

Stephen Friedman Gallery

NBCNews
15 queer art shows you can virtually tour now
Dan Allen
23 May 2020



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Because staying at home shouldn't leave you culturally starving.



Image: Keith Haring on March 1, 1984. Stuart William Macgladrie / Fairfax Media via Getty Images

This year was meant to be a phenomenal year for LGBTQ-themed art exhibitions around the world — until March and the coronavirus pandemic came along, shuttering museums and putting the planet on lockdown. Most physical shows slated for this spring will still likely open sometime, but meanwhile, homebound, culture-hungry lovers of art cannot live on "Tiger King" and "RuPaul's Drag Race" alone.

Fortunately, several of the top LGBTQ art shows originally planned for physical reality right now can still be experienced virtually, as indeed can a number of excellent exhibitions by and about queer artists from years past. Several must-see galleries have also been created exclusively for virtual intake, focusing on the works of some queer art's greatest icons.

Here's our rundown of the shows that should be topping your virtual art tour agenda.

Aubrey Beardsley

Tate Britain, London

Just days before the pandemic temporarily shut down Tate Britain and most of the world, the museum opened its first exhibition in nearly a century dedicated to the work of influential late-Victorian provocateur Aubrey Beardsley, an illustrator whose beautifully curve-infused work focused on the decadent, the irreverent, the erotic and the ethereal. Beardsley's sexuality is still debated, but he was a certified dandy and an avid Oscar Wilde collaborator — most notably and audaciously as the illustrator of the first edition of "Salomé" — who got swept up in the scandal of Wilde's homosexuality trial in 1895. Though he died at just 25, Beardsley was extraordinarily prolific, as revealed in this video recap of the Tate exhibition — a collaboration with Paris's Musée d'Orsay — by curators Caroline Corbeau-Parsons and Alice Insley.

Art After Stonewall, 1969-1989

Columbus Museum of Art

This groundbreaking show — exploring the impact of the Stonewall uprising on artists and their art, through more than 150 works — did enjoy its full opening run at New York's Leslie-Lohman Museum last year, but was sadly

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interrupted just days after its March relocation to the Columbus Museum of Art, which had organized the exhibition in the first place. Fortunately for everyone in Columbus and beyond, the museum has since posted numerous videos highlighting various works from the show, as well as a virtual exhibition that includes several pieces and their contexts.

Faces of Frida

Various museums



Image: Frida Kahlo Artist Frida Rivera stand next to a painting entitled, 'Me Twice' on Oct. 24, 1939. Bettmann / Bettmann Archive

Frida Kahlo lovers, rejoice. In conjunction with 33 museums around the world, Google Arts and Culture has amassed a truly astounding virtual collection of all things Frida, including numerous exhibits of her powerful works (more than 200 pieces in all); still more exhibits about her fascinating life; virtual tours of her Blue House in Mexico City; and copious feature articles, including one that explores her profound and enduring influence on global LGBTQ artists.

Andy Warhol

Tate Modern, London

Another March art casualty was Tate Modern's first Warhol exhibition in nearly 20 years, which opened just five days before the pandemic put the museum on pause. Luckily for us, staff pivoted quickly and launched a room-by-room virtual exhibition guide and a complete video walkthrough of the show, which includes 25 portraits of Black and Latinx drag queens and trans women from the artist's "Ladies and Gentlemen" series, seen for the first time in 30 years.

Kehinde Wiley: A New Republic

Brooklyn Museum

Probably best known for his gorgeous greenery-backed 2018 National Portrait Gallery rendering of President Barack Obama, Kehinde Wiley's exuberant works overlay the conventions of Old World portraiture with bold portrayals of contemporary black Americans, often challenging ideas about race, gender, sexuality and the politics of representation. Here, he talks us through his 2015 Brooklyn Museum mid-career retrospective, which featured 60 of his best paintings and sculptures.

Spectrosynthesis II – Exposure of Tolerance

Bangkok Art and Culture Centre

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Spectrosynthesis II – Exposure of Tolerance: LGBTQ in Southeast Asia, the largest-ever survey of Southeast Asian LGBTQ-themed art, just barely beat the pandemic during its physical exhibition, closing as scheduled on March 1. The important and extremely diverse show also lives on virtually thanks to this video tour by Patrick Sun, founder of Sunpride Foundation, which mounted the show.

Fine, Bright Day: The Photography of Alice Austen

The Center, New York



Image: Alice Austen Photographer and former socialite Alice Austen in 1951. Alfred Eisenstaedt / The LIFE Picture Collection via Getty Images

One of the first female photographers to work outside of a studio setting, pioneering documentary photographer Alice Austen produced some 8,000 photographs in her lifetime, including many personal shots of her close circle of like-minded female friends. Originally a 2018 exhibition at NYC's LGBT Community Center, this virtual edition includes many images taken on the grounds of her Staten Island home, which in 2017 was recognized as an official site of LGBTQ heritage by the National Park Service.

Kent Monkman: Mistikôsiwak (Wooden Boat People)

The Metropolitan Museum, New York

From the moment they debuted in The Met's Great Hall last December, two striking and monumental paintings by Cree artist Kent Monkman mesmerized throngs of museum-goers. Like most of Monkman's works, these Met commissions reverse the colonial gaze, with the nimble help of his shape-shifting gender-fluid alter ego, Miss Chief Eagle Testickle. The Great Hall paintings had been scheduled to close on April 9, but their run will extend post-pandemic once The Met reopens. Meanwhile we can marvel at them virtually via this video, with explanations and insights from Monkman himself.

Mickalene Thomas: Better Nights

The Bass, Miami Beach

Yet another fabulous show that's had its 2020 run interrupted by the pandemic is this immersive installation by art-world superstar Mickalene Thomas at Miami Beach's The Bass. Known for her work that challenges definitions of femininity and black beauty, Thomas was inspired for this show by her mother, and the eclectic late 1970s parties she hosted at their New Jersey apartment. Until The Bass reopens and it can be visited again in person, Executive Director and Chief Curator Silvia Karman Cubiñá virtually walks us through Thomas's ultra-groovy reality-meets-fantasy exhibition.

David Hockney: A Bigger Picture + 82 Portraits and 1 Still-Life

The Royal Academy of Arts, London

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Fire up the popcorn for this full-length feature documentary (originally released in theaters) that deeply dives into two separate David Hockney exhibitions at London's Royal Academy of Arts, 2012's "A Bigger Picture" and 2016's "82 Portraits and 1 Still-Life."

Leonard Fink: Unofficial Mayor of Christopher Street + The Piers

The Center, New York



Image: Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera march in New York City on June 24, 1973. Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera march in the Christopher Street Liberation Day Gay Pride Parade in New York City on June 24, 1973. Leonard Fink / Courtesy LGBT Community Center National History Archive

The work of New York City photographer Leonard Fink uniquely chronicled the West Village's queer bar and pier culture of the 1970s and '80s. In 1993, Fink's estate donated more than 25,000 of his images to the LGBT Community Center National History Archive, several of which are presented in an eponymous virtual gallery. Another collection, The Piers, focuses exclusively on shots Fink took along downtown's then-salaciously seedy Hudson waterfront.

Keith Haring and Japan

Nakamura Keith Haring Collection, Hokuto, Japan

When Keith Haring first visited Japan in 1983, a cultural partnership began that would last until the artist's untimely death in 1990. This virtual exhibition from the Nakamura Keith Haring Collection explores the legacy of Haring's Japanese jaunts and projects, including the creation of the world's second Pop Shop in Tokyo in 1986.

On Our Backs: The Revolutionary Art of Queer Sex Work

The Leslie-Lohman Museum, New York

This innovative 2019 exhibition explored the under-publicized culture of queer sex work, and its intimate ties to LGBTQ art and activism. In this video, curator Alexis Heller walks us virtually through the fun and enlightening multimedia show.