. It's a show with 50 artists from all over the world who would have come to Berlin to join us for the opening and to see their work exhibited in a physical space. One can't replace these physical encounters, why would one even think about that? Being together in social online spaces is an addition and a different experience. For his digital solo show at **KÖNIG** the artist Thomas Webb built a 2D multiplayer world titled **WORLD WIDE WEBB**, a virtual world driven by Artificial Intelligence and real-time data. The digital visitor enters through the browser on a smartphone, and is invited to do an exercise in hopeless nostalgia. The **WORLD WIDE WEBB** is a multiplayer simulation, a digital exhibition space, and a world full of art and characters the visitor interacts with. Webb also recreates the social spontaneity of the world pre-Covid-19. 5.000 digital visitors from all over the world joined us on the opening night mid-August in 2020. They even cued up for 60 seconds to get into the famous night club Berghain and chatted with each other if they would get in. Creating experiences online is what interests us. And that's why Manuel Rossner tore a hole into the wall of St. Agnes in Decentraland, so that people can climb up on his sculpture that leads up to the bell tower

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of the former church. During the opening night of THE ARTIST WAS ONLINE there was a roof top party and people were dancing while enjoying the view.

The gallery will also auction a series of NFTs via Opensea later this week. Do you follow the current trend or is this concept a different one? Did all the artists like the idea and why would they need a gallery to launch a NFT anyway?

JOHANN KÖNIG: If following a trend means selling NFTs, then the answer is yes. One year ago, we launched KÖNIG DIGITAL as the fourth location of the gallery with a virtual space people can enter via the app KÖNIG GALERIE. Like mentioned before, what interests us and is a challenge for new media artists is creating experiences online. That's why we now decided to curate an exhibition of digital art in a virtual space instead of simply putting the NFTs on a marketplace. We work with artists who aim to use the potential of the virtual space. And yes, why do artists still need galleries? THE ARTIST IS ONLINE is an exhibition project, it's curated, the artists are carefully chosen based on their work. Nifty Gateway and SuperRare drop NFTs on their website, each drop is promoted by a newsletter mailing and people buy the work on the website. We provide a space and the context, we create an experience for the digital visitor and share our network of collectors and followers with the artists. Right now it's important for the traditional art world to enter the NFT space and to bring attention to digital artists who create historically relevant work.

What would be the dream collector to purchase the artists NFTs? Do you hope to take established collectors and introduce them to this new world or do you hope that some introvert tech collectors become aware of high level digitalised art works?

JOHANN KÖNIG: The dream collector is always the person who would like to live with the art and feels a connection to it and to the artist and is interested in following and supporting the career of an artist. Are tech collectors introvert? This scene is highly connected and communicative on Twitter, they speak about the artists they have newly discovered and about the prices they paid for an NFT, it's a welcoming community that educates newbies in the space about NFTs and how to start collecting. Crypto collectors are eager to discover new artists and concepts because they want to collect art that pushes the limits of what's possible when it comes to inventing new ways of making work accessible and collectable.

There are NFT panels almost on an hourly base these days across IG, Clubhouse & co. One point of criticism: the carbon foot print. Myth or truth? Can an artist/creator influence their NFTs Co2 emission?

ANIKA MEIER: Yes, NFTs affect the environment and that's a problem that urgently needs to be solved. We also only sell unique pieces to avoid minting hundreds and thousands of NFTs.

THOMAS WEBB: There is nothing the artist can do. We must trust in the ethereum network developers to move to proof-of-work in the Julys 'London' update. This will reduce carbon emissions by a projected 99 per cent. The network wasn't designed to operate at this level, and the creator of Ethereum himself has said this is a massive waste of electricity.

I think the argument is narrow-sighted and invalid. The whole idea of decentralised, open-source networking prevents volatile changes to the code and allows developers to vote fairly on future updates. It can't be fixed overnight and the massive demand from NFTs was unexpected; the ethereum network cannot avoid the emissions, no one can control

what is and isn't minted, the miners are there to mine, they will take whatever gas is going in a proof of work system. You would have to shut down all the miners to fix the problem. However, the network's impact on replacing traditional, physical economies will be so significant that the CO2 savings will be huge; no more shipping art around the world for fairs. If there's a small impact now – for the promise of a cleaner, more efficient environment – significantly when we can improve the carbon efficiency of generating electricity, I see it as a no brainer. There are no fossil fuels involved in the perfect model. We haven't even discussed solar power miners in space. That would fix everything.

My “E tree” that's part of the show in Decentraland investigates the relationship between the NFT and the current environmental impact of minting and exchanging smart contracts, making a transparent statement about its CO2 impact from electricity usage, allowing the holder to calculate this dynamically. To calculate the impact, I use <https://carbon.fyi/> on my wallet. I then used <https://trees.org/> and donated using ETH. I planted around 100 trees, which will more than cover any emissions from future trades in the middle ground leading up to proof-of-stake.

After so many new formats and innovations: What's next? Do you still plan to invite real people in one place to an IRL only painting show or is this a thing of the past?

ANIKA MEIER: This digital show is the third element of the exhibition project THE ARTIST IS ONLINE. It's one generation of artists we show offline and online. Both exhibitions are about painting and sculpture in the postdigital age, it's an overview of what's currently happening and on the minds of artists who have grown up on the Internet. The exhibition at the gallery in Berlin is an only painting and sculpture show, this will never be a thing of the

past. We try to look into the future by exploring what is possible in the digital space for artists and galleries because it's important to never stop questioning yourself and the art world to push things forward and write history.