



LONDON DEALERS ARE DEBUTING THE CITY'S FIRST-EVER GALLERY WEEKEND THIS SUMMER TO REVIVE THE LOCAL ART SCENE AFTER A YEAR OF LOCKDOWN

The three-day event will focus on different geographical concentrations of galleries.

By Naomi Rea
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To celebrate the end of lockdown and resuscitate the local scene, a group of London galleries are launching the city's first gallery weekend this summer.

A grassroots initiative that emerged during the pandemic, London Gallery Weekend brings together more than 80 galleries, ranging from cutting-edge space Sid Motion Gallery to mega-gallery Gagosian, from June 4 through 6.

Jeremy Epstein, co-founder of Edel Assanti gallery and a founder of the event, tells Artnet News that the idea first emerged in November. "We had been talking about Frieze last year, it was almost like a moment of reacknowledgment of the art scene after this massive lockdown in London, and there was this really nice moment where, although it was very local, people were out and about visiting galleries again," Epstein says.

The group surveyed the local community and, after more than 80 galleries showed interest in the idea, the wheels were set in motion.

While gallery weekends are popular in Europe, the format is new for London, which has a more disparate geography of galleries than other European cities. "There was always hesitation about the format because there is a lot of ground to cover in London, but at the same time, the problem that we are seeking to solve in creating an event like this is to make the geography of London's galleries more legible, accessible, and visible," Epstein says.

To navigate London's geographical spread, the weekend's programming has been organized around three different areas. Central London and its concentration of galleries in the Fitzrovia, Soho, and Mayfair neighborhoods will be the focus on Friday; East London, and its crush of emerging spaces will take the spotlight on Saturday; and Sunday will highlight South London.

Sid Motion, the founder and director of South London's Sid Motion Gallery, said in a statement that the weekend is an opportunity to celebrate the diversity of London's gallery landscape. "It is so important for young galleries, emerging artists and new voices to be shown alongside internationally established names from the very beginning," she said.

London's recently established pop-up gallery complexes could give some international venues the chance to get involved in the weekend.

LONDON GALLERY WEEKEND

While Frieze's space at No. 9 Cork Street is not expected to debut until October, South Kensington's Cromwell Place is in talks to come on board as an institutional partner, and each of its galleries will have the option to participate in the program on an individual basis.

Participating galleries will pay a fee ranging between £300 and £3,000 —with larger spaces subsidizing their smaller colleagues— which Epstein says is essentially the seed money to get the event off the ground.

While the summer in London will still be a borderline time in terms of closing the book on the pandemic, the UK's vaccination program is steadily advancing, and galleries are expected to be able to reopen from mid-April. It is likely that crowd control and social distancing measures will still be in place, but the organizers hope that the event will be able to signal an emergence and mark a new era of collaboration across galleries.

The three days will be packed with a program of discussions, studio visits, late openings, performances, and children's events produced by the participating galleries. The organizers hope that the event will eventually become part of the European calendar, and prove to be a yearly draw for international visitors over the summer. For now, the focus is on the local audience in London.

"I think we all felt like, given the size of our city and how many people engage with the museum system, we would love to see our galleries more visited," Epstein says.