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The Art World Works From Home: Dealer Sean Kelly Is Reading About Winston Churchill and Scrambling to Reschedule Canceled Shows

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The art world may be on lockdown, but it certainly does not stop. During this unprecedented time, we're checking in with art-world professionals, collectors, and artists to get a glimpse into how they are working from home.

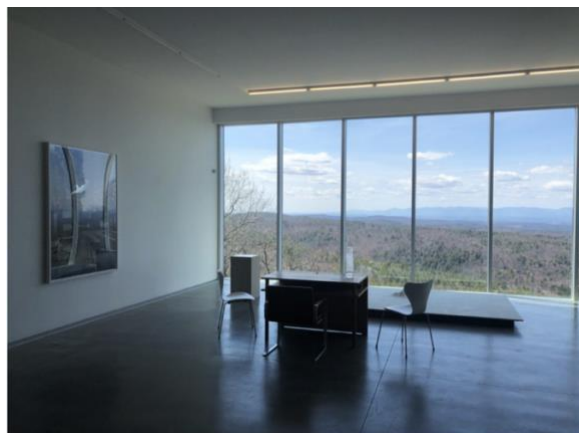
The British-born dealer Sean Kelly founded his gallery in New York in 1991, and has since established a reputation as one of the city's leading dealers of contemporary art, often with a distinctly conceptual bent. The artists Marina Abramović, Joseph Kosuth, and James Casebere are among those who have been with the gallery since the day he launched.

Read on to find out how Kelly is honing his gardening skills, cooking spaghetti bolognese for his family, and working to get artists who have been derailed by the ongoing shutdowns back on track.

Where is your new "office"?

SEANKELLY

We are currently at our Hudson Valley home, which is quite isolated at the best of times, but especially now. We are very lucky as it has outdoor space and spectacular wide vistas of the upper Hudson Valley.



Sean Kelly's office at home in the Hudson Valley. Photo: courtesy of Sean Kelly.

What are you working on right now (and were any projects of yours interrupted by the lockdown)?

Of course, many of our artists' projects have been disrupted and are being rescheduled, both at the gallery and at institutions worldwide, so it is actually making for quite a busy and complicated time as so many things are in flux. We very much look forward to being able to get back into the gallery as soon as possible and open our remarkable exhibition of new work by Joseph Kosuth entitled "Existential Time," which was unfortunately scheduled to open a few days after the shutdown began.

How has your work changed now that you are doing it from home?

In innumerable ways of course, technologically it is challenging to have one's gallery colleagues dispersed. I especially miss interacting with them and our clients and colleagues on a daily basis and all the good-humored banter that inevitably results. However, one has to look to the silver linings in every situation. I believe the quietude that has been enforced upon us in some ways can make us more productive and afford us a level of self-introspection that has perhaps largely been missing from our lives for a long time, and might, if employed positively, be a very good thing.

What are you reading, both online and off?

I like to read books. I know it's very old fashioned, but the physicality of the object is important to me. I tend to read a number of things at the same time, currently I am reading the last part of Hilary Mantel's Cromwell trilogy, *The Mirror and the Light*, as well as *The Last Lion: Winston Spencer Churchill* by William Manchester, and I am lucky enough to be spending some time with an appended copy of Colm Toibin's *The Heather Blazing*, a particular treat, as it allows me a uniquely intimate relationship to this beautiful, personal book.

SEANKELLY

I am keeping up with the news online and news of the art world via Artnet. It is very sad to have lost colleagues such as Paul Kasmin and Renato Danese at this time when they cannot be properly mourned and acknowledged.

Have you visited any good virtual exhibitions recently?

There is a great deal of content being presented right now, not all of it high quality. It is a moment we cannot physically travel to see wonderful things we would like to visit, however, I thoroughly recommend checking out the Morgan Library's remarkable Jean-Jacques Lequeu exhibition, [Visionary Architect](#), I have enjoyed looking through the viewing rooms and virtual exhibitions on [Artland](#), and of course the gallery's weekly social media initiatives at [@SeanKellyNY](#). (A shameless plug, I know, but I am very proud of the intimate content my colleagues and the artists are producing right now in this most isolated of moments.)

Have you taken up any new hobbies?

Normally, this is a very busy time of year for us with international travel. It is also a crucial time of year for one's vegetable garden if one is fortunate enough to have one and for getting plants in. One of the more pleasant aspects of this enforced hiatus is that I can assist [my wife] Mary in getting early planting done in a more leisurely and unhurried manner—a real pleasure.



The view from Sean Kelly's home in the Hudson Valley. Photo: Sean Kelly.

What is the first place you want to travel to once this is over?

I want to be back in the gallery with my colleagues, who I miss a great deal, and to be able to greet and interact with our artists, clients, and friends. They are the core of what we do and why we exist, and I miss them all enormously.

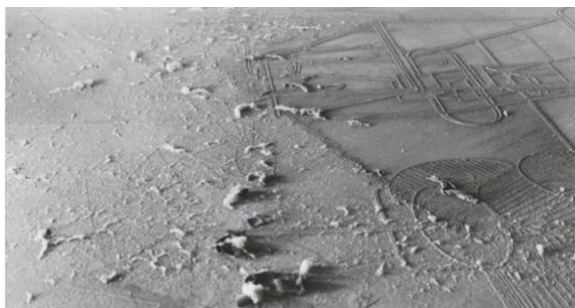
If you are feeling stuck while self-isolating, what's your best method for getting un-stuck?

SEANKELLY

I think of all those worldwide who are less fortunate than we are and use it to motivate myself. Also, I know it's not perhaps politically correct, but the anger I feel at Donald Trump and the coterie of inept cronies he has surrounded himself with and the way they are endangering people's lives and this country generally is a great motivator to get back out there and make a positive contribution.

What was the last TV show, movie, or YouTube video you watched?

If you haven't seen it, indulge yourself with the great BBC drama *Line of Duty*. Start at the beginning and get lost in the series to date. It's the best TV I've seen for ages—completely compelling.



Man Ray and Marcel Duchamp's *Dust Breeding* (1920).

If you could have one famous work of art with you, what would it be?

Marcel Duchamp's *Dust Breeding*. It's such a profound meditation on the passage of time, the impulse for an artist to question their own existence and their motivation for creating. It's a seemingly simple, almost non-artwork, yet as a non-action action it allows us to contemplate the universe both physically—we are born of dust and we return to it—and metaphysically—the inception of conceptual art. It keeps me constantly intellectually engaged.



A plate full of spaghetti bolognese. Photo by jetsun via Wikimedia Commons.

Favorite recipe to cook at home?

SEAN KELLY

Spaghetti Bolognese, a simple comfort food. All quantities should be amended depending on how many people one is cooking for. It's also an extremely forgiving dish so be creative!

1. Take two large onions and a generous helping of garlic, chop them up quite small and cook them in very good olive oil with salt and pepper, preferably in an iron skillet.
2. Take good quality minced beef and cook in a separate pan.
3. Once it's cooked add salt and pepper, chopped tomatoes, tomato paste, and a generous helping of red wine and continue to cook for a few more minutes.
4. Put the onions, etc. and the beef into a large cast-iron pot, add oregano and basil to taste, allow it to simmer for a while, adding splashes of red wine as required.
5. Let it rest, the longer the better, overnight is perfect.
6. When ready to eat, heat the bolognese sauce slowly until warm whilst preparing boiling water with a dash of salt, in a large saucepan for the spaghetti, cook until al dente, drain the spaghetti well, serve with the bolognese on top, with an ample helping of good quality freshly grated parmesan and an excellent glass of red wine.
7. Let the cares of the day fade.
8. Alternatively, watch all the episodes of *The Godfather*, a version of the recipe is in there and recommended for when you have to hole up under duress, which seems appropriate under the circumstances!

What are you most looking forward to doing once social distancing has been lifted?

Having social contact, being able to go to restaurants, and not subject my family to the above recipe on a weekly basis!