

Reimagining visual art: out of the virus and out of the box

Adolescent girl from Moldova explores how art is influenced by COVID-19 and how it might change the world around us.

Iulia Cabacenco

21 July 2020

About the author

Iulia is a fifteen-year-old high school student from Chisinau, Moldova. Besides being an active volunteer and an outstanding student, who participates in international academic championships, Iulia adores art and has many talents. She performs in theatre and is one of the lead singers of the first musical inclusion project in Moldova – Youth choir “LaLaPlay Voices”.

Humanity is witnessing a great change in history. The Earth is wobbling under our feet and it's impossible to predict in which side we'll have to run to keep the balance. We're fragile like the girl on the ball while the extent of our problems is huge and the number of victims of the pandemic firmly holds on top.



© UNICEF

"My interpretation of "Girl on the ball" by Pablo Picasso starring myself."

Who's the artist?

Art will survive through every disaster and people will survive along with it. Energy of creation will never exhaust, and it is what helps to balance on the ball during the time of destruction. Coronavirus gave birth to countless maybe-not-professional but wonderful artworks.

You can be an artist if you have a story to tell. COVID-19 is a new experience for all of us and every “survivor” has something to say. Majority of people were convinced they are not skillful enough to create an artwork and frightened to fail what they haven't even tried. But lots discovered their hidden talents owing to work shut down and unexpected spare time. For example, famous Russian figure skater [Evghenia Medvedeva](#) in lockdown dedicated her free time that is so rare for such athlete to her second passion – art. Fans didn't even know she can draw but Evghenia finally found courage to reveal her art to the public.

For a self-taught amateur artist who is a professional sportsman this work is beyond compare. I believe it can inspire others to try creating. The audacity, patience and hope underpin all art making. Moreover, these qualities will help humanity to endure the pandemic and find creative innovative solutions to rebuild the world in many spheres beside art.

I think that after COVID-19 more multipotential people will appear in art and it will become way more competitive. The quality of art is going to increase, and the bar will be set higher. Just imagine the mixture of biologist's and artist's mindset! Meanwhile art community lays low and accumulates energy to burst with hundreds of exhibitions and amazing out-of-the-box ideas after the virus.

Just like the world where coronavirus art was born it's very unpredictable and you can't say what's coming next. It's more of a discovery than an invention. Discovery can't bear any limits like obligation to fit the expectations and a deadline. Artist Jess Johnson shares her thoughts about it: “So many artists, myself included, produce artwork with an outcome in mind, such as an exhibition or career step.

And removing that outcome can perhaps free us to experiment and create art that connects us to the universalities of being human, as opposed to ‘professional artists’ operating within the structures of a commercial art world.” So, where have our experiments led?



© <https://www.facebook.com/groups/izoizolyacia>

Who's the muse?

Pandemic has seen a large amount of different peculiar works but all of them can be described in two words: LIVING PAINTINGS. This name has wide range of meanings.

Let's start with the one I've tried myself.

- Living on the canvas

For people lockdown resulted in urge to find how to entertain themselves. The idea of reimagining and staging famous paintings quickly went viral on the Internet.

This creative impression of Magritte's work was posted on Russian public group "Izoizolyacia" that shook Facebook with a great number of ingenious living paintings. "Izoizolyacia" has started during the lockdown in Russia and now is joined by more than 500 thousand people all over the world that find themselves painting decorations and crafting costumes or just exploring new artists and paintings. Dozens of participants say it feels a bit easier after this meditative process.

Art helps to wreak your negative emotions because you have complete control over the world of your art and can interpret a painting the way you see it. In addition, such kind of practice will popularize art and make people more intelligent in this area.

- Living around us

The next type of living painting is reportage drawing that is also called a reflection. It's a quick sketch of what is happening around right now that can be made either on the street or indoors. Reportage drawing alike photo captures one fleeting moment: a certain position of a person, an interesting look. Only it's a more personal reflection where you may notice artist's opinion and feelings towards the subject.



© Evghenii Rusak

This work is called "A tired doctor". You can find out more on Evghenii Rusak's Telegram channel "Coronavirus art"

This work is by a Russian painter Evghenii Rusak who decided to keep a coronavirus diary, making reportage drawings every day. He's assured that people will never be *that* way they're now and it's a unique chance to depict humanity a split second before a big change. Thousands of other artists "reflect" life in the pandemic.

This practice will improve because it's convenient for beginners whereas these drawings are not so detailed and "professional". The process of creation is fast, and you can carve the time for it every day. For example, now loads of female artists are busy with children and chores but "reflections" can be a way for them to keep drawing. Artist Francesca DiMattio in [an interview about creation on quarantine](#) mentioned: "Both requiring your hands and attention, motherhood and one's studio practice are in direct opposition to each other"

- Living everyday

On the other hand, these two can be completing when transformed into something like neo-COVID-impressionism. Impressionism involved scenes of quotidian life in 19-th century while the new genre will show our routine now: cooking, caring for children or doing chores. Who knows these things better than our mothers? By the way, impressionists were first to attract attention to scenes of working. The most common topic for the artworks now is "doctors on their mission" and maybe small sketches will turn into big canvases.

- Where we live

As artists are blocked inside of their houses, interior (furniture, design) became the center of their compositions. I especially like how a bathroom is used on work-fromhome artwork by a famous street artist Banksy who couldn't use usual surfaces or his art.

What's the material?

In spite of David Hockney being 82 years old, he managed to catch up to modern methods of drawing. His work above was created on iPad and it represents a surprising combination of new and old. I think that world will follow the same path: nature will reclaim it's meaning for us, but the world will become more digital.

Now many artists run out of materials they can't possess due to the crisis or can't get to their studios to have instruments or space that they need. However, *digital* space is accessible all the time and a lot of artists will switch from paper and paint to graphic tablets. This new tide will require museums to adapt to it.

Material paintings will be replaced by monitors where digital art will be exhibited. Now it's undervalued by expert critics and considered not that worthy to be in a museum. But digital art has a great advantage. It will reduce the price of a museum ticket because paintings will occupy less place: artworks on monitors can swap after an observer would like to move to the next one. Moreover, shipping and installing won't be necessary. [Online exhibitions](#) will be organized frequently and thanks to it art will become even more accessible and affordable. Almost every interested person will be able to enjoy art! I believe that's a positive answer for my question in the beginning.

Not only nature and digital art will be more important for humanity but also usual simple things we haven't noticed before. Lack of material led artists to creating from slightly unexpected materials. Making collages from waste paper is a good solution for reutilizing it.

Pills, buttons, garbage and dozens of other things have an opportunity to live a second life too by being transformed in outstanding mosaic pictures. Mosaics made out of garbage can be created for supporting ecology and communicating about pollution.

I believe that a creation of art can be a considerably more effective and powerful tool to express your point of view and make change than violent protests and manifests.

The question is: what can coronavirus art change?

What's the purpose?

Art makes information more understandable and easier to embrace. That's why it will conquer the world penetrating in every part of our life, from school textbooks to official documents, and demand in it will grow. Just look at how Ministry of culture of Ukraine decided to remind people of protecting measures from COVID-19:



© Ministry of Culture of Ukraine

This amusing poster more likely will keep people following the rules. Plus, it supports art industry that is experiencing hard times. There plenty of initiatives aimed to benefit it. For example, artist Eric Fischl created a limited edition of prints to contribute to the closed New York Academy of Arts. There are [plenty of sources](#) where artists can make donations to support their colleagues and art galleries. Then I asked myself: "Shouldn't we dedicate our money and time to dire needs to make everyone able to afford and appreciate art to begin with? Can people live without art? Is it as essential as food? Is art a privilege or it is taken for granted?"

You can find a lot of examples of artists-activists and art resolving many essential global problems. [The great deal of artists](#) now financially help to soften the consequences of the pandemic by donating money from sales to coronavirus relief funds. For instance, artist Peter Regly benefits #FirstRespondersFirst, a Harvard initiative providing resources to health-care workers on the front lines. Jean-Michelle Othoniel with his drawings encouraged his Instagram followers to donate to the Red Cross.

And people won't survive without art – spiritual food – as well as without usual nutrition. If artists abandoned their studios to work in economy, healthcare or jurisprudence the world would slowly cease of boredom and gloom! People vice versa should strive to make it for everyone and for granted.

Art makes people brighter and kinder and the world will become more colorful living creatively. That's why to step out of the virus we need to create and step out of the box.

