

TOP 10 NEW YORK GALLERY EXHIBITIONS CAUGHT IN THE COVID-19 SHUTDOWN

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Installation view, *Julian Schnabel: The Patch of Blue the Prisoner Calls the Sky*, 2020,
Pace Gallery, New York © Julian Schnabel

Highlights of New York Contemporary Art Galleries at the Shutdown

As Covid-19 spread, with social distancing restrictions in place and most workplaces shuttered in response, New York City's art galleries and museums entered lock-down mode in mid-March. As of mid-May, there were still no reopening plans in sight. The art world has practically ground to a halt, retreating to the illusionary effects of cyberspace, social media, or furtive drive-by exhibitions to simulate a creative environment that is, sadly, a mere ghost of its former self. The situation's toll on artists, the art community, and cultural economy has yet to be

determined comprehensively, but like the rest of the country's condition in the wake of the pandemic and financial fallout, it is likely to be dire if not devastating.

At least for the moment, firsthand experience of artworks and art exhibitions have become precious memories that need to be preserved. Below are brief comments about some of the most memorable exhibitions I experienced in person just before the gallery shutdowns. These are gallery shows that on some level moved me intellectually, personally, and emotionally. Several of them constitute remarkable achievements by artists relatively new to the New York art scene, while others are key exhibitions by midcareer artists, or milestone presentations by art-world veterans, including a number of the most influential artists of our time. Some of the galleries mentioned here promise to keep these exhibitions on hold, and to reopen them to the public as soon as social distancing and other restrictions of movement due to the pandemic are relaxed.



Tom Waring, *Hutch Skutch Skoa*, 2020. Oil on linen, at Downs & Ross.

5. Tom Waring at [Downs & Ross](#).

A young artist from Reading, England, Tom Waring (born 1991) already has a devoted cult following, and *Consistent Estimator*, his stunning New York solo debut, helps to explain why. The images in the ten meticulously wrought oil-on-canvas paintings on view are esoteric and uncanny. The quasi-abstract compositions, with just a hint of Dalí and de Chirico, feature elements that recall bits of industrial equipment, electronic circuitry, weaponry, and fragments of Renaissance and Baroque architecture. With his refined, trompe l'oeil technique, and all the various components compressed within a shallow space, Waring approaches the perfection of an allegorical still-life by William Michael Harnett, such as *Violin and Music* (1888)



Tom Waring, *Roba*, 2019, at Downs & Ross.

Although the technique may seem a bit archaic, as would the fact that this exhibition was partly inspired by Giovanni Boccaccio's 14th-century account of the plague that swept Europe, *The Decameron*—apropos of our time—there is nothing retro about Waring's work. His foreboding, hallucinatory imagery and acid colors, are unmistakably of the 21st-century. *Roba*, for example, shows a conglomeration of imaginatively twisted machines or weapons, rendered in myriad shades of blue, set against a blood-red background. Tightly packed into a structure with classical arches, the image suggests a futuristic vision of entropy or military malice.