



# Social Media Guide for Galleries — 2021



# Introduction

With more than half of the world’s population now on social media, understanding how to leverage these powerful platforms will be integral to your business’s growth and sustainability in the long term. Last year, how we collect and sell art profoundly changed. Collectors bought more art online – notably on Instagram – than ever before, and digital channels became art businesses’ top source of sales.<sup>1</sup> The online art market also more than doubled in value.<sup>2</sup>

Art businesses will use social media differently depending on goals and bandwidth. But how do you determine which tactics and features are the most useful to invest your time in?

This guide provides an overview of the best social media platforms for art businesses today, and takes a detailed look at which content and features will have the most impact.

1 Artsy, “Artsy Gallery Insights: 2021 Report,” p. 9 (2021).

2 Hiscox, “Online Art Trade Report,” Part 2, p. 12 (2020).

# What's Covered

4–7

Why your gallery should be on social media

8–15

Which social media platforms to join — and the business tools they'll offer to your gallery

16–26

How to create great content for your gallery's social media

27–30

How to improve engagement with your content



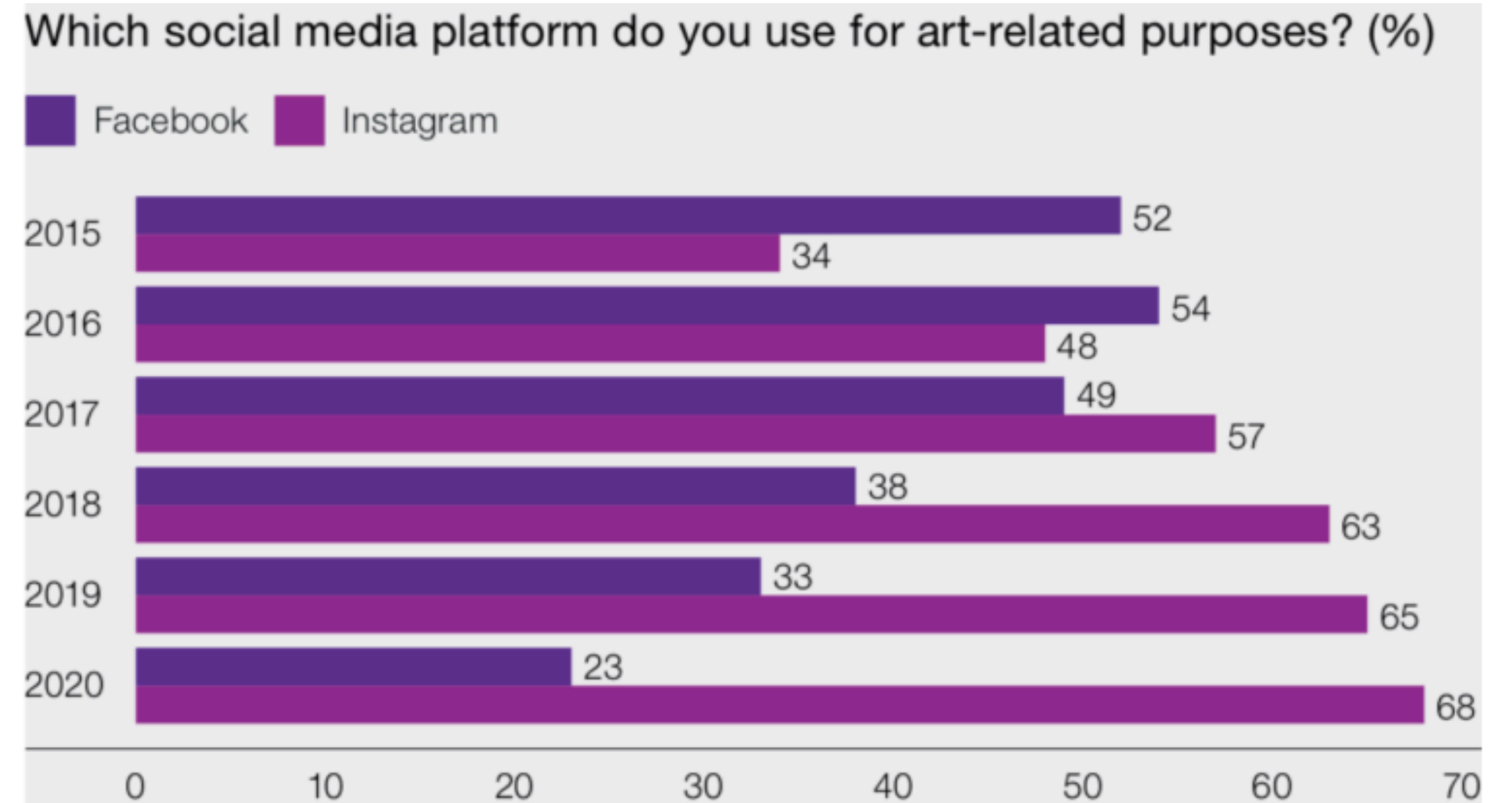
# Why your gallery should be on social media

Installation view, Stack sculptures by Annie Morris. 20199. Image courtesy of the artist and Timothy Taylor Gallery.

# Meet your audience where they are

For the art world, visual and interactive social media platforms with e-commerce tools — like Instagram and Facebook — have come out as the social platforms of choice for collectors looking to discover and purchase art. In Hiscox’s report “The Online Art Trade Report,” 68% of collectors said Instagram was their preferred social media platform for art, and 87% of those collectors said they used it to discover new artists and find art to buy.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Hiscox, “Online Art Trade Report”, Part 2, p. 12 (2020).



An Artsy collector, Pamela Hornik, has shared how she uses Instagram to discover and collect new artists:

“The collecting process we’ve developed is that I’m on Instagram, I see an artist I send the information over to David, he looks them up on Artsy and sees which gallery is representing them, and then we contact the gallery. That’s what we’ve been doing for years.”

– Pamela Hornik, from [“Artsy Collector Spotlight: Pamela and David Hornik”](#)



Installation view, Chantal Joffe, Sally in Fishnets, 2013. Image courtesy of Pamela and David Hornik.

# Increase awareness of — and trust in — your gallery and artists

When carefully crafted and consistently maintained, a strong presence on social media can lead to a significant increase in awareness for your business, helping to attract the attention of a wide variety of prospective clients, cultural influencers, and like-minded individuals. It is also a fantastic tool to build and maintain a loyal, long-term customer base. One of social media's greatest strengths is its unique ability to humanize the perception of brands and build trust by fostering direct interaction with likes, direct messages, comments, shares, polls, and live videos. These interactions make customers feel more connected to brands, helping foster longer-term loyalty than traditional forms of marketing, such as print ads.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *The Telegraph*, Three steps to building customer trust and creating brand loyalty. (2021)

# Lower your marketing costs, easily

A print ad might cost you around \$5,000, and in the same vein, creating and maintaining a website can run up tens of thousands of dollars. On the other hand (and not considering paid ads), social media is a free marketing tool where you can deliver “relevant, creative, and useful” content to users — at little to no cost. By placing a greater focus on social media, you'll lower your gallery's overall marketing spending while also forming stronger relationships with collectors.

# Which social media platforms to join — and the business tools they'll offer to your gallery



Installation view, Antony Gormley, *Lost Horizon I*, 2008. Image courtesy of the artist and the Royal Academy.



In 2020, social media emerged as the third-most successful sales channel for galleries — a substantial bump from the previous year, where it was ranked the sixth source of sales.<sup>5</sup> While that statistic might make you eager to get your gallery on all the platforms, unless you have a large, dedicated social media team, it's better to hold off on less commercial spaces like TikTok, Twitter, and Clubhouse. Instead, concentrate on the two platforms that consistently provide art businesses with the greatest payoffs — Instagram and Facebook. Their networks have the largest reach out of all social media platforms, and collectors, art enthusiasts, and gallerists turn to them the most for discovering artists and browsing works.<sup>6</sup>

As Jordan Huelskamp, Artsy's Head of Social Media, explains, “We focus the bulk of our efforts on Facebook and Instagram, where our key audiences in the art world are most concentrated.”

<sup>5</sup> Artsy, “Artsy Gallery Insights: 2021 Report” p. 6. (2021)

<sup>6</sup> Hiscox, “Online Art Trade Report”, Part 2, p. 12 (2020)

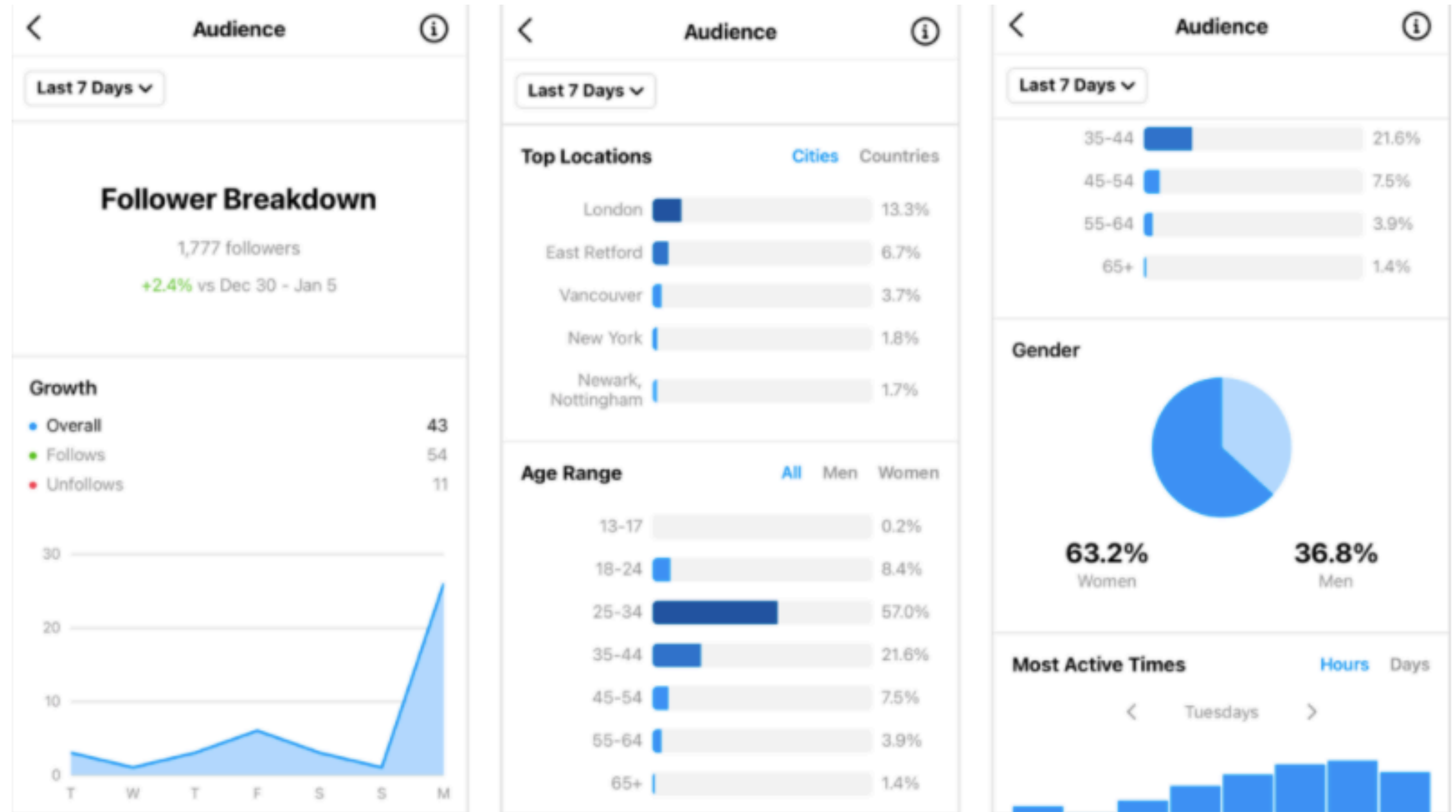
# Instagram

It's no surprise that a platform as visual and timely as Instagram plays such a prominent role in the art world, nor that so many collectors consider it a platform of choice for discovering and buying art. Instagram is particularly important if you want to connect with the next generation of art collectors— a staggering 92% of new collectors and 87% of young collectors reported using Instagram for purchasing art.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Hiscox, "Online Art Trade Report", Part 2, p. 12 (2020).

# Instagram for Business

The first step to your gallery’s Instagram success is setting up a business profile, which unlocks special commercialized features that are unavailable to standard accounts. Here’s what your gallery can take advantage of immediately with an Instagram business profile:



## Instagram for Business

### Make it easier for collectors to reach you.

Add your gallery's address and contact info to your profile.

### Sell artworks to collectors directly on-platform.

Instagram business accounts can leverage the app's e-commerce tools.

### Direct collectors to key links and content.

The "Swipe Up" Story feature is available to business accounts with over 10,000 followers, as well as all verified Instagram accounts.

### Gain access to important analytics.

Understand how your content is performing, who your audience is, and what they're interested in. More specifically, you can:

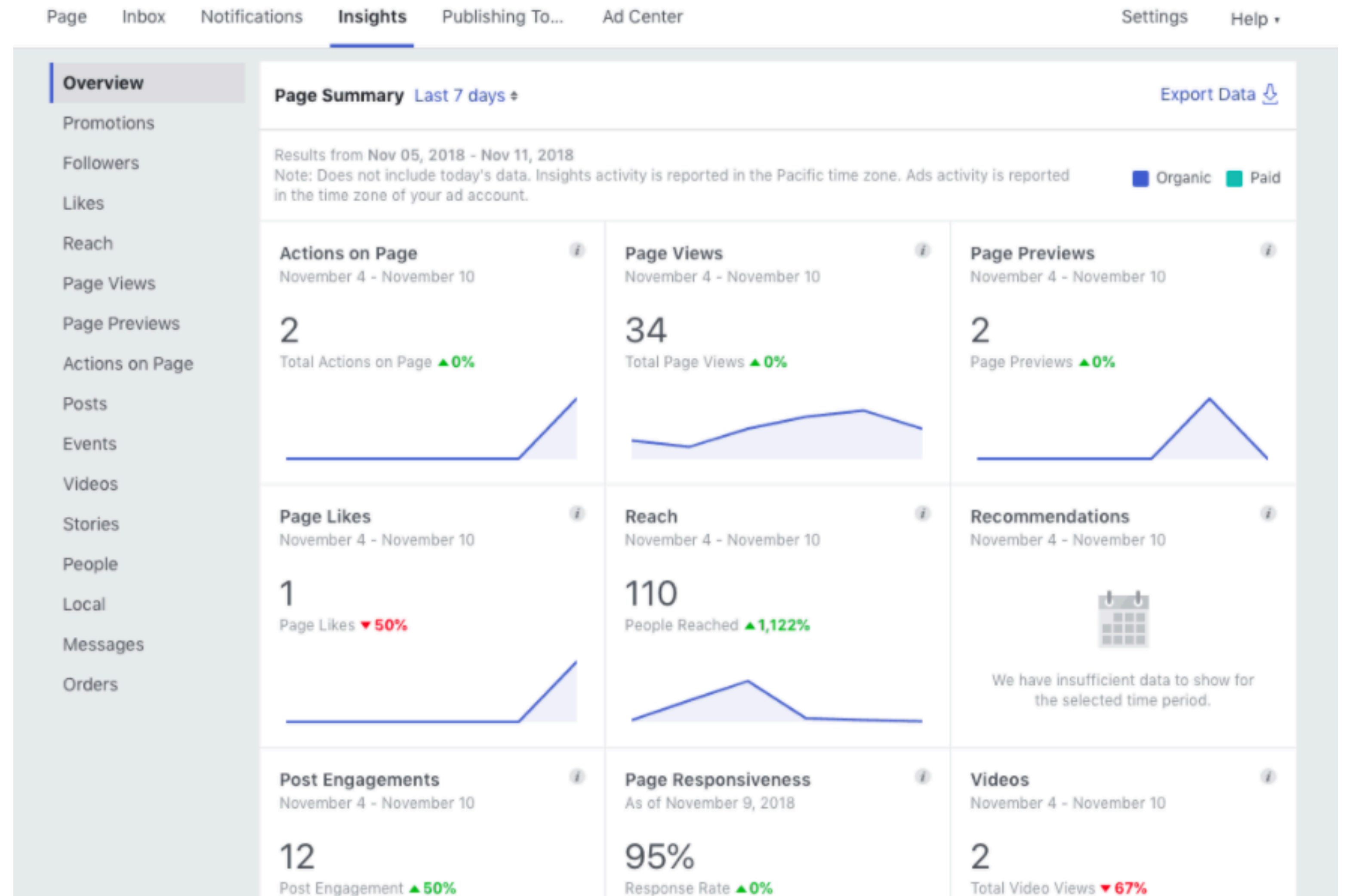
- See your follower growth and demographics.
- Understand your overall engagement analytics for your content (likes, reactions, comments, saves, and reach).

# Facebook

Much like Instagram, Facebook gives registered businesses space to include relevant contact information such as an address and phone number. Facebook also provides businesses with invaluable analytics, which are worth reviewing regularly to help guide your content strategy.

# Facebook for Business

With a business profile on Facebook, you’ll receive insights about your gallery’s audience, content performance, and more—all accessible through your homepage through the “Insights” tab. Here’s how you can make the most of your business’s Facebook profile:



## Facebook for Business

### Understand your follower growth.

The “Followers” view shows the distribution of your follower count over time, so you can see exactly when you’ve gained and lost followers—an indicator of how your content might be affecting your audience size. This view also allows you to see where your page follows come from (desktop or app) and through which source (organic or paid).

### Know what to post and when.

The “Posts” view reveals when the majority of your followers are online and recommends a window of time in which to make a post. It also gives you access to engagement and reach metrics on a post-by-post basis, which can help inform the types of content you share with your audience. You can also see the top posts from other pages you follow, providing insights into what that your audience (or potential audience) may be interested in.

### Get to know your audience better.

The “People” view shares demographics about your follower base, including gender, age, location, and language. This can help you further determine who’s seeing your posts and assist you with your content strategy and tone.

### Gain insights into your events.

The “Events” view allows you to see how all the events you’ve shared on Facebook—from exhibition openings to art fairs—have performed on the platform. Here, you can dig into the number of sign-ups, clicks, and attendees for your past events, which can be helpful for benchmarking in the future.



# How to create great content for your gallery's social media



# Step 1: Hone in your gallery persona

In order to build a strong social media presence, you have to identify what makes your gallery unique and figure out how to effectively communicate that uniqueness across platforms.

With so many art brands on social media today, developing a persona and finding your niche can feel intimidating – but it doesn't have to be. Fill out this questionnaire to get started.

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## What is your brand?

- Are you a dealer, advisor, gallerist, or marketing professional?
- What makes your brand unique? Why would someone follow or engage with you instead of your competitors?
- What resources can you provide to your followers? Do you have any access, expertise, or skills in areas they are (or could be) interested in?

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## What brand story do you want to tell – and to whom?

- What are you most passionate about? Could it be your artists, art history, aesthetics, the environment, or storytelling?
- When a new client walks into your physical space, how do you engage with them in person? How would you recreate that experience through social media?
- Who is your target audience? What do you know about them, and what assumptions can you make about them?
- Who else do they follow? What do they read? Which artists do they love?

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## Who are your tastemakers?

- Do any of your artists have a large following? Are there members of your staff with strong independent social media presences that align with your brand?
  - If so, involve them in your creative process. Ensure they're the strongest advocates for your business on your gallery's feed, as well as their personal feeds.

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## What is your brand's aesthetic?

- Consider color palettes, graphic styles, and typefaces. Do you prefer bright pops of color, soft hues, or monochromatic colors?
  - You'll likely be sharing images of your artists' works on social media, so your gallery's brand will reflect their aesthetics.
- Are there other brands' profiles you refer to when describing your aesthetic?
- Look at your favorite brands, and study how they approach copy and design. What do you like most about what they do? Can you emulate them?

# Step 2: Make your feed a destination

Now that you've identified your gallery's niche and formed an authentic brand persona, it's time to create a content strategy. This will help you engage and grow your audience, while also keeping you motivated and interested in making content.

Start by looking at your past content engagement. What has performed the best? Share posts that you feel will engage your followers—and repeat what works. For example, if your audience consistently reacts positively to studio visits with your artists on Instagram Live, prioritize doing those regularly.

## Social content ideas for art galleries

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### Cross-promote gallery programming

As you know, it takes time to curate and launch an exhibition, viewing room, or fair booth. Ensure that everyone in your audience—no matter how they keep up with your program—knows what's coming up at your gallery by sharing updates across your channels (e.g., social media, email, and website). Remember to include links for browsing the exhibition, viewing room, or fair booth directly.

#### Pro tip

Services like [linkin.bio](#) and [linktree](#) let you direct your audience to multiple landing pages from just one link, such as a newsletter sign-up page, a current show, and your Artsy profile. Consider adding one of these links to your Instagram bio to ensure a seamless experience for those that want to learn more.

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### Spotlight your tastemakers and artists

Many collectors prefer following an individual over a brand. Take this into consideration, remembering that the social media presence of your artists, staff, and collectors can be an asset to your organization. Consider handing your gallery's account over to them for guest posts during key events, such as fairs or exhibition openings—and make sure they promote the posts you make, as well.

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### Publicize your gallery's press

Was your artist featured in a museum exhibition, or did they talk about their work to a magazine or newspaper? Share any relevant press with your audience through social media, and make them aware of the attention your artists—and you—are receiving.

# Step 2: Make your feed a destination

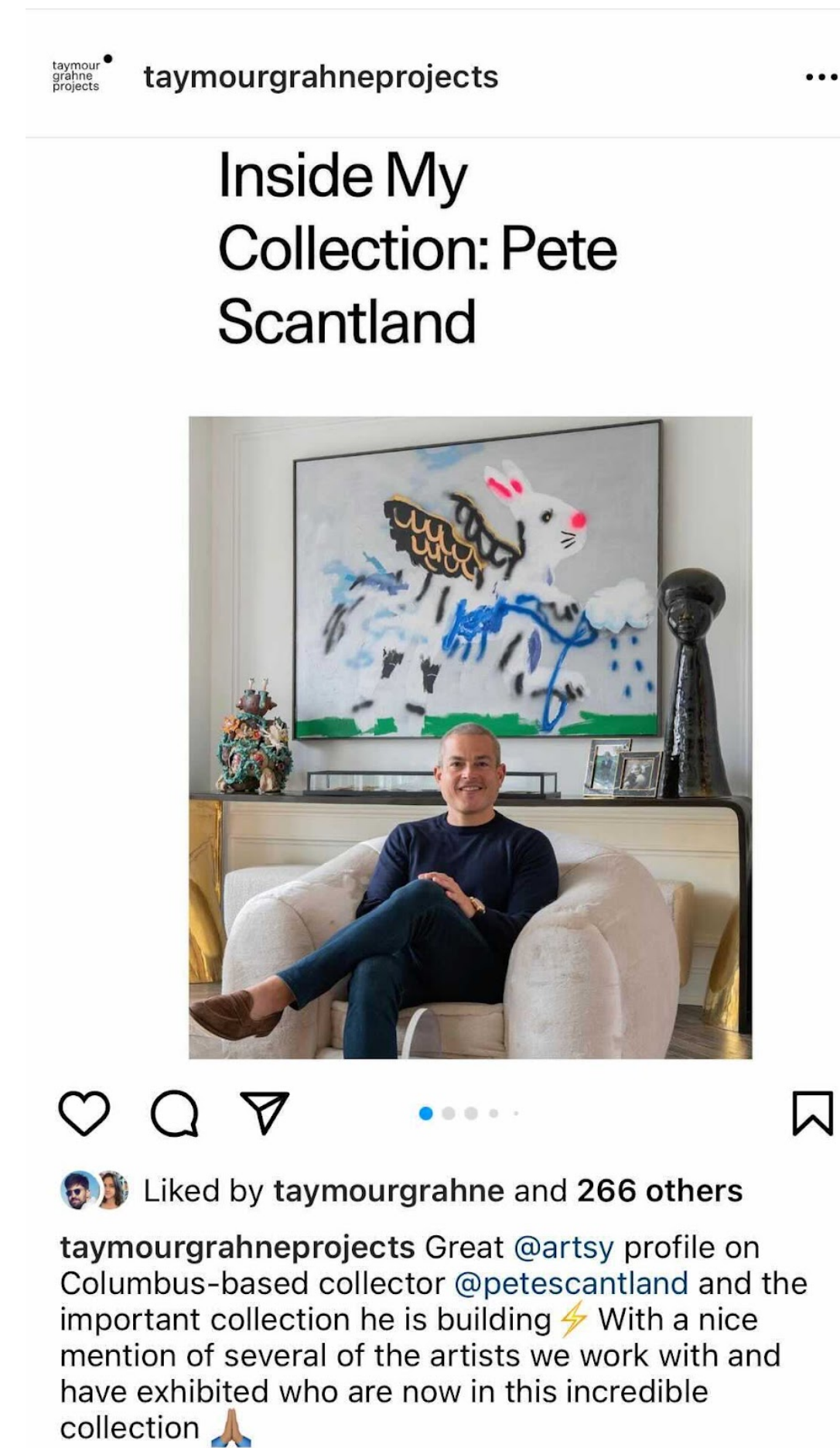
Social content ideas for art galleries (cont.)

## Post striking artwork photos

Instagram and Facebook are highly visual platforms. Share any beautiful images you want your followers to see—including close-up shots—coupled with information about the artwork or artist.

## Share behind-the-scenes footage

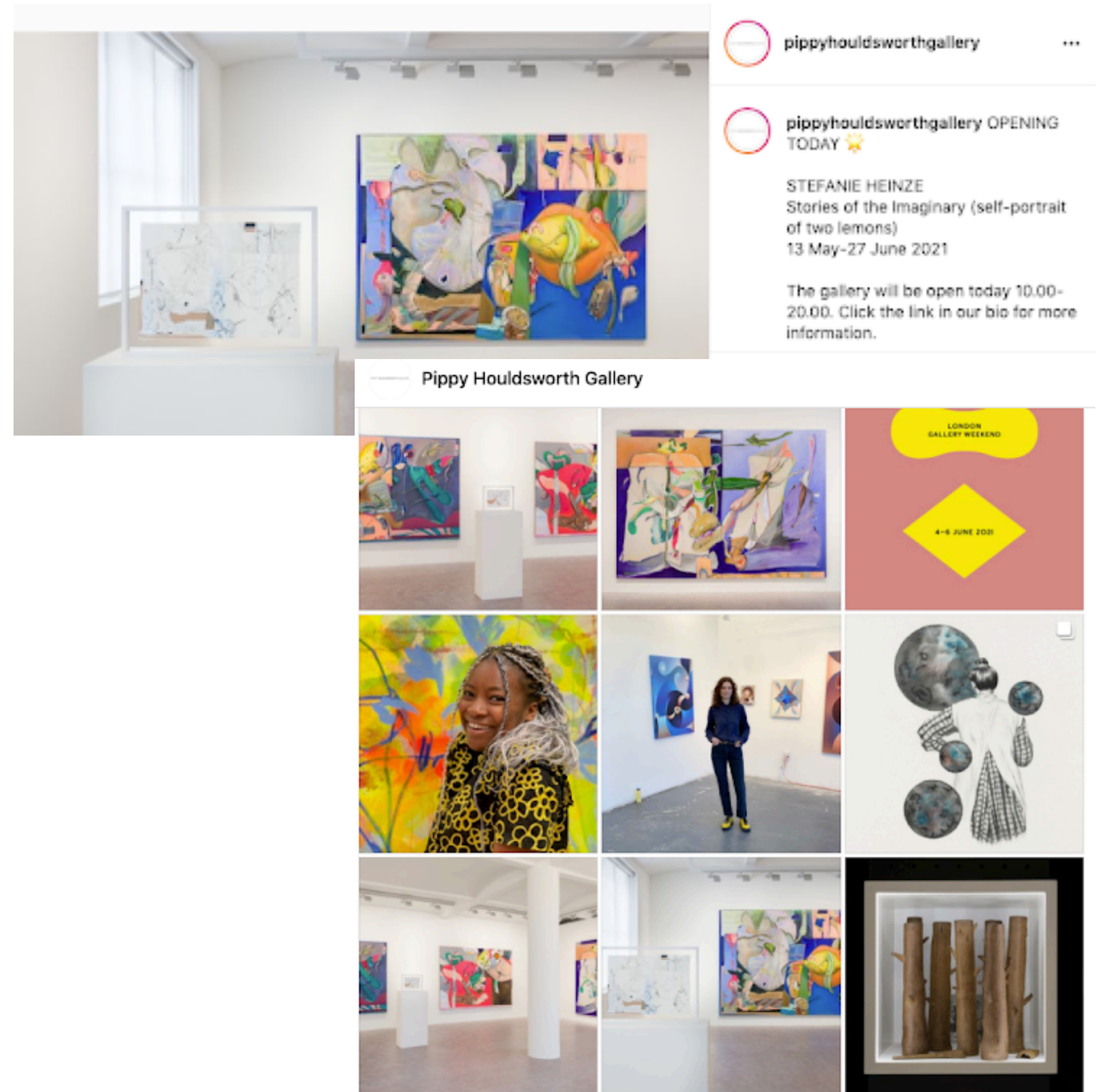
Behind-the-scenes content can be a fantastic way to deepen your audience's appreciation for—and connection with—your gallery and artists. With in-person meetings still in flux, consider giving your followers a peek into something they don't see every day, like an exhibition installation.



Partner Taymour Grahne shares an Artsy collector profile that mentions several artists he represents.

# Partner Social Media Spotlight: Pippy Houldsworth Gallery

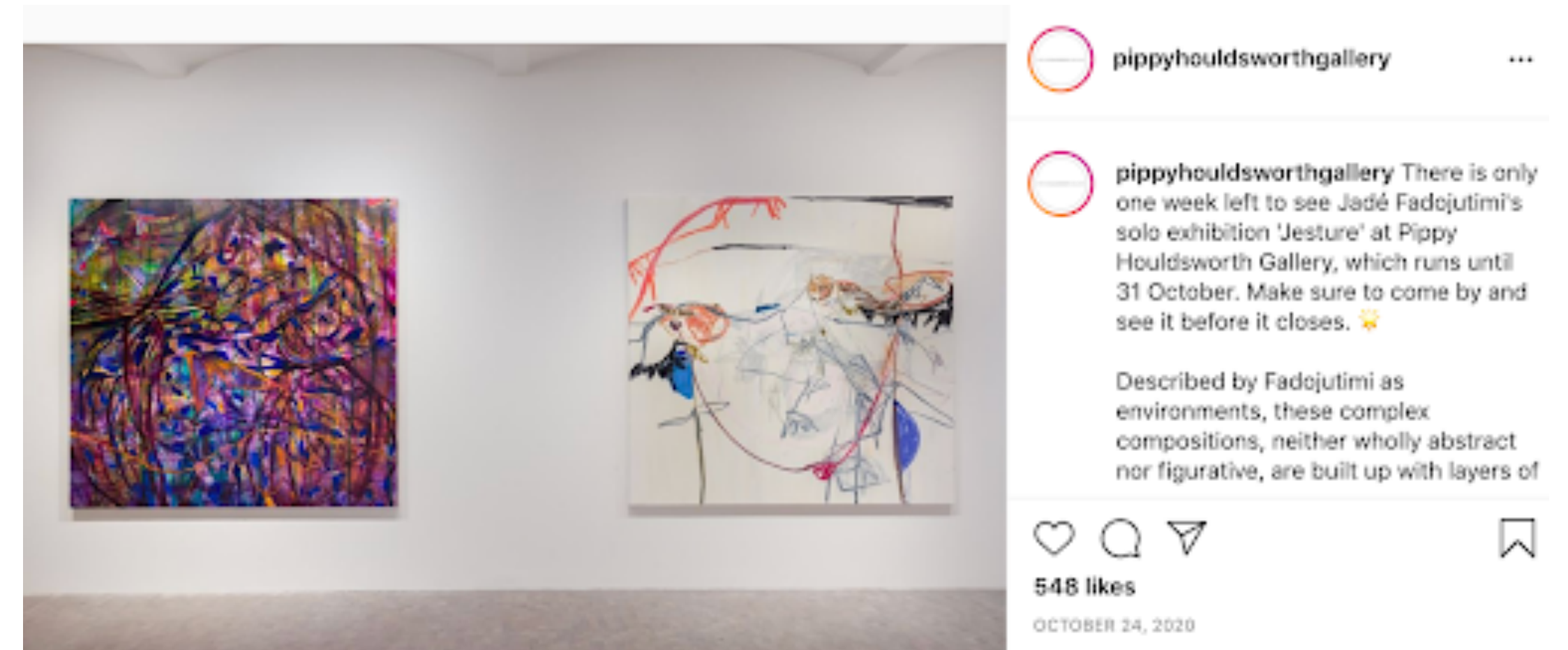
[Pippy Houldsworth Gallery](#) regularly shares news of their artists, such as Jadé Fadojutimi, through Instagram. By leveraging the linkin.bio feature, the gallery directs users to their website, Artsy page (with available works), and any press mentioned in their posts—helping collectors easily learn more about topics that interest them.



Instagram post (Upper left) and Linkinbio feature (Lower right)

## Partner Social Media Spotlight: Pippy Houldsworth Gallery

Last year, Pippy Houldsworth Gallery and Jadé Fadojutimi both promoted the artist's exhibition "Jesture" via Instagram. By posting about the show to her personal account, Fadojutimi drove her audience directly to Pippy Houldsworth's profile. From there, they could discover the exhibition, browse available works, and follow the rest of the gallery's programming.



## Step 3: Invest in the Growing Importance of Video

We'd be remiss to not acknowledge that managing an Instagram presence has its challenges. There's only so much time in the day, and the steady stream of product updates and features can feel like you're constantly needing to learn one feature after another. Over the past year, Instagram has added a slew of new tools to help businesses, including [Instagram Shop](#), [Shopping in Reels](#), and [Insights for Reels and Lives](#).

Recently, Adam Mosseri, the Head of Instagram, [announced](#) that the platform “is no longer just a square photo-sharing app.” Rather, the company is now focusing heavily on its on-platform video, shopping, and creator products. Its algorithm is already making changes to reflect these new priorities, showing users in-feed video recommendations of topics they're not following.

You can prepare your gallery for this change by starting to develop video content. While video can take more time to execute, it also gives you the ability to share complex, in-depth stories that can't be conveyed in a single image. It's also one of the most effective ways to create experiential marketing for your followers, as it gives them something to engage with and remember.

Next, our experts demystify Instagram's new video features and share ideas to consider if your gallery is just starting out.

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## Instagram Story Videos

### What are Instagram Story Videos?

Short, promotional, and entertaining videos with a variety of editing options including normal video, boomerang, superzoom, rewind, and hands-free. Videos longer than 15 seconds are automatically clipped into individual segments.

### Where are they?

The Stories feed and your profile image.

### What could galleries use them for?

Promotional and teaser content—try the swipe-up feature for these—as well as entertaining, interactive footage such as audience polls or Q&A.

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## Instagram Video Posts

### What are Instagram Video Posts?

Short-form videos up to 1 minute. You can also upload multiple videos within a carousel post.

### Where are they?

Discoverable through your profile feed and the Explore page.

### What could galleries use them for?

Behind-the-scenes footage of an artist creating a work; an artist or curator discussing a show; “how-to” clips; video press; snippets from panel discussions.

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## Instagram Reels

### What are Instagram Reels?

Short-form videos up to 30 seconds, set to music. Best for entertaining, funny, and inspiring clips.

### Where are they?

Discoverable on Stories, home feeds, the Explore page, and the Reels tab.

### What could galleries use them for?

Experimental content; artist/tastemaker takeovers; behind the scenes at a gallery opening.

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## IGTV

### What is IGTV?

A channel for long-form video content up to 60 minutes.

### Where is it?

The Explore page, the IGTV tab on your profile page, and a 1-minute preview available for you to post on your Instagram profile feed. Also viewable on the [IGTV app](#).

### What content could galleries use it for?

Full-length artist/curator interviews, studio tours, and panel discussions. IGTV shopping allows businesses to tag products and artworks within video content, so viewers can tap to shop while watching the content.

#### Pro tip

Monitor your IGTV analytics to see your audience retention rate (the average percentage of your video watched), total views, likes, and comments. You can also create an “IGTV Series,” which allows you to share your content in episode format and notify your audience whenever you share new content to the series.

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## Instagram Live

### What is Instagram Live?

An unedited livestream (up to 60 minutes) recorded from a mobile device for your followers to tune into in real time. Instagram Lives are easily discoverable and prioritized within the algorithm. Your followers will receive an in-app notification when you go live, and it will be bumped to the front of their Instagram Stories feed.

### Where is it?

The Instagram Stories feed. You can also post Instagram Lives to IGTV individually, or as part of an IGTV series.

### What could galleries use it for?

Instagram Lives allow a sense of immediacy and direct interactions with your followers. Consider running an artist Q&A, having an artist or tastemaker take audience questions, or doing a live studio visit. After your live broadcast is over, make sure to repost it to IGTV.

#### Pro tip

You need good upload speeds for a high-quality live stream. Anything between 672 kbps and 61.5 Mbps is ideal.

# 2 Best Practices for Video Content on Instagram

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1  
Grab your audience's attention with an eye-catching cover image.

Select a photo that captures the overall message of your video and will make scrolling Instagram users want to stop and look at your content. Also, do your best to hook your audience quickly with the video—the first three seconds are key to grabbing attention.

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2  
Add subtitles or closed captions.

According to Instagram, 60% of Stories are watched with the sound on—which means that 40% are experienced without sound. Most social platforms prevent videos from autoplaying with audio, so if a user scrolls through their feed, they will only hear a video's sound if they tap the frame.

Therefore, your videos can't rely too much on audio. Create subtitles (or use auto-generated closed captions) so that your audience can enjoy your video with or without sound. Plus, this will make your content more accessible for people who are hard of hearing.



# Step 4: Take Great Photographs

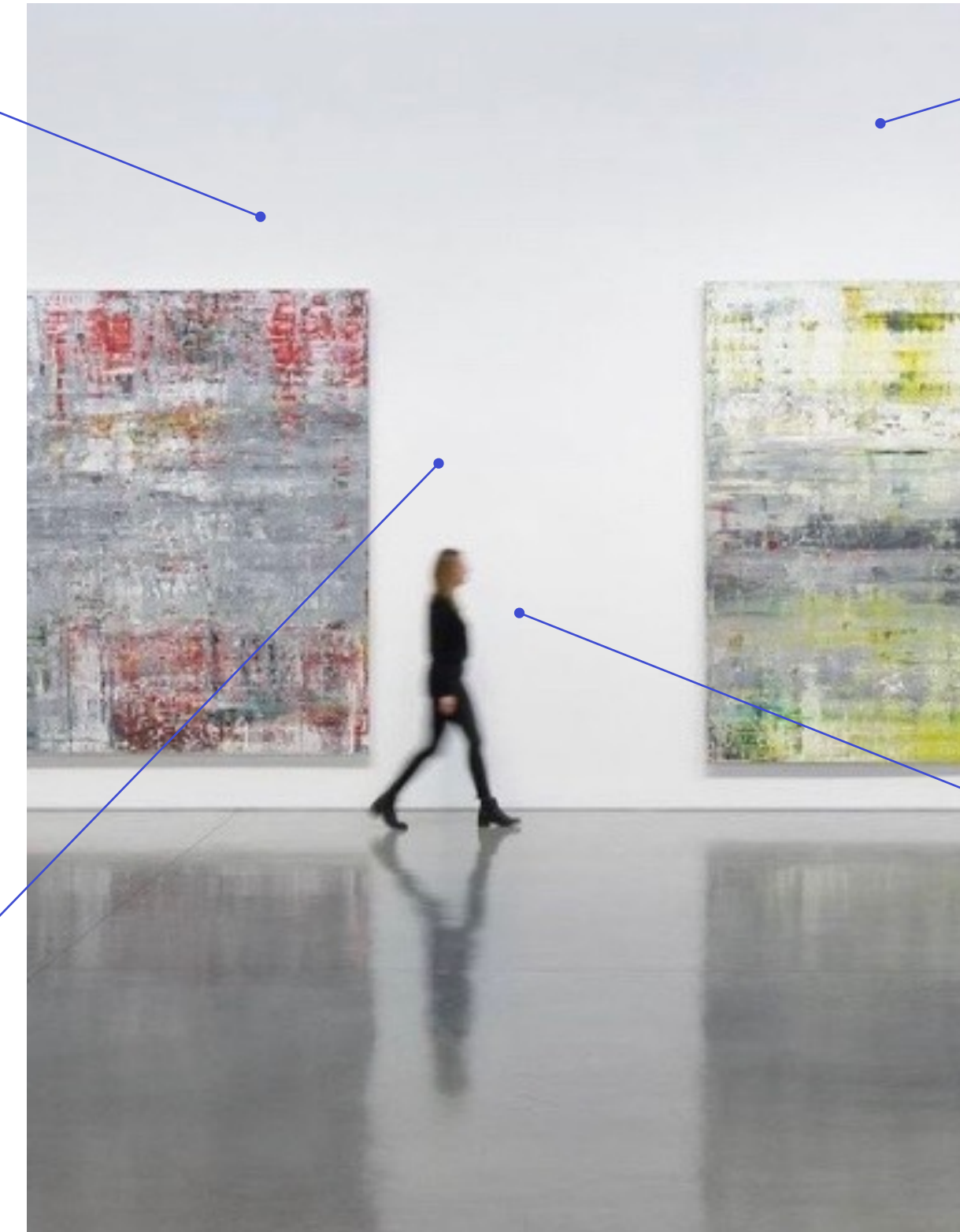
High-quality photos are the foundation of any strong social media presence, so photography is a skill worth working on. Start with our recommendations for taking better Instagram photos.

## Straight edges

Illusion is everything when it comes to making photographs have straight lines. You can achieve this by turning on the grid feature in your phone's camera. For example, if you're taking a photograph of a painting, keep the edges of the painting parallel to the lines in the grid on your phone—it's easier to use it and take a photo with straight lines than to try to straighten them later.

## Add a figure

By featuring people (or animals!) in an art space, you can give the artwork a sense of scale and setting. Visually, this tactic also gives viewers something to relate to by allowing them to imagine themselves in that space.



## Process before posting

Set yourself up for success (and minimize the need for processing) by keeping lines straight, finding the best light, and adjusting the brightness and focus before you snap your photo. Then edit your photos using the Instagram app, or any combination of apps such as Snapseed, Priime, and VSCO. These apps can make your photographs look sharper and more professional in just a few minutes, so take advantage of them.

## Experiment with bursts

The burst feature on your phone is helpful for getting multiple shots, but it's also great for getting an intentionally blurred image of a person moving through a gallery space. This gives the image a sense of movement and an extra something that might get viewers to stop and take a closer look.

## Step 5: Schedule your content

When dealing with social media algorithms, consistency is key and engagement is cumulative. The algorithms on Instagram and Facebook show users the content they're most likely to find engaging. This quality-control mechanism rewards accounts that consistently share content that performs well and penalizes those who don't—which is all the more reason to schedule your content and pay close attention to what your followers respond to most. While there is no minimum or maximum amount of content to share that guarantees success, it is important to ensure you consistently post content that receives good engagement.

“To ensure we are on top of our social calendar, we use Later for pre-scheduling Instagram posts and stories, and Sprout Social for Facebook and Twitter posts.” —Jordan Huelskamp, Artsy's Head of Social Media, on her favorite social scheduling tools



Jack Sheiner, Scene from my Quarantine Part 41, 2020. Image courtesy of the artist and Taymour Grahne Projects.

# How to improve engagement with your content



Vaughn Spann, Big Black Rainbow (Smoky Eyes), 2019. Courtesy of Rubell Museum.

You take a picture and upload it to Instagram. An hour goes by, three likes. Two hours go by, five likes. We've all been there—you think a post is going to be your best yet, and it gets almost no engagement. What is happening?

Your posts aren't getting likes because they are not being seen by all of your followers. When you upload a post to Instagram or Facebook, it gets surfaced to a sampling of your following that engages with your content regularly. The engagement (e.g., comments and likes) from that sample determines whether it will continue to get served to your audience or beyond (e.g., on the Explore page), ultimately determining the total possible engagement. In other words, if users don't immediately engage with your post, the post will not be surfaced to a wider audience.

Try our tips to improve your post engagement.

# Get to know your audience

Think of engagement on social media as a reciprocal relationship—your followers take the time to engage with your content—and it's important for you to engage and get to know them as well. Set aside 30 minutes a week to respond to comments, explore and engage with your followers' content, look at your top performing and lowest performing posts, and see what times your audience is online with Instagram Analytics. Also, regularly engage your audience directly by giving them the opportunity to ask you questions—and answer your questions (e.g., with Story polls).

# Leverage account tags, hashtags, and geotags

Tags are effective search tools that make your account more discoverable for users. Instagram users can follow hashtags, view account tags, and search geotags and hashtags. When used correctly, posts with tags receive more engagement—posts with hashtags receive 12% more engagement from audiences on average. So, what are tags, and how should you use them?

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## Hashtags

**What they are:** A string of characters placed after a pound sign, for example, #TheArtsyVanguard or #ChrisOffili. Hashtags are followable and searchable, making it easy for users to navigate to your profile and content, even if they would never have come across your gallery or artists otherwise.

**How to use them:** Place relevant and specific hashtags to your content at the end of your posts (or in a comment) and use them purposefully and sparingly. Ideally, you want to find a hashtag that has posts, but not too many to ensure you won't get lost. For example, #art has 829 million posts, which means your post will probably get lost. Meanwhile, #caribbeanoilpainting has almost no posts, suggesting there aren't too many followers for it — but #caribbeanart would be a much better hashtag since it has over 1,000 posts.

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## Geotags

**What they are:** Searchable location tags that associate your content with all content tagged with that location.

**How to use them:** Add your location to a photo, story, or video on Instagram. Geotags can be helpful to have for your gallery, and for events such as art fairs because they enable users to view all content tied to that particular location or event, making them more likely to discover your feed.

### Pro tip

If your gallery is new and you're looking to create your own geotag, you can find instructions on how to do so [here](#).

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## Account Tags

**What they are:** Tags to connect someone else's account with your content, such as a post or a video. Account tags are discoverable on both your profile and the tagged person's profile, making it easy for users who browse tagged photos to navigate to your profile and content, even if they would never have come across your gallery or artists otherwise.

**How to use them:** Tag your artists with social media followings when you make a post about them and ask them to repost and tag your gallery in content they share that pertains to you. Also tag companies and brands when you repost their content, or share relevant content that pertains to them — oftentimes, Artsy gallery partners tag us in their posts.

### Pro tip

“Have you heard of blind tagging? Blind tagging is a powerful way to tag relevant accounts in your Instagram Stories — invisibly. You can blind tag up to 10 accounts per Story slide, which gives the tagged accounts the opportunity to repost your Story, but doesn't clog your Story with handles typed out in text. To blind tag, type @accountname as you usually would, and use your finger to drag the name to the edge of the screen until it disappears.”

# Conclusion

In 2020, galleries and collectors were forced to migrate online almost entirely. Now, these digital habits, modes of consumption, and buying options are here to stay. With technology making undeniable impacts on our industry, it's important to invest in your digital marketing and engagement strategies to connect with your audience and introduce your artists and gallery to new collectors – social media is the perfect place to start.

We hope this guide has helped you. For more information on Artsy's gallery partnerships, [click here](#).