

How Many People Does it Take to Make Art Work?

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Partners, gallerists, assistants, dancers, zombies. An artist's practice is full of collaborators—five of New York's most vital young artists share theirs.

It seemed strange to publish this story, which appears in the print version of GARAGE Issue 18, about family, community and collaborators given that living in quarantine has changed the ways we interact with the world. (For the most part, these shoots could not take place today.) We asked the artists to let us know where they were quarantining, what their version of community looks like now, and the ways in which the quarantine has changed their process if at all. Their answers are below.



Sam McKinniss

At first, the painter Sam McKinniss wanted to be photographed with a friend—“the guy I go to happy hour with most days of the week after work,” he said. “That’s the community angle.” But after some consideration, he decided to just go it alone. And it makes sense, given that most of the 35-year-old’s subjects are iconic figures and moments so famous that they have a singular hold on our imagination: Whitney Houston mid-belt, Prince on the gigantic motorcycle in *Purple Rain*, Princess Diana forlorn on a yacht in Portofino, and Joan Didion, her spindly hands clasped together. Most famously, he painted the singer Lorde for the cover of her 2017 album, *Melodrama*, capturing her as she languidly lay in bed, an artificial light streaming over her face. More often, he paints from images he finds on Google. It's here, in this process of alchemy, that the works turn into something much more than fan worship. The gauzy paintings don't so much reproduce a celebrity as reproduce the idea of a celebrity, smudged by the passage of time and altered by the faint biases of the eye's beholder.

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“I’m quarantining at home or at studio, both in Brooklyn. I live and work alone. There is no adequate style of being in a community right now. I talk on the phone more often now than I used to, which is fine. And I’ve gotten involved with a few projects to raise and donate funds for mutual aid, but that’s all networked via phone, social media or email. We could call that a community. But I’m done with Zoom, I hate it on there. I used the HouseParty app once but it stressed me out. I miss my friends. I’ve slowed down again, a lot, since there’s no use in hurrying. It’s been over a month, every day is the same. I’m taking my time on a select few detailed pictures. I’ve lost concern for speed, or for having to keep up with our accelerated culture. Who cares? The culture has a lot of explaining to do. I’ve watched Titanic a few times during quarantine, which seems relevant. The ship sinks at the end.” —April 23, 2020