Street Art Sent to Space & Other Headlines

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- Entertainment, Art & Sports
- Civil Rights
- Insurance Reinsurance & Surety
- New York
- 2nd Circuit (incl. bankruptcy)
- Norway
- Italy
- Spain
- United Kingdom
- Hong Kong

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UNITED STATES

Street Artist’s Work Sent to Space

On May 30, 2020, SpaceX, the aerospace manufacturer and space transportation services company founded by Elon Musk, made history by sending its first manned flight into outer space. Yet, its spacecraft, the Crew Dragon capsule, was carrying more than the two NASA astronauts. On board was the work of Tristan Eaton, a Los Angeles-based street artist, who designed five small metal plates, one for each of the astronauts on the International Space Station. Titled Human Kind, Eaton’s designs feature science-inspired images, including birds, flowers, trees, flowing water and a chimpanzee family, combined with human elements such as an outstretched hand, a fingerprint and various representations of technology. The plates come with custom greeting cards for each astronaut and are expected to return to Earth in three to four months. This historic event places Eaton among the
few artists in the world whose work has been sent to space.

- Space.com: Tristan Eaton’s “Human Kind” art flying on SpaceX astronaut launch
- Artnet: Elon Musk’s SpaceX Commissioned a Street Artist to Create Indestructible Gold Paintings as Décor for Its First Trip to the International Space Station

**Art World Launches Initiatives to Support Black Lives Matter Movement While Monuments with Controversial Histories Are Toppled Around the World**

Artists, curators and dealers are unveiling initiatives to secure financial responses for Black Lives Matter, including through sales of artworks and promises to match donations. Several museums became subjects of controversy for staying silent on the topic of the killing of George Floyd and Black Lives Matter and began issuing statements to address the criticisms from members of the public, high-profile activists, curators and artists. As protests continued around the world, protestors caused monuments of controversial historical figures to be removed, either directly or through quickly organized official removals.

- ArtNews: Artists, Curators, and Dealers Launch Initiatives to Support Black Lives Matter Movement
- ArtNews: Major U.S. Museums Criticized for Responses to Ongoing George Floyd Protests
- Artnet: The Troubling Stories Behind Five Monuments Around the World That Came Down in Recent Days – and Why Their Removal Was Long Overdue

**Giant Mural Dedicated to Health Care Workers and Victims**

In the parking lot of the Queens Museum, Cuban-American artist Jorge Rodríguez-Gerada completed a 20,000 square-foot mural portrait of a doctor clad in personal protective equipment spray painted directly onto the cement. The eyes of the doctor are said to be based on Dr. Ydelfonso Decoo, one of the first minority doctors who died from COVID-19. Titled Somos la Luz (“We Are Light” in Spanish), the work aims to honor the health community and highlight the disparate impact of the virus on minority communities. Adding to the impact of its message, the scale of the piece is so large it can be viewed by satellite.

- Artnet: An Artist Is Transforming the Parking Lot of the Queens Museum into a Tribute to Health Care Workers “So Big It Can Be Seen by Satellite”
- Queens News and Community: Artist completes massive memorial for COVID-19 victims in Flushing Meadows Corona Park

**Auction Houses to Debut Virtual Auction Experience**

Bypassing the pandemic, on June 29, 2020, Sotheby’s will auction off Contemporary,
Impressionist and Modern pieces via a live video stream. This is the first time the auction house has used such a format to conduct its business. Bids will be accepted via phone or online, and the works to be auctioned can be viewed online or in person by appointment at Sotheby’s New York gallery. Christie’s announced a new auction format for a July 10 event, which will include a livestream with auctioneers offering works of Impressionist, Modern and Contemporary art in a relay-race style from Christie’s salesrooms in Hong Kong, Paris, London and New York.

- New York Times: Sotheby’s to Hold “Live” Auctions in June, Remotely

Multimillion-Dollar Lawsuit Filed over Damage to Picasso’s Le Marin

Steadfast Insurance Co., Christie’s insurance carrier, recently filed a lawsuit in the United States District Court, Southern District of New York, seeking $18.4 million in damages, plus legal fees, from T.F. Nugent, a family-owned commercial painting business. The dispute concerns damage to Pablo Picasso’s Le Marin that occurred in 2018 shortly before the work was to be auctioned by Christie’s. At the time, the piece was expected to sell for between $70 and $100 million. Christie’s hired Nugent to paint its gallery ahead of an exhibition featuring the work, when disaster struck. After a Nugent employee left an unsecured paint roller rod against a gallery wall, the rod fell and crashed into Le Marin, tearing a 4.5-inch gash in the canvas. It is estimated that the value of the painting was diminished by approximately $20 million due to this incident. Christie’s negotiated a settlement with the owner of the painting, casino mogul Steve Wynn, and agreed to pay $18.74 million in damages, for which Steadfast reimbursed Christie’s. Now Steadfast, standing in the shoes of its insured, is trying to recoup its costs.

- Artnet: A Paint Roller Tore a $20 Million Hole in a Picasso Painting Headed to Christie’s. Now, the Insurance Company Is Suing the Contractor to Pay for It
- Bloomberg: Costly Rip in Steve Wynn’s Picasso Blamed on Contractor’s Gaffe

Christie’s, Hobby Lobby and the U.S. in Battle over the Gilgamesh Dream Tablet

In September 2019, the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement seized an ancient Mesopotamian artifact known as the Gilgamesh Dream Tablet from the Museum of the Bible. The artifact dates back to 1600 B.C. and contains inscriptions of the Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh. The museum was founded by the family that owns Hobby Lobby, the arts and crafts chain. In late May 2020, the U.S. Attorney’s Office in New York filed a civil action alleging that the artifact was illegally looted and imported from Iraq and requested its return to its home country. Shortly after that action was initiated, Hobby Lobby filed suit against Christie’s, where it purchased the artifact in 2014 for $1.67 million.

As we reported in prior posts of the Art Law Perspectives blog, this is not the first time the provenance of cultural property purchased by Hobby Lobby has been
questioned. In 2017, Hobby Lobby was fined $3 million for failing to do proper due diligence after federal authorities charged it with purchasing thousands of artifacts that were smuggled out of Iraq. However, Hobby Lobby maintains that Christie’s should refund the purchase price of the tablet, as Christie’s allegedly affirmed that its provenance was accurate and that the seller was legally entitled to sell it. Hobby Lobby also alleges “deceitful and fraudulent conduct” on the part of Christie’s in providing a dossier to Hobby Lobby containing false provenance documents.

- Art Newspaper: [Hobby Lobby Sues Christie’s for Selling It an Antiquity Authorities Say Was Looted](#)
- Artnet: [The Founders of Hobby Lobby Are Suing Christie’s for Selling Them an Ancient Artifact That Pretty Much Everyone Now Agrees Was Stolen](#)
- NPR: [U.S. Authorities Say Hobby Lobby’s Gilgamesh Tablet Is “Stolen,” Must Go Back to Iraq](#)

**EUROPE**

**Visitors to the New Munch Museum Will Need to Socially Distance from The Scream**

Edvard Munch’s The Scream has attained worldwide notoriety for its symbolism of the anxiety of the human condition and the several times various versions of the artwork have been stolen and recovered. Now it seems that the large crowds that the 1910 version draws each day to the Munch Museum in Oslo may be causing the painting to deteriorate and change colors. Curators noticed that portions of the paint were flaking and that the yellow in the sunset was turning an off-white color. Upon investigation, it was discovered that Munch selected an impure tube of cadmium yellow for the piece, making the paint susceptible to flaking and fading, especially when exposed to the humidity of being breathed on. It is anticipated that when the Munch Museum relocates later this year, visitors will be required to keep a certain distance away from the painting.

- The Guardian: [Edvard Munch’s The Scream needs to practice physical distancing, say experts](#)
- Artnet: [Scientists Discover That Visitors to Oslo’s Munch Museum Are Destroying “The Scream” by Breathing on It Way Too Much](#)

**“Surreal” Appeal of Woman Claiming to Be Dalí’s Daughter Rejected**

The Regional Court of Madrid has dismissed the appeal of Pilar Abel, a psychic who claimed to be Salvador Dalí’s long-lost daughter, and ordered her to pay for the cost of exhuming the artist’s body. In 2015, Abel filed a paternity suit against the Spanish state and Dalí’s foundation, the executors of Dalí’s estate. After she won the right to have Dalí’s remains exhumed, DNA evidence revealed that Abel was not related to Dali. The court issued a ruling that Dalí was not Abel’s father, and Abel appealed questioning how Dalí’s remains were handled.
### Major European Art World Events of the Summer Cancelled, Delayed or Postponed

The Venice Biennale has been postponed until April 2022 and the Venice Architecture Biennale has been postponed until May 22, 2021. Art Basel’s Swiss fair was first pushed back to September and then cancelled. The Manifesta 13 Marseille was pushed back to August, with organizers still evaluating new dates. The Berlin Biennale has been postponed indefinitely.

- Artlyst: [Manifesta 13 Marseille to Go Ahead in August](https://www.artlyst.com/manifesta-13-marseille-to-go-ahead-in-august/)

### UK Court of Appeal Upholds Elephant Ivory Ban

The UK Court of Appeal has dismissed the appeal of an art and antiques group challenging the validity of the Ivory Act. Enacted into law in December 2018, the Act imposes a near-total ban on the trading and sale of objects made of elephant ivory in the United Kingdom. While opponents of the Act allege that it will destroy the antiquities market and violates individuals’ property rights, the Court of Appeal disagreed. Wildlife advocates and environmental conservationists have expressed satisfaction with the Court’s decision.

- Artnet: [Antiques Traders Angry at the UK’s Ivory Ban, One of the World’s Toughest, Have Lost Their Fight to Overturn It in Court](https://www.artnet.com/news/antiques-traders-angry-at-the-uk-s-ivory-ban-one-of-the-world-s-toughest-have-lost-their-fight-to-overturn-it-in-court/)

### ASIA

#### Hong Kong Artists Protest New Law Aimed at Limiting Speech

China’s National People’s Congress announced that it would force wide-ranging national-security laws on Hong Kong that would criminalize behaviors that the authorities deem subversive to China’s national security. This law was passed despite protests and petitions voicing concern by more than 1,500 organizations and members of the creative community. Opponents of the law fear it will give the Chinese and Hong Kong governments the right to censor and limit artistic expression and free speech, marking an abrupt end to Hong Kong’s former autonomy from the
control and culture of mainland China.

- The Observer: Hong Kong’s Arts Workers Decry New National Security Law
- Japan Times: China’s Security Law Sends Hong Kong Residents Dashing for Exit

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