

Liv Vaisberg _ Office for Art & Design

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As the whole world seems to have been put on pause and a new sense of emergency and priorities has emerged, the digital sphere has undoubtedly gained extra momentum. Our emails and social feeds are (over)flooded with a wealth of initiatives ranging from private viewings, to online fairs, workshops, digital exhibitions and online festivals...

However, while the art market certainly needs to continue to function if only for the sake of artists and art workers, what we do enjoy seeing at the Office is more information on artists' backgrounds, reading in depth interviews and watching films - as well as seeing lots of grassroots smaller initiatives that should be praised for supporting the artists and art workers who are most financially threatened.

For this LV Office Insight, we have chosen to highlight a couple of initiatives on why and how to support artists during this difficult time.

Stay home, stay safe, support art.

Interviews: How to support emerging artists during confinement

Awakening by Galerie Valeria Cetraro (Paris)

Liv Vaisberg Office: You are a gallerist and defending your artists is your *raison d'être*. How do you envision this period and how do you respond to the current circumstances as a gallerist?

Valeria Cetraro: The gallery operates on the basis of close collaboration and transparency with the artists. We, therefore, discuss a lot together in order to fathom the actual crisis, which is not, despite its collectively acknowledged severity, the first upheaval we had to face, understand and fight together and proposed to take benefit from this very particular moment.



It is time to reexamine the contradictions that characterise our activity in a permanent way, which the current turbulence just reinforces. Our audience is not diverse enough and we sometimes work in isolation within our own environment. Those facts question what art is all about and how it makes sense in the world, they also pose economic and sustainability issues.

While on the one hand, it is important to keep up the curiosity of those who have been already following and supporting the artists by continuing to show their works via the usual means of communication, on the other hand, we thought it is time to imagine a way to break a few taboos, to open new doors, to make things more accessible, aiming at a greater openness of our activity and more concrete consequences at the level of the gallery's economy.

This is how the idea of *AWAKENING* surfaced, with not only the intention of making a new selling tool, but, above all, to share a new kind of platform for proposing the artists' works to a wider audience.

LVO: So *AWAKENING* supports your gallery's artists and also stimulates new collectors. Can you tell us more about this initiative?

VC: The *AWAKENING* catalog, intended to accompany us for the years to come, brings together a selection of works by the gallery's represented artists. Each edition introduces one work per artist, for a limited time (between one to three months), during which the works can be acquired with a 30% reduction on its initial selling value. Once removed from the catalog, the work returns to its original value.

Considering the economics of the gallery, the initial prices of the artworks are rather high because the demand is relatively little. The *AWAKENING* discount communicates the effort that the gallery and the artists have agreed to make in order to open accessibility to a broader audience.



We also want to show that the actual prices of the works are most of the time not as high as one might think. People might be surprised to learn that artists who already have institutional recognition and who have been working with a gallery for several years, can propose works for 2000 euros. The *AWAKENING* approach comes from a concern for transparency, fueled by the conviction and the desire to move out from a certain opacity that characterises our market. One important element is the ephemeral nature of the discount. It is intended to foster a dynamism that only art fairs nowadays are generating.

We must today find a form of independence from the latter fairs by imagining other ways to develop our activity.

LVO: What is your take back on this period we are going through in the art world and what can it teach us for the future?

VC: In all domains, this major crisis exposes the flaws of a system. There are many things we need to rethink. When it comes to contemporary art galleries there are often misunderstandings and unawareness from the larger audience about how we work and about our economic metabolism. Those misconceptions, not to say distrust, are due to the opacity I mentioned before but also to actual weird segregation, partly due to bias, partly to a privileged elite's tendency of closure. This discriminating pattern has to be dismantled in order to reconnect with the world which we are living in, with the conviction that contemporary art can be at least as necessary as literature or even, I push it a bit, as household appliances.

The major failure of our generation is that of not being able to encourage the emergence of new collectors among this same generation. If there is one lesson to be taken, it surely is that art must get closer, again, to life. This relies on mediation and content but also on the question of value and price. This is why, paradoxically, I think that the disclosure today can be activated by the dissemination of such a catalog, maybe even more than by an exhibition project.

Moreover, as I said, few people are aware of the economy of an art gallery. In the same way as many other galleries, together with my artists, we put a lot of energy into offering the public quality exhibitions. Accompanied by art critics, we strive to propose mediation efforts based on in-depth content. This background work is fundamental. But it seems important to me to recall that this work is paid only by the sale of the works.

In the context of a small/medium gallery, beyond the attraction one can feel for one specific work, or corpus of works, of an artist, what also motivates numbers of our collectors is the genuine desire of participating in its mere existence by supporting the whole project (that includes the whole group of the artists represented by the gallery). It would be wonderful if this vision would spread more widely. For this, it is important to work with transparency and sincerity. Galleries are not occult organisms.