

# ARTNET NEWS

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### Anybody Home? I Went in Search of the Last Places Where New Yorkers Can Still Safely See Art in Person During the Coronavirus Crisis

by Nate Freeman



The exterior of Karma, a gallery in the East Village, showing a work by Thaddeus Mosley.

Some window-only spaces, public art exhibitions, and at least one gallery that can still be visited. Just stay six feet away.

For years, the See Saw iPhone app has been an indispensable tool for gallery goers in New York and other global art cities, with its clean interface allowing users to scroll through a list of exhibitions on view. One section of the app highlights shows that are opening in the coming week, another highlights which are closing. After selecting from the rich buffet of open shows, the user can watch, with joy, as the See Saw map becomes peppered with flags, each one marking the location of the gallery they want to visit.

But by the end of last week, art fans were looking to See Saw for something else. They wanted to get news on which galleries were still holding their openings this weekend, and which galleries were closing for the foreseeable future.

“We’re obsessed with making sure See Saw is accurate, so we began updating the temporary closure status of individual galleries in response to COVID-19 on the app last Wednesday afternoon with no idea of the ultimate number of closures to come,” said Ellen Swieskowski, See Saw’s co-founder.

A week later, New York’s world-leading constellation of museums and galleries were shuttering due to the coronavirus crisis, and by a need for six feet of social distancing—and a state-wide ban on gatherings over 50 people. Now, See Saw serves less as a way to get from spot to spot than as a reminder of the enormity of what has closed.

“At this point it’s clear that the overwhelming majority of galleries are temporarily shuttered, so we’ve taken a ‘closed until proven open’ approach and updated all galleries on See Saw worldwide with the note ‘Please contact gallery for hours,’” Swieskowski said. “It felt a little eerie having to make that decision, but public health is clearly the number one priority right now.”

And yet, even with the city on lockdown, there’s still a high amount of art that you can see. There’s been a push to develop online viewing rooms, virtual gallery tours, and new ways to circumvent the fact that long-established norms of the art world were shattered in just days. And there’s no reason why you shouldn’t go outside. Asaf Bitton, the health systems innovation leader at Ariadne Labs who wrote a harrowing guide to the desperate need for social distancing that went viral over the weekend, told the New Yorker “the recommendation is to please go outside if you can.” Even if New York gets slapped with an order to shelter-in-place, going outside and taking a walk is listed under “essential activities.”

And if you do go outside, you might be even to see art the old fashion way, in person—through windows, public spaces, or even at the last open gallery in New York.

## **Window Shopping**

Some galleries never needed people to come inside in the first place—they were built as window spaces, solely to be seen from the outside and never entered. In what now seems like incredible timing, Anton Kern Gallery opened a window-only space in Tribeca in January, on the corner of Walker and Lafayette streets, showing a David Shrigley neon work and a sculptural and video installation by John Bock. In late February, right before Armory Week brought the art world together for what now seems like an extremely ill-advised spree of art fairs and openings, the gallery opened a show of two works by Lothar Hempel that was supposed to be up until March 30, but could be there much longer. Gallery director Brigitte Mulholland noted that, technically, the gallery can stay “open” without breaking any restrictions.

“Maybe Anton was wildly ahead of his time with this concept!” Mulholland said.

Other spaces throughout the city have windows that reveal part of a show, or the entire thing. The East Village gallery Karma has two spaces on East 2nd Street, between Avenues A and B. One is a small space where the entire show can be glimpsed from the street, and the other, while larger, still has a tiny white cube cut into the exterior brick big enough to house one work. It has a Thaddeus Mosley show up, and while you can’t go inside, you can see one gorgeous wooden sculpture while you walk six feet away from everyone else.