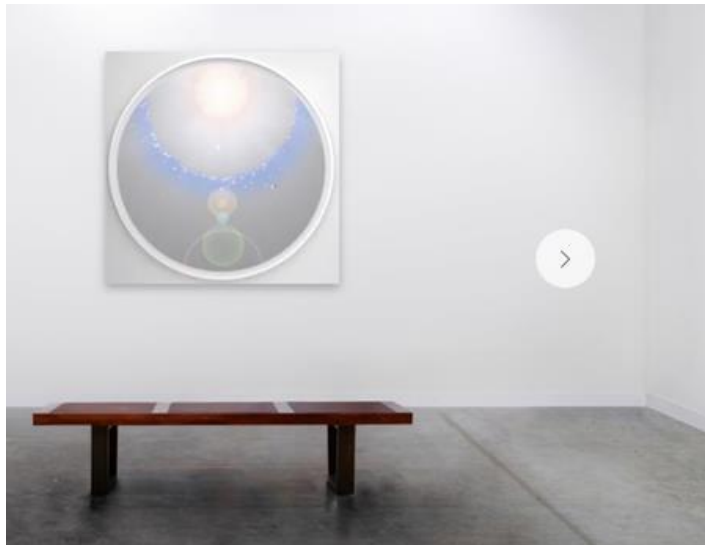


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Binlot, Ann. "Art Basel In Hong Kong In The Time Of Coronavirus." *Forbes*.
March 24, 2020.

Forbes



Radiant Being IV, 2019

Mariko Mori

\$50,001 - \$100,000

Sales Inquiry

More Info

Art Basel

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A screen shot of Mariko Mori's Radiant Being IV at Sean Kelly at Art Basel Viewing Rooms. COURTESY ART BASEL

Normally around this time of year, I'd be in Asia covering Art Basel in Hong Kong and the myriad satellite events around what is arguably the continent's most important art fair. But, as coronavirus swept through China and into Hong Kong in early February, the organizers of Art Basel announced on February 6 that it was canceling its annual show. I was disappointed as I've been going for the past few years, but little did I know then that in a matter of weeks coronavirus would forever change my way of life and that New York, the city in which I live, would become the coronavirus epicenter in the US.

As an alternative to a physical art fair, Art Basel introduced Art Basel Online Viewing Rooms, a virtual art fair complete with the same VIP preview days and public days as the physical iteration. By the time Art Basel Online Viewing Rooms opened for its VIP Preview on March 18 at 6am EST (6pm in Hong Kong) I was randomly awake from coronavirus anxiety-ridden insomnia, so I tried to log in. At first I kept using the wrong email, but when I finally got it right, the website was down from too many eager visitors. Half asleep, I sheepishly returned to my bed.

I finally returned to Art Basel Online Viewing Rooms on Sunday, when I granted myself a well-deserved break from being isolated in my apartment obsessing over coronavirus news. I logged on without a hitch, and I immediately entered Marian Goodman's room and saw one of Bahamian artist Tavares Strachan's first showings with the gallery since he signed on earlier this year. It was an

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image of a mixed media piece titled Josephine that featured a woman who appears South Asian dancing, a Life magazine cover, and a man in black-and-white from the '50s that hung on a white wall behind a bench. The price, which usually isn't in plain sight in real life, was out there in the open for everyone to see: \$135,000. Who is Josephine? I wondered, knowing that Strachan's practice often involves important figures in history who didn't get the recognition they deserved. Luckily, I knew someone who worked at the gallery, so I messaged her and she promptly answered, "Matthew Henson who actually discovered the North Pole—Josephine's husband Robert Peary took the credit!" Interesting. I would later discover that Henson was the black son of two free sharecroppers. No wonder why he didn't get recognition for discovering the North Pole in the early 1900s. So dealers were just as available to answer questions at a virtual art fair as they were a real one. That's a good sign.

I entered Pilar Corrias's viewing room, and saw a vibrant fabric collage of two curvy figures by rising artist Tschabalala Self. Then I went to Luhning Augustine's virtual booth, which featured video works by Ragnar Kjartansson—I've seen his work in person several times and have been moved to tears. I clicked on the piece which linked to a Vimeo page that previewed the video of people in white lab coats walking in front of an idyllic mountain scene. A little too eerie I thought, going to back to the doctors on the front lines right now and knowing very well it would have been a completely different experience to see the video in person. I visited David Zwirner and saw his rendition of Botticelli's La Primavera, complete with his reflective blue gazing ball smack in the middle for a pretty \$3 million. Then I went to Richard Nagy's room to look at the Egon Schiele works, a haunting reminder of a revered artist who also lost his life too early at 27 in 1918 during the Spanish Influenza pandemic that ravaged the globe that year. After, I clicked on Sean Kelly to discover a soothing work by Mariko Mori that depicted a figure staring at what appears to be a sun—or hope, a moment of respite in the midst of a global pandemic.

A feeling of sadness overcame me while perusing virtual Art Basel in Hong Kong. Seeing art as a slideshow formatted on a screen doesn't even come close to viewing it in person on a wall or on the floor of a booth at an art fair. There was no press conference to kick off the fair. There were no outrageous parties thrown by LACMA, no late nights at Cassio, no Prada Club, and no dim sum art receptions at Duddell's. This year I wouldn't be on a tour of the Encounters section led by curator Alexie Glass-Kantor, staring in awe at the enormous pieces, or walking through the fair randomly discovering a painting by an artist I've heard of, or air kissing my colleagues in the art world.

But for now as we isolate ourselves to avoid spreading coronavirus, it'll have to do.