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Guest Contributor - 02 September 2019

MEET QUANTUM CONTEMPORARY ART



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October 2019 in Battersea is the 100th Affordable Art Fair for gallerist Johnny Gorman, owner of **Quantum Contemporary Art**. Johnny counts Buckingham Palace, Woburn Abbey and Dragon's Den judge Nick Jenkins among his clients. I loved meeting Johnny in his gallery, minutes from The Affordable Art Fair venue Battersea Park, to hear him regale me with anecdotes about his sometimes hilarious, sometimes inspirational moments in the art world - in particular the story of an American in jeans and how the Affordable Art Fair has been a 'miracle'. Johnny has a knack for selecting artists that have their own

unique voice, often those who employ innovative, thought-provoking techniques to create their works whether it's the extraordinary use of feathers to create silhouettes or painting still lifes that look somewhere between a photograph and the work of an 18th century Old Master (more on both below). The longstanding relationships Johnny enjoys with artists he represents as well as his client list to-die-for are evidence, if it were needed, that he definitely made the right decision leaving his earlier career in banking behind him.

MEET QUANTUM CONTEMPORARY ART

WHY HAVE THE LAST 20 YEARS PROVED TO BE A TURNAROUND TIME FOR ART

While art had been a minority interest, over the past 20 years it's become hot property. I had always wanted a career in art but after leaving the army, I got side-tracked into banking for a decade. When I left the City to start Quantum 22 years ago, art galleries tended to be elitist, with no prices on the walls. On a Saturday they were only open from 10 till 2 – that was, if they even opened the door to you once you rang on the bell. Gallerists often posed visitors the patronising question 'Do we know you?'

There is a legendary story from the late 90s, it's said that an American in jeans once walked into a gallery asking if there was any more work available by a particular artist, only to be ignored by the posh girl at the desk. Somewhat irritated, the American left, which was when a man in the gallery remarked to the receptionist: "That was Bill Gates, you know," to which she responded "Who's Bill Gates?"



QUANTUM CONTEMPORARY AND THE AFFORDABLE ART FAIR WERE ESTABLISHED AROUND THE SAME TIME. WHY?

In the late 90s and early noughties, art became sexy. Property prices were on the up. This led to a slew of TV programmes about interiors, including Changing Rooms presented by the flamboyant Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen. At that time Saatchi's pivotal exhibition, Sensation, took place which featured Young British Artists, Tracey Emin and Damien Hirst et al. People began talking about controversial Turner Prize winners and art was on everyone's lips. Selling art was like pushing at an open door.

Nowadays, luxury fashion shops have taken over from many of those old Mayfair galleries. Many high street retailers are on their knees. The Belgravia Gallery is now in Surrey. Open studios where artists share spaces at low rental prices and have open weekends are growing in popularity. The Affordable Art Fair and its experimental, fun-loving approach is more relevant than ever.



YOU'LL SOON HAVE EXHIBITED AT 100 AFFORDABLE ART FAIRS OVER 20 YEARS, AS WELL AS CURRENTLY SHOWING AT UP TO 9 AFFORDABLE ART FAIRS ANNUALLY. WHAT KEEPS YOU COMING BACK TO THE AFFORDABLE ART FAIR?

Art fairs and a strong mix of British and international clients are the lifeblood of our business and we have around 250 art works on



the move being transported to art fairs around the world at any one time. In the coming months, we will be travelling to Affordable Art Fairs in **Melbourne** (stand A01), **New York** (stand C11), **Battersea Autumn** (stand G1) and in **Singapore**.

As Quantum Contemporary has developed, art fairs have become an essential part of our business model. The Affordable Art Fair dreamed up by the founder Will Ramsay, was disruptive, inspired and a miracle of timing.

Where else at an art show do you see 20,000 people arriving with friends, family and/or

dogs, enjoying a glass of wine or a cocktail and finding themselves being welcomed by performers on stilts or dressed up as hedges? And an art fair located in Singapore's iconic Formula One racing track pits? Quantum is proud to have been the first gallery to sign up for Affordable Art Fairs in new cities, including **Melbourne** this September.

WHICH OF YOUR ARTISTS ELICIT THE MOST POWERFUL RESPONSES?

We've almost had punch ups over some of our art works. Recently, four pieces by one artist were snapped up in 20 minutes. They were by Marie Ange Daude, who fashions striking portraits by suspending feathers on nylon threads. At one point, two people were shouting at me, with one wildly gesticulating with his black Amex card.

Alison Pullen's works always get people talking. Alison Pullen, whose works sell for £2600, cuts out pages from Architectural Digest and interiors magazines, pasting them together and painting over them to result in mesmerising rooms within rooms that draw your eyes inside them. After the HM the Queen commissioned two of them, the V&A called to buy one as well.



WHY DOES AN ARTIST NEED A GALLERY TO SUPPORT THEM FOR THE LONG HAUL?

The artist-gallery relationship allows everyone to concentrate on what they're best at. When Quantum Contemporary was established in 1997, the very first artist that we took on was Jessica Brown, who was only 23 and her works sold for £500. She now creates 16 or 17 paintings a year, which strongly resemble Old Master still life paintings, but which look almost photographic. Today Jessica Brown's works exceed the Affordable Art Fair price ceiling of £6000. They sell for £12,000 and I have a long waiting list for them. The Affordable Art Fair was critical to her success.

By the time we were on Jessica's third solo show, demand for her work had skyrocketed. We had queues on the street from 3pm, which is simply unheard of. When the throng eagerly entered at 6pm, it turned out we had positioned the champagne waiter too near the front and his tray went flying. Jessica had spent two years working on 25 pieces and they were all sold in 90 seconds. Throughout the evening, Jessica stood outside because she is very shy.



Back in 2002, way before smartphones, I landed in JFK airport for a New York Affordable Art Fair, only to be held in customs with officials who refused to believe Jessica Brown's works were contemporary paintings. They were convinced I was smuggling Old Master paintings into the country illegally and after 5 hours of me failing to persuade them that these were indeed new works, the US officials sent the paintings back to the UK and I had to face the ultimate indignity of paying import duty on them!

WHAT ARE THE TELL-TALE SIGNS A VISITOR TO YOUR STAND HAS FALLEN IN LOVE WITH A PIECE OF ART?

Good art lifts the spirits. One couple I know came to our stand in **Battersea** in 2018 to say hello and spotted a work by Marie Ange Daude which won them over immediately. The problem was they didn't have a spare wall in any of their three houses to hang it. They stood by that piece, quietly talking to each other, carefully weighing up again and again which pieces in their collection they could move around and where they would put them to create space for this new wonder. One hour later, they reported they were ready to buy it and the deal was done.

I recently delivered a plexi-glass piece by artist Vanessa Whitehouse to an apartment in One Hyde Park in Knightsbridge. I saw the 20 metre wall it was going to go on in a room with floor to ceiling views of Hyde Park and I informed its new owner I had bad news. "I'm sorry to tell you the painting is going to be dwarfed in that enormous space," I told them. "You need three." Fortunately, they agreed.



Huge thanks to Johnny and Claire for carrying out this interview as a part of our 20th anniversary celebrations. This interview is just one of many pieces within our 20th anniversary magazine - [click here](#) to or follow the link below to read the collection of exclusive interviews and exciting articles all created in aid of saying a huge THANK YOU to YOU for your support over two decades of democratising the art market.

READ THE MAGAZINE

ABOUT THE JOURNALIST

Claire Adler has written over 500 articles for publications including the Financial Times during over a decade as a regular contributor, The Times, Vanity Fair, Wallpaper*, The Washington Post, Hong Kong Tatler, The Spectator and many more. Claire specialises primarily in jewellery, luxury and art. Her writing has also appeared in business books published by The Financial Times and Open University. In 2016, Claire was named a Top 20 Luxury Tastemaker by IN London magazine. Later that year, Claire founded [Claire Adler | The Luxury Public Relations And Writing Consultancy](#), which employs a journalistic approach to the way companies communicate with journalists. Clients include or have included Jaeger-Le Coultre, Sotheby's, Adama Partners, The New West End Company, Objet d'Emotion by Valery Demure and Investec.

Main Image:

Johnny Gorman of [Quantum Contemporary Art](#).

Featured art from first to last:

[Claire Adler](#), Luxury Journalist.

Stephane Joannes, Tanker 71, Quantum Contemporary Art.

Johnny Gorman within the Quantum Contemporary Art gallery in Battersea, London.

Ana Kapor, Mare Nostrum, Quantum Contemporary Art.

Johnny talks to journalist Claire Adler.

A work by Jessica Brown of Quantum Contemporary Art.

The Quantum Contemporary Art stand at [Affordable Art Fair Battersea Autumn](#).

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