**Why the World's Most Talked-About New Art Dealer Is Instagram**

by Olivia Fleming

[Vogue](https://www.vogue.com/article/buying-and-selling-art-on-instagram) |

Standing before \*\*Marc Quinn’\*\*s looming *Myth Venus* sculpture in front of Christie’s Rockefeller headquarters last night was a masked protester holding a large poster that read *F\*\*\* U.* It was a parody of \*\*[Wade Guyton](http://instagram.com/burningbridges38)’\*\*s 2005 *Untitled* that sold for $3.52 million just hours later at the live-streamed “[If I Live I’ll See You Tuesday](http://www.christies.com/sales/if-i-live-ill-see-you-tuesday-new-york-may-2014/)” auction, which included 35 contemporary artworks from blue-chip names such as **Richard Prince,** [**Jeff Koons**](https://www.vogue.com/vogue-daily/article/justine-and-jeff-koons-promote-young-designers-at-their-new-fashion-week-venue-the-white-space/#1)**, Martin Kippenberger** and **Alex Israel,** all handpicked by contemporary art expert with the majority of the production on his—and [Christie’s](http://instagram.com/christiesinc)—Instagram accounts.

Guyton, who makes his art on inkjet printers and photocopiers, had used his own Instagram account over the weekend in what was quickly interpreted as a subtle threat, rather than just a cheeky response, to the auction by printing and photographing dozens of prints using the same file that produced his original inkjet on linen *Untitled.* He could flood the market, if he wanted to. But he didn’t and the auction, which “witnessed worldwide participation” according to Christie’s and surpassed its pre-sale target of $92.9 million to total a record-breaking $134.6 million, saw Israel’s *Sky Backdrop* sell for five times its estimate at $1.25 million in what was the artist’s first appearance at auction. Meanwhile Kippenberger’s *Untitled* sold for the world record price of $18.6 million. “Christie’s is taking contemporary art and making it go to prices that it shouldn’t,” the anonymous protester told the *New York Observer.* “By the time they’re 30, these artists aren’t going to have anywhere to go.” But if Gouzer’s auction has taught us anything, it is that what artists will have is Instagram.

The social media platform is not only launching the career of under-the-radar artists, it is providing the world with an entirely new way to access art. Where artists once had to first get support of the art world elite—critics, galleries and big name collectors, which would eventually lead to museum shows—before reaching the monied masses, today artists use Instagram as their own virtual art gallery, playing both dealer and curator while their fans become critics and collectors, witnessing the creative process in real time.

“I can post a painting and it will sell before the paint is dry,” explained artist whose glossy crystal-covered canvases are regularly bought straight off her Instagram feed for upwards of $30,000. The 37-year-old is based in New Orleans but will often ship her artworks directly from her Uptown studio to London, Tokyo, and Switzerland, where she recently sold a painting to **His Serene Highness Pierre d’Arenberg** for an undisclosed amount. “My collectors will text and email me their credit card details, they mail checks; it is literally a frenzy to see who can whip out their AmEx first!” admits Longshore, whose nearly 2,000 Instagram followers, and subsequent clients, include the likes of [**Blake Lively,**](https://www.vogue.com/vogue-daily/article/blake-lively-perfume-gucci-chime-for-change-initiative/#1) the former President of Time Inc. Digital, **Fran Hauser,** and “one of the wives” of the Rolling Stones. “Technology is the platform of my business: All I need is my iPad, my Instagram and a delivery truck to haul all of this gorgeousness to the new homes where they will hang.”

Now able to sell works themselves, artists are nudging the dealer out of the way while promising to demystify fine art and increase accessibility; challenging what has long been seen as an industry shrouded in pretense and exclusivity. “Like many technology disruptions, it levels the playing field,” says **Kenneth Schlenker,** the CEO and cofounder of [Gertrude.co](https://gertrude.co/), a recently launched online platform where New Yorkers can sign up for modern-day art salons that bring collectors and the curious together to learn about, discuss and buy contemporary art in informal settings. “It used to be impossible for an artist to reach a massive audience directly,” he said, adding that “what is happening to art is comparable to what happened to music: The cards have been reshuffled.” Musicians don’t necessarily need record companies to distribute their work anymore—anyone can put an mp3 up on SoundCloud or video on YouTube and reach millions. Similarly, Schlenker says, Instagram gives artists the ability to control the way their story is told, and find people who want to hear it.

the head of creative development at Bobbi Brown Cosmetics, has witnessed this flipping of the old guard first hand. Just one month after the unassuming 52-year-old began posting his fashion illustrations on Instagram in November 2012, British designer [**Giles Deacon**](https://www.vogue.com/voguepedia/Giles_Deacon) inquired—in the app’s comments section—about purchasing one of Robertson’s lip prints. Deacon ended up using the print in his spring 2014 collection, and last month actress [**Emilia Clarke**](https://www.vogue.com/vogue-daily/article/emilia-clarke-birthday-best-red-carpet-looks/#1) appeared on the cover of British *InStyle* wearing one of the lips dresses. “Each dress had 50 individually hand-beaded gap-tooth mouths exactly as I painted it!” exclaimed Robertson, who watched Deacon’s September show from the front row.

In a little over a year, Robertson has amassed 35,000 Instagram followers and sells his exclusive pieces directly to fans off of both Instagram and the social media e-commerce platform [Trendabl](https://trendabl.com/donalddrawbertson)—prices range between $250 for a small black-and-white print to $5,000 for a more detailed acrylic piece. Of course, the fact that and with whom Robertson has a “little Instagram flirtation going on,” will regram quirky illustrations they are tagged in certainly doesn’t hurt his growing fan base. “People can see when other people love something, like when they see [**Carlyne Cerf de Dudzeele**](https://www.vogue.com/voguepedia/Carlyne_Cerf_de_Dudzeele) comment on one of my paintings with 20 emoticons and hearts and ‘YOU R A GENIUS’ written in all caps. This creates a very unique situation that you will never get elsewhere.” In this way, Instagram, he says, has “somehow managed” to make him popular, something that still surprises the father of five whose assistant set up his account in November 2012 after his children said a BlackBerry “was extremely uncool for a creative guy to be carrying.”

But much like illustrator [**Richard Haines**](http://instagram.com/richard_haines)**,** who also regularly sells one-off pieces directly to his 9,700 Instagram followers (including **Joe Jonas,** who recently acquired a piece he saw on Haines’s feed), Robertson believes that for artists, the magic of social media lies in the lack of pressure to actually buy anything. “It’s posted on Instagram to enjoy for free. Having people just push that ‘like’ button globally, regardless of cultures or language barriers is magic!” he admitted. Sixty-two-year-old Haines, who in 2008 started a blog [What I Saw Today](http://designerman-whatisawtoday.blogspot.com/) to showcase his simple charcoal on paper sketches before embracing Instagram four years later and has since worked with everyone from *The New York Times* to J.Crew and [Prada](https://www.vogue.com/voguepedia/Prada), said that “drawing is a very authentic thing for me, and I think my Instagram followers respond to that authenticity and the fact that I love it.”

The power to expand access to art lovers and collectors without the intimidation that comes with buying the art on display, and the ease in which artists are able to harness that power themselves, is what **Christine Kuan,** the chief curator and director of strategic partnerships at [Artsy](https://artsy.net/), believes is “the future of art education and selling art” to a younger generation. Through Instagram, teens are able to train their eye and their minds in how they look at art on a visceral, rather than classroom, level; and as their career and therefore purchase power builds, there is a high chance they will remember that particular artist from their feed who influenced their taste as they were growing up. “It is about being able to engage with audiences around the world without requiring them to enter brick and mortar spaces to do so,” Kuan explained, adding that social media is slowly changing the “protectionist ideology” many art world insiders struggle to let go of. Longshore, who cites Instagram as a gateway for people of all ages to inquire about pricing in a “much less formal way,” agrees. “It makes it seem more approachable than walking into a gallery where someone rolls their eyes under a pair of black-horned rim glasses,” she explained. “There is no judgment. I’m not checking to see what kind of purse or shoes or how big their diamond is to qualify them as a buyer . . . It’s a really happy, judgment-free zone to cruise what you love.”

Though the rules of selling works need to be reimagined for Instagram (**Lacy Davisson Doyle,** an art adviser for the MoMA, insists that while Instagram is a “great tool” for buying pieces from trusted artists, she would caution collectors who are thinking about buying any work of art without seeing it—and its “emotional” value, color, scale, texture, and three-dimensionality—in person first), Gertrude.co’s Schlenker firmly believes that Instagram’s arguably positive democratization of high art will see the end of many an art dealer’s career. “Dealers and galleries who make the most of it will be the ones who know how to use social media to their advantage,” he said. “Today things are different and smart people in the art world embrace social media for what it is: an extraordinary way to discover, promote and critique art.”

With 48,500 Instagram followers, art auctioneer [**Simon de Pury**](http://instagram.com/simondepury) is leading the charge alongside the likes of MoMA PS1 Director (5,400 followers) and Gouzer (1,870 followers), who, rather than send out the usual email-ad blasts for his Christie’s auction, insisted on collectors using Instagram to find out what would be going up for sale weeks before the official catalog came out. “It’s very interesting to see works for upwards of one million dollars posted on Instagram for sale,” admitted the manager of New York’s Nyehaus gallery, **Danielle Forest.** “Especially when you see big collectors, like **Alberto Mugrabi,** the son of Israeli art collector **Jose Mugrabi,** commenting that he wants [to buy a painting] next to a little red-faced emoji.”

It is this unparalleled access to a world which has previously been off-limits to those whose pockets don’t run as deep as their enthusiasm for art that has enabled 29-year-old artist **Gordon Stevenson,** known as [Baron Von Fancy](http://instagram.com/BaronVonFancy) to his 31,000 Instagram followers, to grow his business into what some would call a street art empire. “Being accessible has been very helpful to me,” said Stevenson, who started his Instagram account as a way to broadcast his work to the world and now uses it as his manager, agent and public relations firm. “So many more people are likely to look at my Instagram than to go see a show of mine,” he said. “Every image I post of my art is instantly seen by a wide audience, and people who like the work often repost and spread it even further—this gets the conversation going and leads to sales.” Then there are the collaborations with brands such as Porsche, Rag & Bone, and the Paris department store Colette that he believes would not have happened if it weren’t for social media. “Often the first line of a corporate email is, ‘I saw your Instagram . . .’ ” explained Stevenson, before adding that the number of individuals and brands inquiring about purchasing his work far exceeds the interest he has received from galleries since his Instagram “took off”—something that worries him, albeit only slightly.

“I think artists like me who have gained this wider audience are somehow looked down upon or not taken seriously by the high art world,” Stevenson said—a comment which his contemporaries don’t necessarily agree with. “I think an artist’s work speaks for itself, whether it’s seen in a gallery or on an iPhone feed! If it’s good, it’s good,” countered Haines. Los Angeles–based artist **Petra Cortright,** whose work has been shown at the New Museum and the Venice Biennale, put it more simply: "Instagram is more important than the openings now,” she said to an audience member the Local Host culture and technology conference on May 1. And Artsy’s Kuan, who will be speaking on May 15 at the panel discussion [Online Art Industry: What’s Next?](http://nycxdesign.com/events/the-online-art-industry-whats-next/#.U20ZI61dWJU), agrees: “I don’t think an artwork’s value can be assigned or taken away merely by its presence online. Important artists are proven through time. Vincent van Gogh sold only one painting in his lifetime, maybe he would have wanted to sell through Instagram if he could.”

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