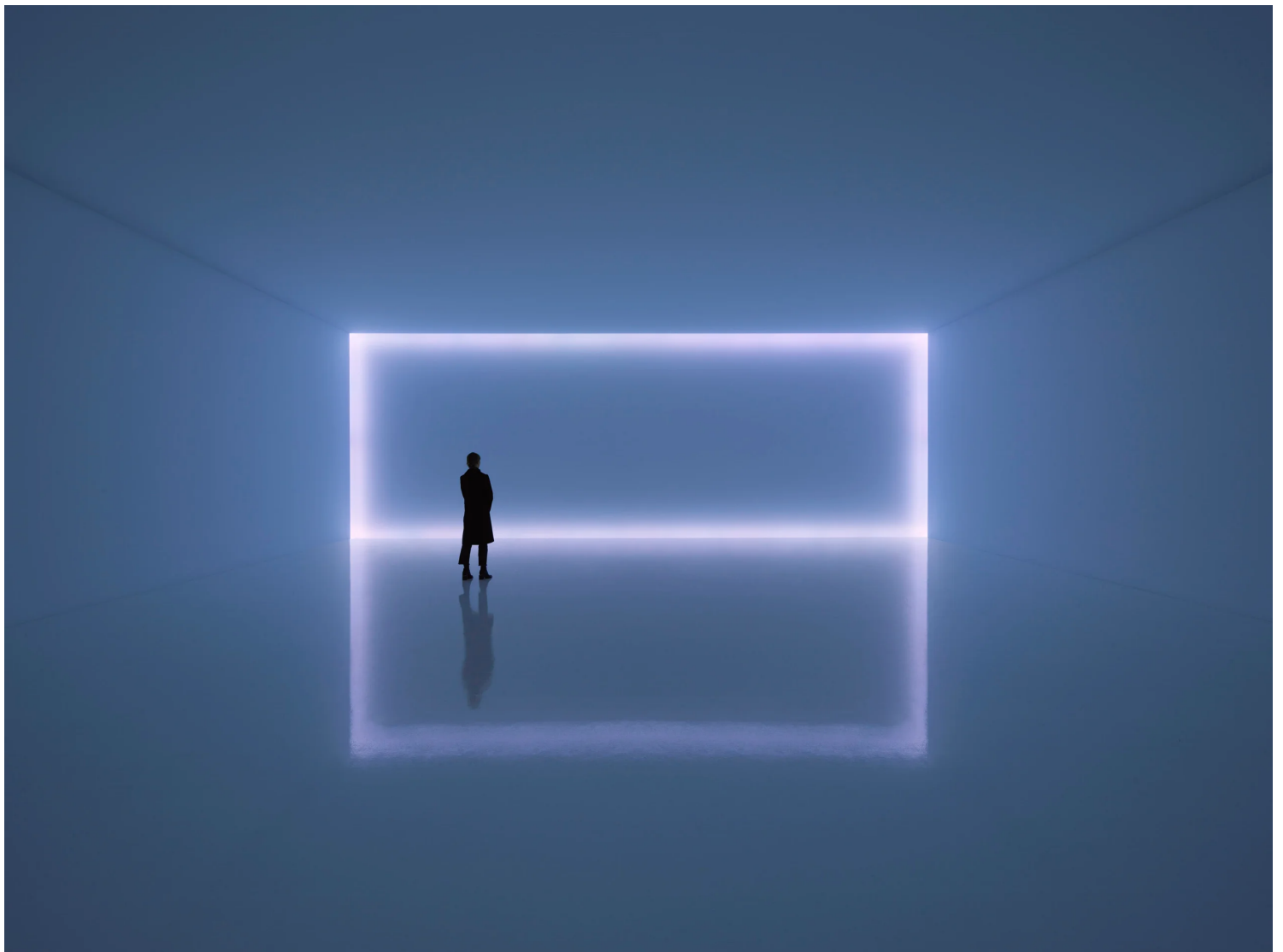


ARTS

What's It Like to Go to a Gallery Right Now?

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Doug Wheeler's *49 Nord 6 Est 68 Ven 12 FL*, 2011-2012. Installation view, *Doug Wheeler*, David Zwirner, New York, 2020 © Doug

Around the world, for better or worse, the Great Reopening is well underway. First, it was shops, salons, and beaches; later restaurants (if only for outdoor dining); and now galleries and museums are starting to peek through the curtain too.

In Europe, the Louvre reopened Monday, and museums in London will follow this week and next. Closer to home, Texas museums largely opened in May. The Barnes Foundation in Philadelphia and Art Institute of Chicago are preparing to reopen later this month, both with exhibitions originally shown in March (the tapestry-focused “Marie Cuttoli: The Modern Thread from Miró to Man Ray” at the former and an El Greco show at the latter). And Pace Gallery is currently showing drawings by Yoshitomo Nara at its temporary outpost in East Hampton.

In Manhattan, we’ll have to wait until the end of August to enter the Metropolitan Museum of Art again, and the city’s other major museums have yet to commit to dates. Later this week, however, the Perrotin Gallery will open with “The Secret History of Everything”,* a group show featuring work by Katherine Bernhardt, Mauro Bonacina, Sayre Gomez, Julia Wachtel, Daniel Arsham, Cosima von Bonin, and Nick Doyle. Kasmin will reopen as well, with “William N. Copley: The New York Years”* and “And/Also: Photography. (Mis)represented”*. And David Zwirner’s galleries on 19th and 20th streets reopened after the Fourth of July holiday with a suite of shows.

Of course, with infection surging in the U.S., all this may be short-lived. But, curious and more than a little stir-crazy, I made an appointment online (encouraged, but not required there) and headed downtown to have a look at what was happening at Zwirner’s Chelsea outpost.

Admittedly, it felt a little funny to be *doing a thing*; namely, heading somewhere other than Citarella or CVS in an intentional way. (I mean, it required getting into a cab!) Setting aside my semi-regular walks through Central Park, it had been months since I’d seen people out in the wild, doing something for pleasure. Once an enthusiastic museum/theatre/ballet-goer myself, the deepest, most fulfilling aesthetic experience that I’d had since March was

probably streaming Jacques Rivette's *La Belle Noiseuse* alone in my studio. So, I was excited to go to Chelsea and look at art with my fellow man again.

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That isn't exactly how it happened. As big as its galleries are, David Zwirner is admitting only six people at a time into its spaces for the moment. The effect of this was briefly unsettling; between the masked staff and the abundance of hand sanitizer, there was no refuting that things were not at all as normal. But I quickly came to my senses. Virtually no people—no guards, even!—meant doing exactly what I most love when I'm in the room with a painting, drawing, or piece of sculpture, and that's getting right up close to admire the handwork. It was heaven to be able to do that without getting in the way of a picture.

Of course, not everything displayed at Zwirner actually *needed* the intimacy its echoing emptiness afforded. There was Doug Wheeler's hypnotizing light installation, *49 Nord 6 Est 68 Ven 12 F*, which would be a big hit on Instagram in simpler times, and in *A / low / ha: The Hawaiian Works*, Al Taylor's sketches and sculptures proved, for me, more intriguing than urgently absorbing. But then there was *The Lost Paradise*, from the Swedish painter Mamma Andersson. Peering at her scrubby landscapes, portraits, and still lifes, I found it difficult to separate the quiet I was feeling from the room's literal silence. The muted palette, the empty chairs, the many figures with their backs turned to the viewer: Was I projecting that remoteness, or was it really there? Without wall text or a press release to hand (at some galleries, a QR code is the new normal), I was left, quite pleasurably, to simply stand and stare. (That afternoon, I confirmed that Andersson does, indeed, deal in melancholy.)

Mamma Andersson, *The Lost Paradise III*, 2020 © Mamma Andersson/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/Bildupphovsrätt, Sweden
Photo: Courtesy the artist and David Zwirner

With their exquisite plays of color, texture, opacity, and transparency, moreover, Leo Amino's drawings and sculptures almost demanded the extra space. There wasn't another soul in the gallery, and *still* I only narrowly avoided smacking into a mobile of his while answering an email. (It was, after all, a workday!)

But as pleasurable as my excursion was, it was not untinged by the fears and paranoias that have gripped us all for months: a fear of other people, a reluctance to go out in the first place. And then there was the sense that something is still sorely lacking in this new world. We visit cultural institutions and monuments not only for the work but also for the sense that we are sharing and experiencing some distillation of humanity with others. But if nothing else, it clarified that seeing art in person is still so worth it. And, in spite of myself, I still can't wait for us to do it together again.

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