

## Forget Titian, here's a talking dog! Is this digital art's big moment?

A film noir about a cluttered flat, an animated canine, Yesterday whistled in a corridor ... artists in coronavirus lockdown are making the leap to digital. Can they stop people switching over to Netflix?



Dispensing wisdom ... Greka the dog. Photograph: Goshka Macuga

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The last art I saw in the flesh was the Titian exhibition at the National Gallery in London. It was a remarkable, treasurable experience: his group of “poesie” paintings, based on stories from Ovid, had last hung together 400 years ago. Two days later, the museum closed its doors. By then, most commercial galleries in the UK, and many public institutions, had shut. The drift to digital began soon afterwards. Visual arts organisations launched so many podcasts and IGTV broadcasts and film streams and viewing rooms and talks from the archive that it has sometimes been overwhelming.

This week, the most social, crowded, people-watching-oriented event of the global visual art calendar – [Frieze art fair](#), in its New York iteration – is happening on devices everywhere. It has transformed itself into an online shop with art as the scrollable produce. The Asos effect is amplified by the fact that prices, for once, are displayed for all to see. A [Martin Creed](#) neon spelling out the words **DON'T WORRY** could be yours for \$150,000 (£118,000).

The reopening of art institutions still seems a distant prospect for many parts of the world – and the idea of the hyper-crowded blockbuster show even more so. So has the moment for digital art arrived? Artists – many of them locked out of studios and with projects, residencies and exhibitions having evaporated – are improvising with the means at their disposal. At least those, of course, who aren't sick, or caring for others, or running up face masks on their sewing machines (like [Stephanie Syjuco](#), the California-based artist, who has been producing around 100 a week for use by frontline community workers).

Many are getting used to working in new ways, some of them digital. But this is what artists have always done. As Martin Clark, director of Camden Arts Centre in London, says: “I used to work at Tate St Ives. There it's really noticeable that when you get to the war years, paintings became really small – because there wasn't much canvas around. Everyone's work changed to accommodate the material conditions. In a way, what's happening now is no different.” (For his own institution, accommodating the conditions has meant launching an online version of a now delayed exhibition, [The Botanical Mind](#) – a site rich with texts, recordings and images, plus a new digital work by Adam Chodzko.)

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[Goshka Macuga](#) – whose intellectually dense work is usually based on lengthy periods of intense research – began a lockdown Instagram account, [@Grekaandfriends](#), in which an animated version of her dog offers satirical thoughts on life, the pandemic and everything. “I went into it with the aim of entertaining people, sharing, doing something that existed outside the art market,” she says. “I think of it in the tradition of the political cartoon.” She records the sound in her loo, which has the best acoustic for the purpose, and has used a simple animation app. “It was easy, and has given me a way of having an instant voice. We don't know what the art world will be like in the future. An economic crisis on a large scale will, of course, impact it. We may have to change the way we work. It has been a good exercise in making something that literally takes no money to produce.”