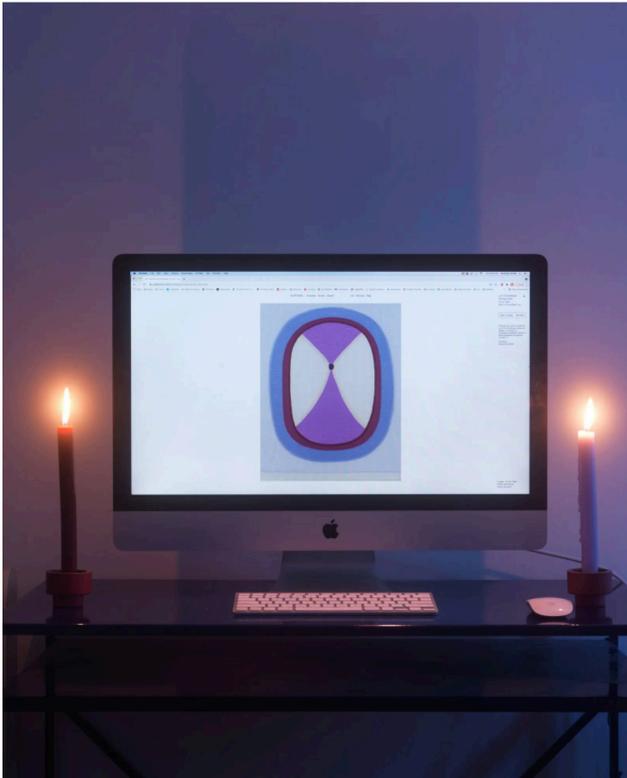


The New York Times

Zwirner May Disrupt Art Gallery Model With Click-to-Buy Business

By Robin Pogrebin, May 20, 2021



Lily Stockman, *Primula*, 2021.

© Courtesy of the artist and Charles Moffett and David Zwirner. Photo by Matt Grubb

The art world is only just beginning to address the questions raised by the pandemic, such as: Are in-person art fairs a thing of the past and virtual viewing rooms the future? Will museums maintain no-touch ticketing and auction houses continue global online salesrooms?

One mega-gallerist, David Zwirner, has decided to double down on what he took away from the last year: the need for a click-to-buy marketplace to sell original works of art. As a result, Zwirner has created Platform, a website that debuts Thursday and which each month will offer 100 works presented by about 12 independent galleries around the world with prices ranging from \$2,500 to \$50,000.

“We learned there is a real place in the art world for e-commerce,” Zwirner said in a recent telephone interview. “There is an audience out there we did not know existed. They don’t go to galleries necessarily and they don’t really go to art fairs. They look at things online.” He noted that the audience was “almost all millennials,” who discover art through Instagram and word of mouth. “The art world has never catered to them,” Zwirner added. “They can graduate into a much broader participant.”

“Everybody is trying to figure out this new landscape, which relies so much on digital content and selling material without actually seeing it in person,” Moffett said. “We’ve tried a number of different platforms and have been less than satisfied with the results.”

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Obviously the David Zwirner brand is one that is very well respected and my artists liked the idea that they would be presenting on the Zwirner platform, so we figured, why not give this a shot?”

Zwirner said he is looking to collaborate with smaller galleries, not supplant or exploit them, pointing, for example, to the gallery’s recent addition of the Romanian-born sculptor Andra Ursuta, who will continue to show with Ramiken Crucible, and to Harold Ancart, who continues to work with a smaller gallery, Clearing.

Lucas Zwirner, the son of the dealer, who led the creation of Platform, pointed out that the mega-gallery is investing in material on the site that gives the artists greater visibility, including interviews and videos.

“We’re not just taking art and selling it,” he said. “We’re helping grow careers and promote artists.”

Moffett said the click-to-buy aspect was a little unsettling, replacing the “inquire” button, which initiates a conversation with the gallery. “I take a lot of pride in placing all of my artists’ work carefully, and the idea that we’re putting these artists’ work out there in the world for anybody to buy is a little bit stressful,” he said. “If I had a preference, it would be the ‘inquire’ button, but I think taking a leap of faith is worth it.”

Indeed, where dealers typically take great pains to place works of art with prominent museums or reputable collectors, Platform allows anyone but felons to purchase. But that democratization, David Zwirner said — as well as the transparency of posted prices, compared to the usual gallery opacity around what things cost — is integral to the new business.

“We’re not sitting there and saying, ‘You get to buy it and you don’t,’” Zwirner said. “It’s first come, first served.”

David Kusin, an economist in Dallas who tracks the art market, commended Platform’s “use of 21st-century technology” for buying and selling art, and suggested Zwirner could use the venture to collect valuable art price data.

Mike Steib, the chief executive of Artsy, said he welcomed Platform into the arena: “Anything we can do that makes buying art as accessible as buying cars, jewelry or luxury goods is great.”

Platform is staffed by a team of 10 young gallerists — in addition to his son, it includes Zwirner’s daughter, Marlene — who bring different backgrounds to the venture. Bettina Huang, for example, Platform’s general manager, has held leadership roles at e-commerce companies like Fab.com and the Amazon subsidiary Quidsi.

Silverman, who just opened a new space in San Francisco, said the two artists she will feature are Clare Rojas and Catherine Wagner. “I’m interested in experiments,” the dealer said of Platform — “who might come to the work who we don’t know.”

James Fuentes, a Manhattan gallerist who participated in a pilot of Platform during the pandemic, said that the experience proved to be “a huge boost for us in a very difficult time,” and that the online space is “less hierarchical.”

Several artists on Platform said they were excited about the possibility of greater exposure. “Even a year ago it would have been unimaginable for a dealer like Zwirner to invite an artist like me to participate in this,” said Lily Stockman, who shows with Moffett.