

make something that makes you feel good

Hosting exhibitions during a pandemic doesn't have to be an archiving process. Here at LDVA, we created an interactive, digital space that was an alternative and NOT a substitute for the physical private view.

The curation process was natural and collaborative with the exhibiting artists. There was a flux of media used throughout the installation of the make something that makes you feel good that played with the spatial dimensions and reproduction of the art between 2D and 3D; documentation and exhibition. The artworks often moving from their original form to shared photographed and digitalised images that were then re-created into FrameVR.

The curation process was experimentally driven. Not being limited by physical constraints, the scale and positioning of the artwork was able to be played with in ways that wouldn't have been possible in a physical exhibition. The artwork became the sky; it became the horizon; it became the entire landscape that surrounded the gallery model. Artists were encouraged to re-imagine their own pieces into a digital realm. This resulted in morphing some of the pieces into other spatial dimensions. The art in the space became site specific, transforming into new works and therefore new ways of viewing. An area of quiet was curated in the digital gallery model. It was a space of clarity within the chaos where a work from each artist could also be viewed in a more conventional style.

make something that makes you feel good was a social event where discussing the artwork was integral to the form of the exhibition. FrameVR allows each spectator to create an avatar with a microphone and video. The sound is sensitive so that the closer an avatar is to the others, the louder the conversation will be. The intention was to create the sense of multiple spectators and recreate the social interactions with people known and unknown, that are currently restricted. Spectator discussion was intended to be a sonic experience when entering the gallery space. We found there was sometimes a guardedness to discussions in this space, despite the open conversations that usually occur in physical private views. Perhaps that's down to the wine!

The technology is experimental and hasn't yet reached its full potential. Our curators felt that the formal format of name plaques jarred with the spontaneity of the curation and they are currently looking into more exciting ways to interactively credit the artists.

We are looking forward to hosting more of these events in the near future!

Keep an eye out for our risograph posters throughout...

Featuring Artists:

Anamika S
Ann Mechelinck
Astrid Schulz
Demeter Dykes
Jody Mulvey
Johanna Bolton
Vomiton Collective

LUVA Curators:

Fran Hayes
Meg Ganosky

By talking to galleries, collectives and artists, LUVA Gallery has been exploring how the pandemic has created potential for new CURATION in spaces between the digital and physical.

Featuring Interviewees:

Small House Gallery
iMT Gallery
Ekphrasis
Contance Leterre

LUVA Interviewer and Editor:

Lydia Poole

PHYSICAL

PHIGITAL

DIGITAL

iMT gallery

Back in 2004/2005 when Lindsay Friend @lindsayafriend and I imagined what iMT could be it was a response to two main influences. On the one hand, we were both artists with experience of exhibiting our work and wanted to imagine a space that could try to show work in ways artists wanted their work to be shown. We both felt this wasn't always easily the case. And on the other hand, we were interested in understanding how galleries worked.

We'd both previously been involved in different artist-run spaces that had been unsustainable or inherently broken and we wanted to try and do it differently by roleplaying as gallerists. For me, this primarily came from being interested in curating as a kind of remix practice, and from struggling to have sound art shown as sound. I'd had a sound work I'd made included in an exhibition at the ICA but had been asked to create a video track in order for it to be exhibited. I felt that I'd come through a series of setbacks regarding wanting to show sound-as-sound so I was a bit grumpy about it.

In 2005, when we started iMT, we were in an uncertain place in London, in terms of whether sound art was a mainstream practice in the visual arts. This was mid-way between David Toop's Sonic Boom at the Hayward in 2000 and Susan Phillipsz winning the Turner in 2010. Galleries were peripherally aware of sound art but weren't really showing it in a sustainable way. I was going to lots of wonderful noise events with people like Alex Baker and Kit Poulson making abrasive noises with a load of machines on a table in the street. I wanted people to be able to do that. That was what iMT meant to me at the time. **The ability for artists to do something experimental, but at the same time for it to be seen as serious, legitimate work.**

Lindsay threw herself into learning about gallery culture and wanted to strip away the bits where gallery management could be impenetrable and boorish. **She wanted it to be about people.**

The horrors of social media. This is a Not-Me came about because of the pandemic. We had potential access to a funding stream through the Arts Council England's Emergency Response Fund for non-NPOs. Lindsay and I had already committed to help iMT keep going through the pandemic with our own resources from other jobs, so we wanted to get as much of this to artists as seemed feasible, in the form of commissions. But, we also wanted to make sure that we had some kind of existence outside of becoming a temporary storage facility for the duration of lockdown. **Early on, I was thinking about artists who couldn't access their studios, who'd had projects cancelled and who were worried about income, so the project started from that point.** Artists were suddenly deprived of materials and practices that were important to their working processes. For artists like Plastique Fantastique, for whom being in the same space, is such an important part of what they do, it was **a recognition that this was not business as usual.** There were also artists that we'd started working with on other things that had to be put on hold. Both Lindsay and I generally find it difficult to drop something that we are excited about. We'd been talking a lot about social media. iMT had been on social media in some way since MySpace and Flickr were things. Obviously, at the start of the pandemic, a lot of us (myself included) who use social media in some way, used it as an outlet for anything from pandemic anxieties to dealing with isolation. The project's title was about how, as useful or seductive social media could be, it was also pretty dysfunctional. Any pretence at our social media selves being directly correlated to our non-social media selves, seemed potentially harmful. **Especially, when software like Facebook stakes a claim over words that actually matter to who we are as organic beings, like "memories" and "friends" and turns them into cloud storage.** So the exhibition title was a reflection of these things.

I was eager to use High School Musical 2 as a reference point, as I felt it had formulated a useful articulation of time, work and friendship that reflected these feelings around social media. This formed the starting point for an exhibition narrative. The project was designed to evolve through group Zoom meetings. We didn't want to make any assumptions about everyone's time commitments or individual circumstances. So it was important that it was curating through conversations. The artists then brought key reference points to these conversations. For example, Felix Rose Kawitzky suggested Jeff Vandemeer's Strange Bird, which, I think, had a clearly important impact on some of the work.

An important part of the project was its flexibility: the hope that the form and content of the project would evolve as it appeared and that the artists themselves would be instigators of this. We didn't want it to have too much of a consistency but be something that appears here and there in different ways. Although Instagram was the most consistent platform we used, the audience could join Maggie Robert's WhatsApp meditation group, for example, or Felix's Discord rpg.

The works began sharing ideas in a way that was more successful than I'd ever envisaged. Close attention reveals how collaborative some of the material is, with themes, images and sounds, moving between different artists' works. I think the streams, themselves, fit together really well. They create the feeling that the various artists come together and then diverge again as the project goes on. Now that restrictions are lifting, Lindsay and I are keen to retain some of the ways this project functioned. It is obviously useful to maintain a group discussion for a group project, but this had happened to a greater degree than any group exhibition we'd done up to then. We want to keep artists directly involved in a gallery's online AND offline

Can you tell me a little about your exhibition series *This is a Not -Me*, that presented artworks responding to the uncertainties of existing in a digital future? What inspired this and how did it start?

What did you envisage for *This is a Not -Me* when it began and do you see it differently, looking back at the series, now that pandemic restrictions are beginning to lift?



existence. **Destabilising the curator-as-auteur is important for me and iMT.** If iMT is going to play with problematic, art-world power structures (as well as problematic media platforms) **it needs to avoid becoming the monster**, itself. It must remain a collaborative venture and one that continuously unsettles the expectations of its field. Looking back on this project, as we come out of lockdown, is about being better able to see the gallery articulating its hybrid existence both online and in East London art scenes; revealing where we do this critically and the points where we fail to do this.

I think one of the great things about the work in this project is how emotional and visceral it can be. Perhaps, this is most obvious in motifs of pain and violence, but for me there's more balance than that. What's that Jacob's Ladder line from Eckart?

If you're frightened of dying and you're holding on, you'll see devils tearing your life away. But if you've made your peace, then the devils are really angels, freeing you from the earth.

Heh. Some of this work made me weep, and not because of the friction. I was watching full streams through three times in a row as I arranged the work and then streamed it first through Instagram and then Twitch, so perhaps that had an impact. But every stream felt emotional to me. I'm seeing visions of a 10-year-old Macaulay Culkin. Perhaps it's partly because I think I love all these artists as actual people, even those I hadn't met outside of Zoom. But it was the work, the same feeling you find in a book that reminds you that you're not alone. It's good to have art that makes you cry.

I'm not sure that online exhibitions trying to replicate meatspace exhibitions are that useful. Online activity has entirely different relationships to speed; subjectivity; attention; the honesty of interactions; the pause between thinking and commenting; and work/life balance. My god, social media instinctively consumes our non-work lives and grinds it together with obligation, self-surveillance and professional anxiety- or at least that's my experience of it! I've deleted Facebook, partly due to its group function becoming a part of courses I teach on. I am dead against that. We all rely heavily on Google but in The Vampire Diaries they Bing it instead. So even, by changing some major metaphysical conditions of reality (like vampires and werewolves being real), it still means you just jump from relying on one multinational company, to relying on another. **With some of the digitisation of the art world right now it seems there is still an overwhelming rubber band effect seeking to snap back to pre-existing conditions.** The sudden chatter about NFTs, especially how they might make digital things operate like unique physical objects, seems to me indicative of this.

I love it despite everything I've said above. As England proudly **collapses into its default role of two-dimensional movie villain**, it's been really invigorating, and a respite, to have access to collaborations outside. We work with Lotte Rose Kjær Skau (based in Denmark and working at LungA School in Iceland) and Paola Ciarska (formerly based in Newcastle but currently in Poland). Lindsay is in regular touch with Paola and I meet Lotte online each month for a studio chat. We talk about LungA, what she's reading, her studio community in Denmark, or her practice. There are really wonderful, profound things that seem to be happening there.

Audience experience of "the work" has become less uneven. In London, we're not a huge space and often turning up to a performance might mean either being stuck behind a crowd or thrust right into the middle. **People who can't visit the physical space, suddenly have the same experience as those can.** Two of the artists we represent don't live in the UK, and I live 300 miles away from Bethnal Green. There are people who might now feel part of, whatever it is we are doing, that perhaps didn't before.

There are motifs of pain and violence throughout the This is a Not-Me. How do you see art and its audiences occupying and living within digital architecture?

As a contemporary art space geared towards intermedia and new media, how do you think online exhibitions have impacted your curation and that of the wider art world?

As a team with members in the UK and EU, how do you find collaborating across different countries?

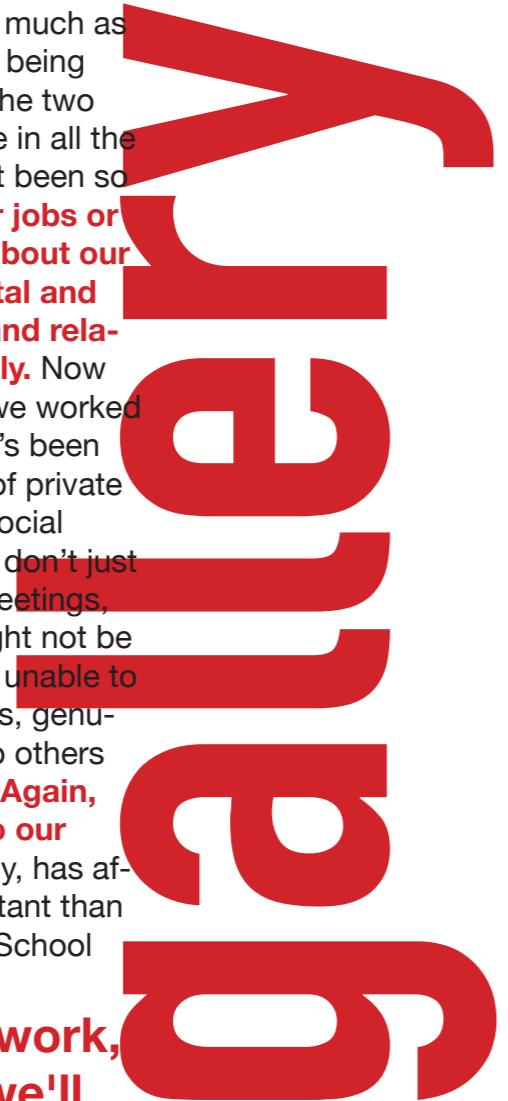
What's different for your audience by using digital platforms as a gallery space?

iMT gallery

How do you think Covid 19 has affected the artists whose works you exhibit?

I don't think I can or should answer this for the artists in a way. COVID-19 if it is anything is intensely personal as much as it is global. I've been fortunate in being able to spend the last year with the two people that mean the most to me in all the world. I know others who haven't been so fortunate. **It's not just about our jobs or our public existence, it's also about our biological conditions, our mental and physical health, our anxieties and relationships with friends and family.** Now I'm not talking about the artists we worked with here, but for something that's been so isolating, it's also made a lot of private circumstances public. Just like social media does to some degree. We don't just see our homes in those online meetings, our employers see things we might not be comfortable with sharing but are unable to hide, like our health vulnerabilities, genuine anxieties or responsibilities to others who need various forms of care. **Again, this is the invasion of work into our lives.** Our work, and the economy, has after all been declared more important than our survival. To go back to High School Musical 2:

**We've got to work, work,
to work this out, we'll
make things right, the sun
will shine.**



Do you have any future projects and things we can be looking out for?

I'm writing a book about iMT at the moment for Routledge. A kind of summary of one of iMT's explanations of itself: **iMT as a curatorial practice.** It should be done next year. It may conclude with This is a Not-Me as it seems like a real transition moment between what we've done over the last 15 years and the direction Lindsay sees us taking now. There are lots of projects on the horizon for the gallery itself, including working through plans we had on hold, but there is still an uncertainty of how we should do some of these things. There are also some really important conversations we are having about iMT's function that we need to address. That's exciting!

answered by mark jackson @markpjackson

CONSTANCE explores the extension, translation and transformations of social interactions—its fantasy, agency and **the needs for « care » online**; meaning the Internet, applications and, of course, social media.

lettere
@constancelettere

The pandemic has had a great impact personally and on my work. What is the place of art when the world is going through a pandemic? I did not want to feel frustrated by not being able to access workshops and studios and a social life, so I embraced the digital concerns that my research and practice already fed off. I embrace the virtual without trying to exploit it. I have recently been collaborating with tailoring designer Kate Bautista, merging fashion and WebDesign.

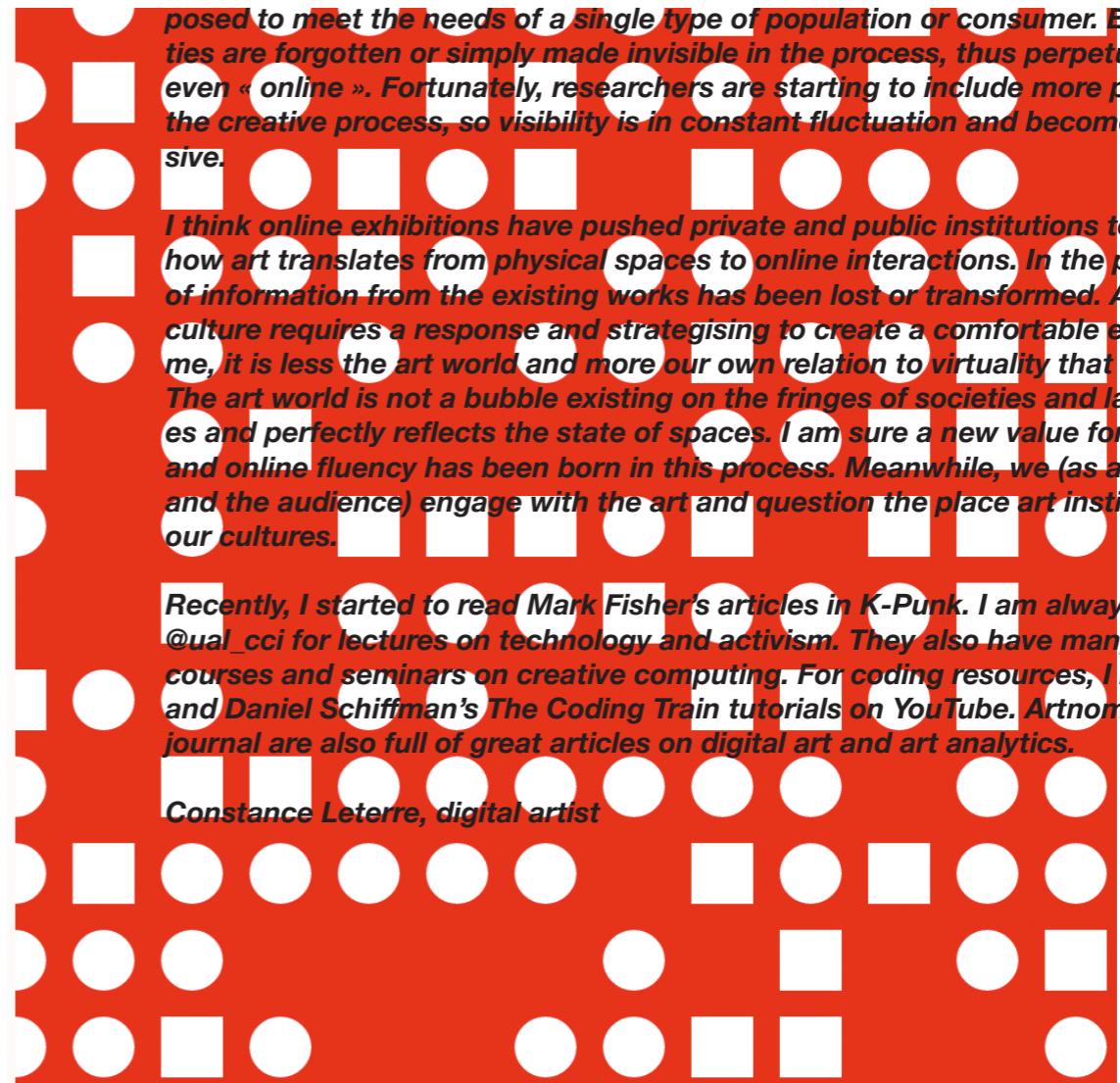
As Naomi Pearce and Alice Hattrick say in their correspondence on Pharmakon (Lucy Beech, 2016) « [...] connectivity is the poison and the cure ». Looking for resources (and a community), I use digital technologies to satisfy simple needs such as ordering food and contacting my family. I also use them to preserve relations I already have, to discover spaces to be explored or simply network. However, this process is ambiguously addictive and becomes pointless on social media when I endlessly scroll, absorbing lots of information, related (or non-related) to my interests. I have to remember it's always directed by biased algorithms and commercials.

I believe this question of visibility is at the centre of the Covid crisis since the spaces where we usually showcase our work, as artists, have been closed. Our data traces that are capitalised on and have become « 21st century oil ». Technology is designed with inbuilt biases that often interfere with reality. Whatever the object, design is supposed to meet the needs of a single type of population or consumer. Entire communities are forgotten or simply made invisible in the process, thus perpetuating the bias even « online ». Fortunately, researchers are starting to include more parameters in the creative process, so visibility is in constant fluctuation and becomes more inclusive.

I think online exhibitions have pushed private and public institutions to reconsider how art translates from physical spaces to online interactions. In the process, a lot of information from the existing works has been lost or transformed. A new digital culture requires a response and strategising to create a comfortable environment. For me, it is less the art world and more our own relation to virtuality that has changed. The art world is not a bubble existing on the fringes of societies and lands, it coalesces and perfectly reflects the state of spaces. I am sure a new value for digital work and online fluency has been born in this process. Meanwhile, we (as artists, curators and the audience) engage with the art and question the place art institutions hold in our cultures.

Recently, I started to read Mark Fisher's articles in K-Punk. I am always looking at @ual_cci for lectures on technology and activism. They also have many free online courses and seminars on creative computing. For coding resources, I look at GitHub and Daniel Schiffman's The Coding Train tutorials on YouTube. Artnome and the eflux journal are also full of great articles on digital art and art analytics.

Constance Leterre, digital artist





JOHANNA

VOMITON COLLECTIVE

MAKE SOMETHING THAT MAKES YOU FEEL GOOD

make something that makes you feel good
luvagallery.com
@luva_gallery

Ekphriasis was born in the first lockdown, in May 2020, as artists separated from studios, peers and audiences. Realising this estrangement was here to stay, we wanted to play a part in envisioning how the new normal, as it were, would look. There was a large consensus from friends and peer that felt isolated from the 'art world'. While great for engaging with lots of content, Instagram and social media don't really make up for having no access to studios, workshops, funding or crits. At Ekphriasis, we were looking for a way that would enable creatives to collaborate, show work and engage with an audience. It was exciting to work with new artists (and now friends), nationally and internationally, whilst being able to continue to support, promote and engage with the art community. We've had some great feedback of collaborations that have come from our platform.

When quarantines, our first online volume, began we weren't really sure of what to expect. Like all our volumes, it was digital. We wanted to create a platform that was accessible and dynamic. One that wouldn't remain stagnant, but rather, was constantly open to evolving and able to change with the times, as well as with creative practices. It is important to us that we are engaging with contemporary conversation in our fast-paced cultural environment. For us, that meant it was featured online for a month before it being taking down, renovated and replaced with another 'volume' of artists, writers and creatives. We really enjoy this durational way of working with a digital platform. Its dynamic form and temporality enabled a more realistic approach to curation. Its form would continually evolve from one volume to the next.

The physical zine was a way to bridge the gap between virtual art and art that can be held by an audience. In creating a physical zine, we wanted to give back to the artists and contributors who had been involved digitally, but might feel detached from their physical practices. The zine is an archive or artefact and the only documentation of the first three Ekphriasis volumes. The profits raised went to an Edinburgh-based art therapy charity The Teapot Trust. It felt great to be involved in giving something tangible, especially in these distanced times.

Publications have been a great way to engage with audience throughout the pandemic. It is the physical relationship to the work that feels a little less isolating, and which we have all been seeking. I think the combination of digital change and physical work is definitely exciting. In a world headed towards more digital and time-based media, it's hard to imagine publications bearing as much resonance. However, I believe that artists books, posters, postcards will always have an important and tactile impact on their audiences.

Digital art and an inhabitation of online spaces has really blossomed. Online exhibitions, Virtual Realities and Zoom performances have been able to engage with audiences in a completely new way. I heard it said somewhere that:

*TV shows did what Movies could never do, they inhabited people's homes
TV stars felt like friends because you could watch them in bed, in your underwear
– breaking the fourth wall.*

This new 'art world' that can exist online and allow virtual exhibitions, engages with people in the same way as movies; it is, perhaps, a more relaxed viewing stance. I'm still unsure what it really means for artistic communities. The traditional white cube space has been made, temporarily, obsolete and it really excites me to think of what could be next. However, I think we will always be drawn to see and install work in gallery settings, because that's the allure of art: to see it in person, to experience the work with your own eyes.

Ash Tomkins, Ekphriasis founder

Ekphriasis.
@ekphriasis

@small_house_gallery

SMALL
HOUSE

Small House Gallery is an art curation project made up of 3 doll houses situated in a family kitchen and an old developing shed in South London. The original doll house was bought for an art performance in 2013 and 3 years later, Small House Gallery was founded out of an impulse to assemble small family art tokens. The offer expanded to other artists by word of mouth, and then to online open calls. Up until Covid, demand was admittedly modest, I remember almost having to beg artist friends to give me their work to exhibit!

There came a time around 2018/19 when I had to 'shelve' the project - literally! If not for the pandemic's social restrictions and an offer to share a local studio space, I may not have revived the house. I didn't know at the time that Small House Gallery was going to almost entirely, take over my own practice. I see the project as an extension of the collaborative arm. When I restarted the gallery last year, I saw it as a way to connect with the real people who make up the online art community. So many of us were going through this isolation; together and apart. Even in its first incarnation, Small House Gallery was intended as a means of connecting to the art world when parenting responsibilities. Limited childcare options made it hard for me to go out and see private views or talks that often take place in the evenings. Participating in external shows was also logistically tricky, so having mostly-online curation made perfect sense.

@small_house_gallery

You founded Small House Gallery prior to the pandemic. Have you noticed any difference in reception to the rise of virtual spaces?

Small House Gallery is contemporary in its curation between the physical and digital landscapes. How do you see the cross-roads of 'phigital' curation?

Typically White Cube spaces can feel quite hostile and exclusive. How does this translate into a dollhouse setting?

When I started the Small House Gallery Instagram account in September 2020, I discovered this vast world of microgalaries. **There's a growing network of us** and even a Guild of Microgalleries - A GUILD! Each approaching programming and presentation a little differently, and all seeming to attract different artists. I think the idea just came to a lot of us simultaneously. It made sense to focus on the small while stuck at home, on and off, for a year. I suppose it gave people (including me) the illusion of control over our little corner of the universe, when we felt rather powerless and cut off. For a lot of people in this virtual micro-space community, we found personal solace in these projects. **There was humour and whimsy; but also real art, real issues, real conversations and real exchanges happening.**

In terms of hybrid digital/physical shows, there are microgalaries that are hand-built to look 'real' in every detail, using high-end production photography and VR tours - I straight up marvel. Their aesthetics are very different to mine. I like working with what I have to hand. I'm not necessarily trying to fool the viewer into thinking the architectural elements are real and the scale is 1:1. At Small House Gallery, **I never pretend that it isn't a doll house**. I want the viewer to understand that the photographs of the gallery were taken in a domestic setting but without having to explicitly show the shed or a family kitchen. **I want the viewer to consciously be inside a toy**, using their own imaginations to play with miniature and monumental proportions.

My use of online and physical curation isn't intentionally conceptual; it's for practicality. I mainly use the photos as documentation and definitely not to replace or become the physical work. Although, never say never: one of the May artists, Alex Pearl, just informed me that he's going to make digital interventions on the photos I'll take of the installations. This makes total sense for his practice. So, if we're doing 'phigital' right in May, it's thanks to Dr Alex.

I'd love for one or all the doll houses to be invited to show in a conventional gallery space, just to see if it doesn't soften that elitist, alienating quality you're referring to. It would be so great conceptually: a series of solo shows within a group show within a group show. I would propose a dozen doll houses, one for each of the exhibitions that I've had in Small House Gallery. I would recreate each artists' show. It would be great for a collector bought a whole house of their work was in: lock, stock, and lightbulb. There's just something cutely subversive about that scenario.

Or, perhaps, if someone commissioned the artist for a life-sized version of their Small House Gallery works, treating their show as a maquette, a showcase of possibilities:



possibilities: **turning make-believe into reality.**

I mean of course the small works are wonderful in their own right. I guess I just like the idea of the project and the artists making the jump to life-size exhibitions and recognition beyond a Covid context. But I also appreciate the smallness, and the low overheads!

HOUSE

No favourite room, though some rooms are easier to work with such as the ground floor in both 'traditional' dolls houses.

There are also some which are more challenging, like attic of both and the new basement of Small House 2. **But, when you get it right, it is very satisfying.**

I studied art and art history but not curation, so I work using my instinct. It's intuitive for sure. I get varying degrees of input from the artists. Some have very clear visions of how their shows should be laid out, but sometimes it might not work when placed in the actual space. We'll work out the best solutions together, until we're both agreeing it looks 'right'. However, some artists say, I trust you, do whatever you see fit. Surprise me.

Actually those works by Ian started out as maquettes for a residency application for CERN. They were an attempt to illustrate constant change and movement on the particle level of matter and energy, and the particle/wave duality, maybe even quantum entanglement.

Ian sees this work as being in the expanded field of drawing but after seeing his work installed in Small House Gallery, **it has reignited a part of his practice that was dormant** for a little while. He used to create room-sized, assemblage-based installations. As a result of his work with us perhaps he will start experimenting along those lines again. Playfully embracing the duality of drawing and assemblage, challenging a dichotomy between the two practices. The surrealism is consequential I think, but if we ask Ian, he might say differently.

SMALL

Johanna was testing ideas in the house for a larger work, while also testing the same works in your [LUVA Gallery] VR show, which led to a solo VR show on her own website. I believe she had been planning to combine the life-sized real-world installation with either live performance or video performance. However, after exhibiting at Small House Gallery and LUVA Gallery, VR might find its way into the 'big' show she's cooking up.

I know that Victoria Rance's show influenced how she displays her handheld pewter sculptures in her studio and workshop, though not how it is translated into her exhibitions. She has

already made life-sized versions of the Lokis in the past. The small Lokis in our show were never intended to be maquettes for those larger scale works. I saw recently, that some of her tinier pewters were in a performance and installation down by the Thames (but I can't claim that her Small House Gallery show exerted influence!)

small house

Who are you excited about right now?



gallery

In Ian Andrews' Tiny Collision Event Experiments, there is a sense of surrealism and playfulness. Have you found any new perspectives from the artwork after they've been exhibited on a smaller-than-usual scale?

Do you find that presenting work in the Small House Gallery can influence the curation or artwork in future large-scale exhibitions?