10 Binge-Worthy Art Podcasts in the Age of Coronavirus

Plugging into the art-world conversation while museums and galleries are closed.

By Jori Finkel

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Many museums and galleries have closed in attempts to slow the spread of the coronavirus, but the conversation about art keeps going — and you can get your fix of the art talk (and also the gossip) through a growing number of art podcasts. Hosts include curators, art writers and artists. Here are my picks for 10 art podcasts worth subscribing to, from one in Los Angeles showcasing the music that moves local artists to another, out of Sydney, focusing on Aboriginal culture.

**Recording Artists**

Helen Molesworth gives some of the most incisive and insightful exhibition tours of any contemporary art curator of her generation, and her new podcast Recording Artists, produced by the Getty, puts this intellectual-storytelling skill set to good use. Here her subject is not one of her own exhibitions (she recently organized the Noah Davis show for the David Zwirner gallery), but six renowned artists — Alice Neel, Lee Krasner, Betye Saar, Helen Frankenthaler,
Yoko Ono and Eva Hesse — whose audio interviews with the historians Barbara Rose and Cindy Nemser are now in the archives of the Getty Research Institute. Smart move: After introducing the artist and issues at hand, Ms. Molesworth brings in smart guests to weigh in, like Lari Pittman and Amy Sillman speaking on Krasner. Memorable moment: in one recording, Alice Neel, who lived a famously bohemian life and painted portraits of a wide cross-section of society, makes the surprising admission that she left Greenwich Village because there were too many “very butch” lesbians on the streets. Ms. Molesworth, who identifies as queer, says she respects the painter’s frankness. Besides, she adds, “I think that I, or any artist I know, could have easily talked her out of this position.”

**Talk Art**

On Talk Art out of London, Russell Tovey, an actor-collector, and Robert Diament, a musician-turned-gallerist, host freewheeling and wide-ranging talks with some big visual artists (think KAWS, Tracey Emin, Grayson Perry) and bold-name creator-collectors (Lena Dunham, Michael Stipe). It’s trendy, gossipy, fast-paced conversational fun, and occasionally frustrating for the tangents left unexplored. When Kaws admits to being arrested, could someone please follow up and ask him where and why?

**Awaye!**

Produced by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), this radio show and podcast focuses on Aboriginal culture, including art, music, theater and film. Mr. Browning, of Bundjalung and Kullilli descent, was trained as a painter himself and it shows, in his strong profiles of contemporary indigenous artists who bridge the gap between traditional and experimental beliefs, processes and materials. Awaye! is also the perfect place to hear more about this year’s Sydney Biennale, which has indigenous leaders for the first time since the Biennale began in 1973. (At present, this exhibition has not been canceled and runs through June 8.)

**In Other Words**

Produced by a division of Sotheby’s called Art Agency Partners and hosted by Charlotte Burns, In Other Words comes closer than other podcasts to the intimacy and insider feeling of being seated at a chic gallery dinner next to a hotshot dealer or curator. Some episodes are issue-driven, focusing, say, on the rise of the Los Angeles art scene (to which I contributed) or the myth of gender progress in the art world (the subject of a major 2019 investigation In Other Words undertook in partnership with Artnet). But most segments are personality-driven, sharing the views of a single art-world figure, whether the mega-dealer David Zwirner or the Metropolitan Museum of Art director Max Hollein.
Dr. Janina Ramirez — Art Detective

In these podcasts, Dr. Janina Ramirez presents herself as an art-object sleuth, “your chief investigator of images,” but she acts more like that memorable college teacher — the one who shared such enthusiasm for her topics that you found yourself interested in dusty corners of art history that had never intrigued you before. Her academic specialty is medieval culture and several episodes skew that way. She brings on scholars to discuss the stunning Byzantine mosaic of Empress Theodora from the Basilica of San Vitale in Ravenna, or the reconstruction of the Staffordshire Hoard Helmet — “possibly the single most exciting Anglo-Saxon find of the last 10 years,” she says. And yes, she is also a professor at Oxford, as well as a popular host of BBC art and archaeology documentaries.

What Artists Listen To

Imagine the ever-popular BBC radio program Desert Island Discs with an artist-only guest list and a feminist bent and you’ll get What Artists Listen To. The London artist Pia Pack started this podcast shortly after moving to Los Angeles in 2017 to explore “the stories and soundtracks of artists’ lives” and get to know female artists in her new community. Like Desert Island Discs (but with rougher sound engineering), each episode consists of an interview with an artist, interspersed with passages from songs that she chooses. Artists include Alison Saar, Alexandra Grant, Kim Schoenstadt, Shizu Saldamando and Galia Linn.

The Sculptor’s Funeral
Jason Arkles is an American figurative sculptor who settled in Florence because of his work, and his show is a deep dive into the giants of the past who inspire him, from the ancient Greeks through Donatello and Michelangelo to modern legends like Rodin. A good place to start is Episode 65, the first of his two-parter on Augustus Saint-Gaudens, the 19th-century master of high relief sculpture who gave the public monuments and coins that had the expressive quality of line drawings. This is podcasting at its simplest: one microphone, one voice, much to say.

**The Art Newspaper Podcast**

The Art Newspaper, a London publication that reports on international art, has created one of the most topical podcasts around. Hosted by Ben Luke, the weekly show is not a digest of recent articles, but a chance to hear experts talk in depth about new developments or trends. A recent episode featured an interview with Art Basel’s director Marc Spiegler on the effect of the coronavirus on the art market and another with the Tate Modern’s curator Catherine Wood on the legacy of Ulay, the German photographer and performance artist who long explored issues of “masculinity” and “vulnerability” and died in March.

Margaux Williamson’s “Living Room,” oil on canvas, 2020. Credit...Margaux Williamson

**Momus: The Podcast**

These monthly conversations with international artists, writers and curators come from Momus, the online magazine based in Toronto that bills itself rather self-importantly as a “return to art criticism.” But the podcast, hosted by Sky Goodden and Lauren Wetmore, strikes just the right tone: thoughtful without being academic, analytic and poetic both. And the guests include some fascinating Canadian artists who deserve broader recognition, including the “slow” painter Margaux Williamson, who speaks about how “boredom and patience leads to complicated things.”
The Lonely Palette

“It looks like the Chrysler Building with a fruit bowl on top,” one museum visitor says. “If I’m correct that it’s a figure, it’s kind of shutdown and shut-in,” another adds. Both are describing Louise Bourgeois’s totemic sculpture “Pillar” (1949-50) and reflect the way that Tamar Avishai likes to start her accessible, personal, but still meaty podcast. She asks museumgoers to describe a particular artwork, then fills listeners in about the artist and the making of the work. Many featured artworks, from this Bourgeois sculpture to a Rembrandt portrait, come from the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, where Ms. Avishai has been the podcaster in residence. But, no, she doesn’t plan to stop podcasting now that museums are closed. “I’ve got lots of backlogged tape and nothing but time on my hands,” she wrote in an email, “so I’ll be producing all through these weird dark days, hopefully tapping into that #MuseumFromHome vibe and collaborating with other creators to make as much content as possible.”