

Instagram Toolkit for Galleries

2024

Richard Bosman, detail of *Cellphone 11*, 2021. Courtesy of the artist and Stewart & Stewart.



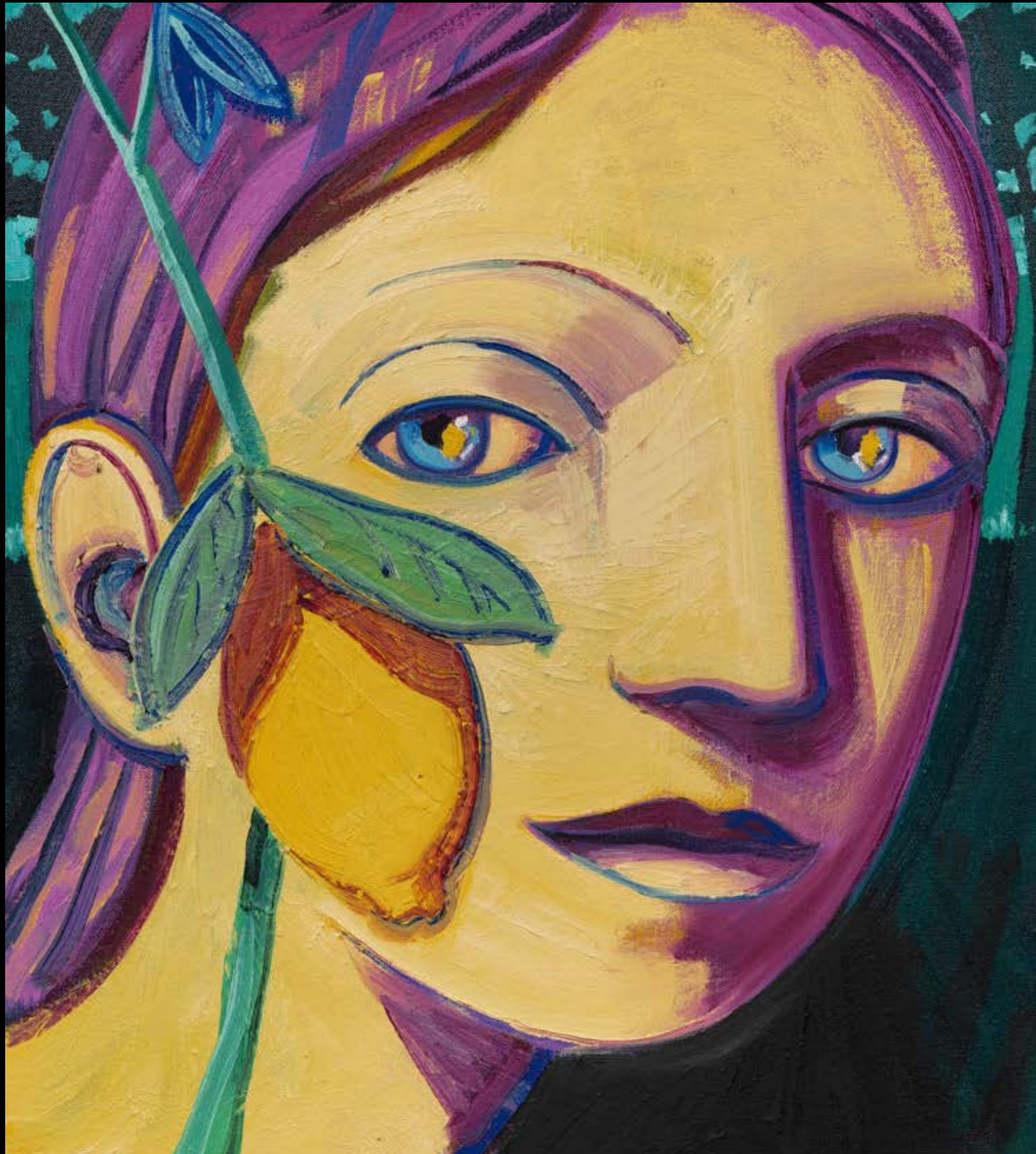
ARTSY

Introduction

With nearly a quarter of the world's population now on Instagram, understanding how to leverage this powerful platform is integral to your gallery's growth and sustainability.

How we collect and sell art has profoundly changed in the last decade, and has further accelerated during the pandemic, which has welcomed more of the art world online. This is particularly important to younger collectors: Some 94% of collectors aged 18 to 36 said that they used Instagram to discover new art, according to Artsy's 2023 Collector Insights Report.

Art galleries use Instagram differently, depending on their goals and bandwidth. This toolkit provides an overview of the best Instagram strategies for art galleries today and takes a detailed look at which content and features will have the most impact.



Carlo D'Anselmi, *Girl With Lemon*, 2021. Courtesy of the artist and Thierry Goldberg Gallery.

Why your gallery should be on Instagram (if it isn't already)

Meet your audience where they are

Visual, interactive social media tools that facilitate e-commerce are the platforms of choice for collectors looking to discover and purchase art. Instagram leads the way by far.

According to Artsy's 2023 Collector Insights Report, Instagram is the top platform for users that engage with social media: 50% of respondents who use social media to discover art say that they use Instagram for this purpose, followed by Facebook, which was selected by just 7%. Galleries that are on Instagram are also viewing it as an important sales tool. Some 32% of galleries surveyed in Artsy's 2023 Industry Trends Report said that it was a growing source of artwork sales.

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 brand awareness for your gallery. It is also a key way to build and retain a loyal customer base.

Social media humanizes the perception of brands by fostering direct interaction with likes, direct messages, comments, shares, and videos. These interactions make customers feel more connected to brands, helping foster a longer-term loyalty than traditional forms of marketing, such as print ads.

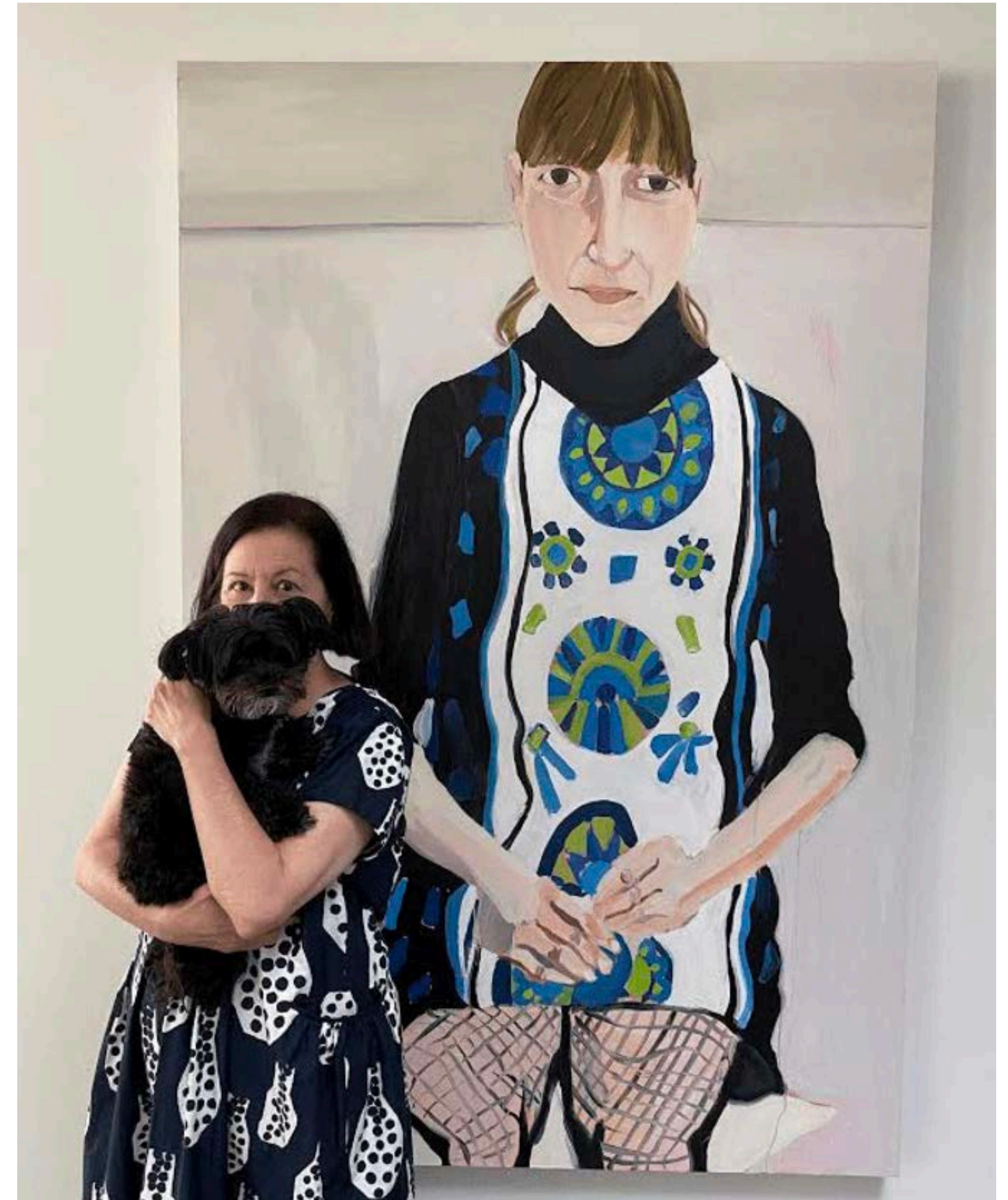
Lower your marketing costs, easily

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, social media is a free marketing tool where you can deliver content that is relevant, creative, and useful to users at little to no cost. (You can also run paid ads on the platform.) By placing a greater focus on social media, you may lower your gallery's overall marketing spend while also forming stronger relationships with collectors.

Some collectors put social media at the center of their process. Pamela and David Hornik use Instagram and Artsy in combination to discover new artists to collect—here's how Pamela described their approach:

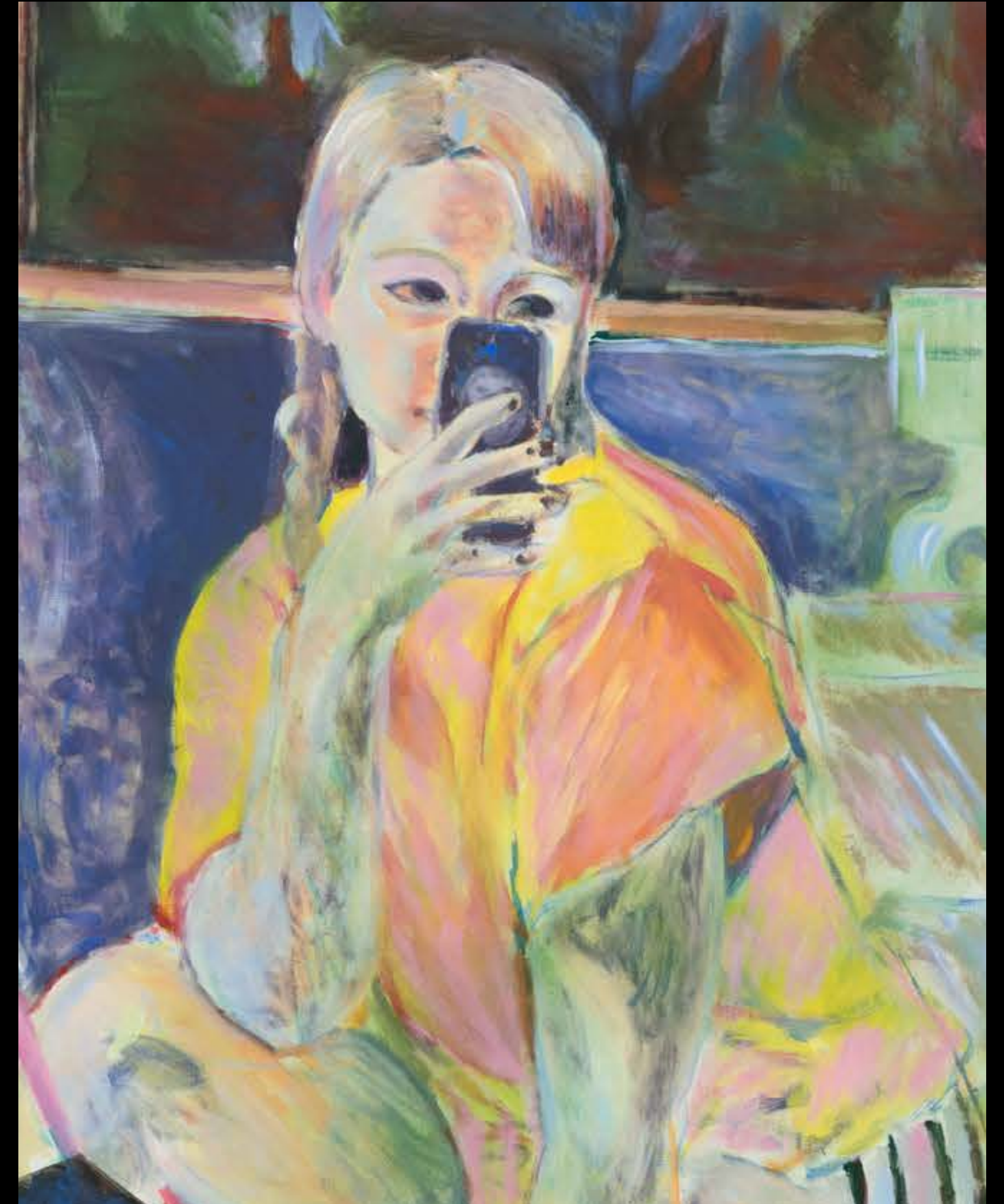
“I'm on Instagram, I see an artist, and I send [their profile] over to David. He looks them up on Artsy and sees which gallery is representing them, and then we contact the gallery. That's what we've been doing for years.”

Pamela Hornik, from
“Artsy Collector Spotlight: Pamela and David Hornik”



Pamela Hornik with Chantal Joffe, *Sally in Fishnets*, 2013. Courtesy of Pamela and David Hornik.

Building an Instagram presence



Duda Bebek, detail of *Den gröna skärmen* / *The Green Screen*, 2021. Courtesy of the artist and Galleri Magnus Karlsson.

Unless you have a large, dedicated social media team, it's better to hold off on less commercial spaces like TikTok, X (formerly known as Twitter), and Facebook. Instead, concentrate on the platform that consistently provides art galleries with the greatest payoffs — Instagram.

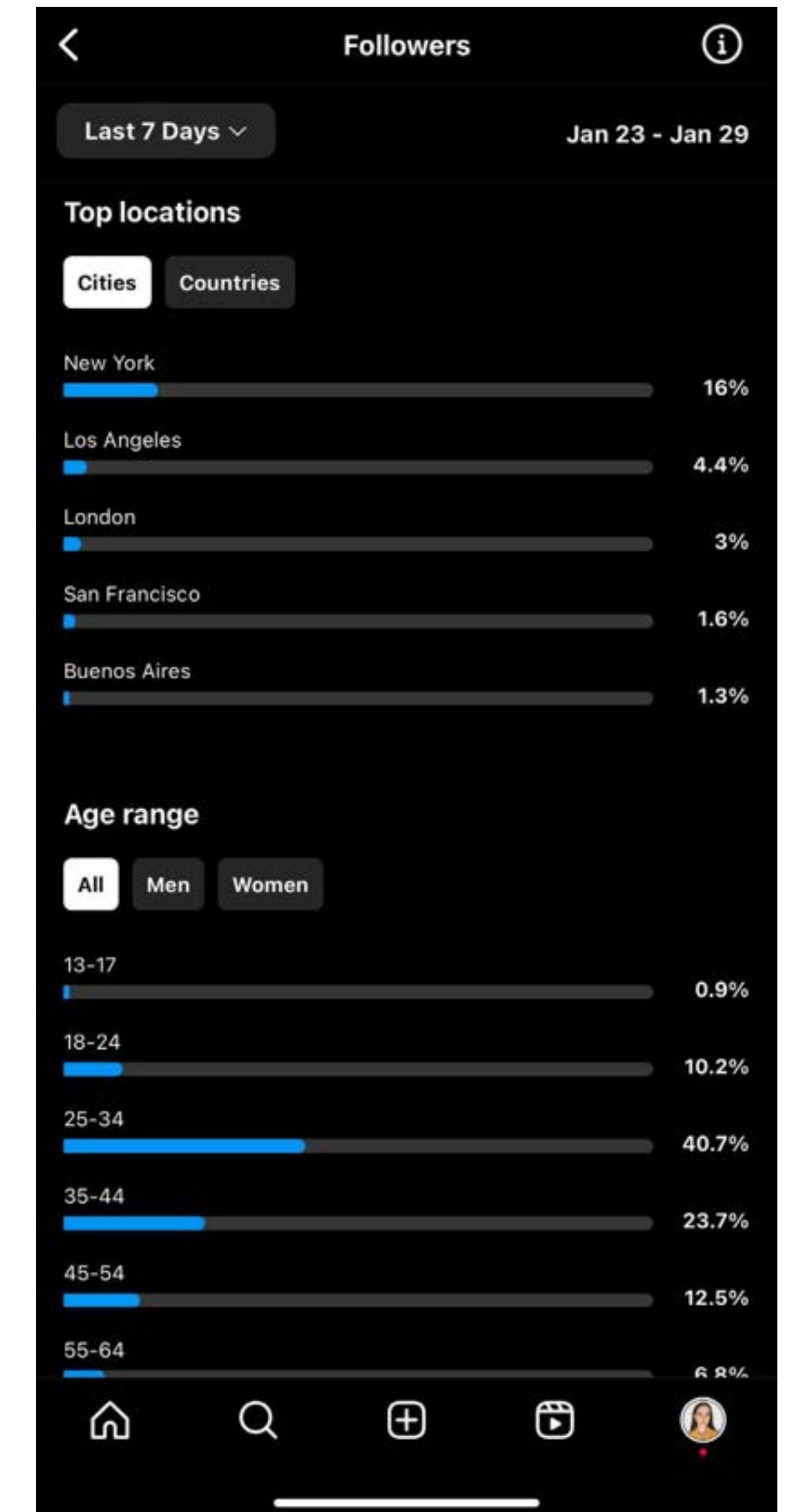
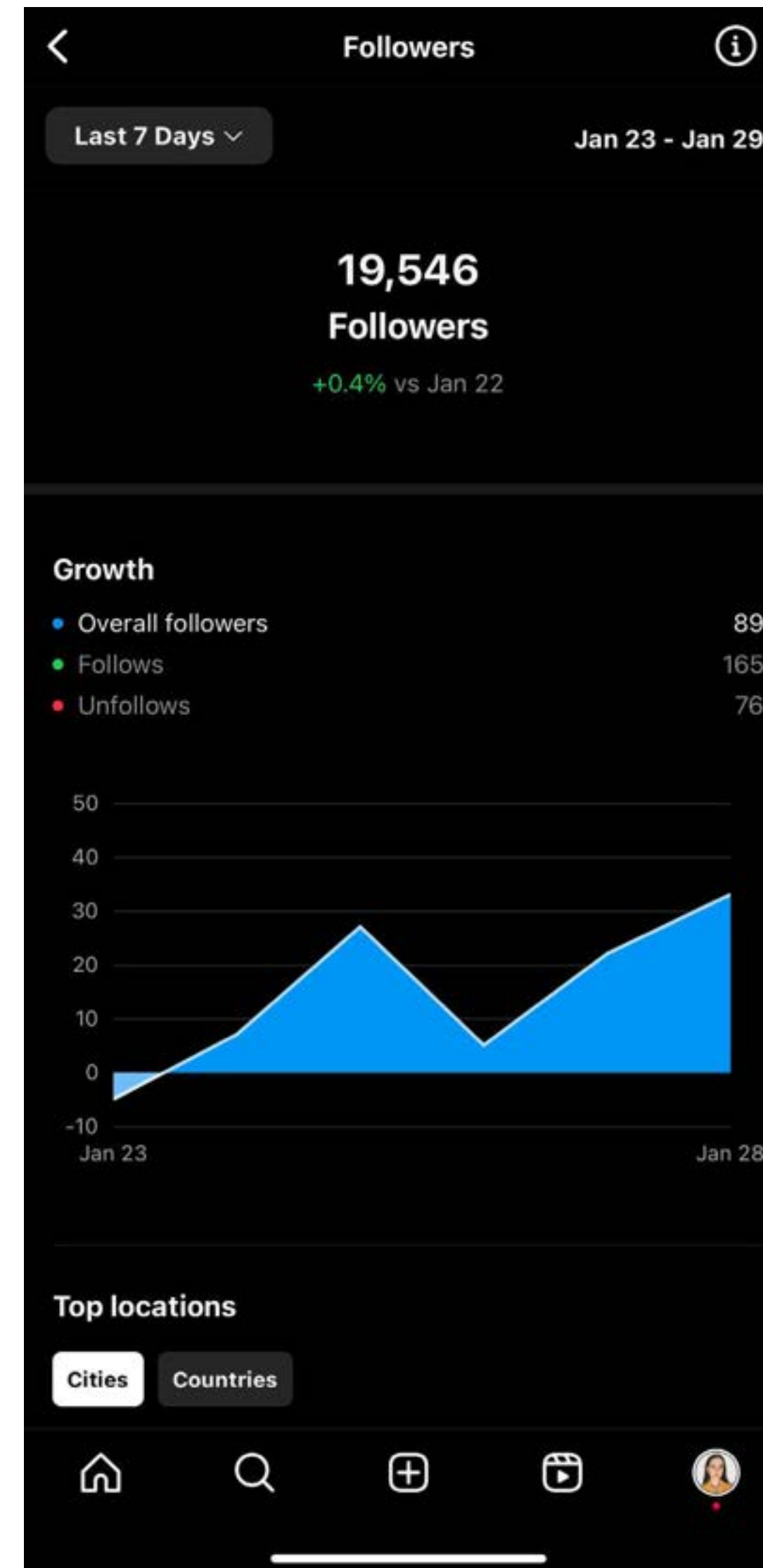
According to both Artsy's Collector Insights and Industry Trends Reports from 2023, collectors and gallerists turn to Instagram the most for discovering artists, galleries, and works.

As Jordan Huelskamp, Artsy's head of social media, explains, "We focus the bulk of our efforts on Instagram, where our key audiences in the art world are most concentrated."

Here's how you can build your gallery's presence on the platform.

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.

Keep reading to see how your gallery can take advantage of an Instagram business profile.



Make it easier for collectors to reach you.

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

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)

Direct collectors to key links and content.

The “Link Sticker” feature for Stories has recently become available to all accounts. Further options to link to your gallery's content are available to those who use a “Link in Bio” service, like Linktree.



Ramonn Vieitez, *Sunday in Recife*, 2021. Courtesy of the artist and The Art Design Project.

How to create great content for your gallery's Instagram

Step 1: Find your gallery persona

To build a strong social media presence, focus on what makes your gallery unique—and figure out how to communicate that.

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.

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 your gallery 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?

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?

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?

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 gallery on your feed, as well as their personal feeds.

Each of your posts should be crafted with your brand persona and audience in mind. Before you post, ask yourself these two questions:

- "Is this post aligned with my brand's voice and values?"
- "Will this post resonate with my audience?"

Step 2: Create a content strategy

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

Cross-promote your 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).

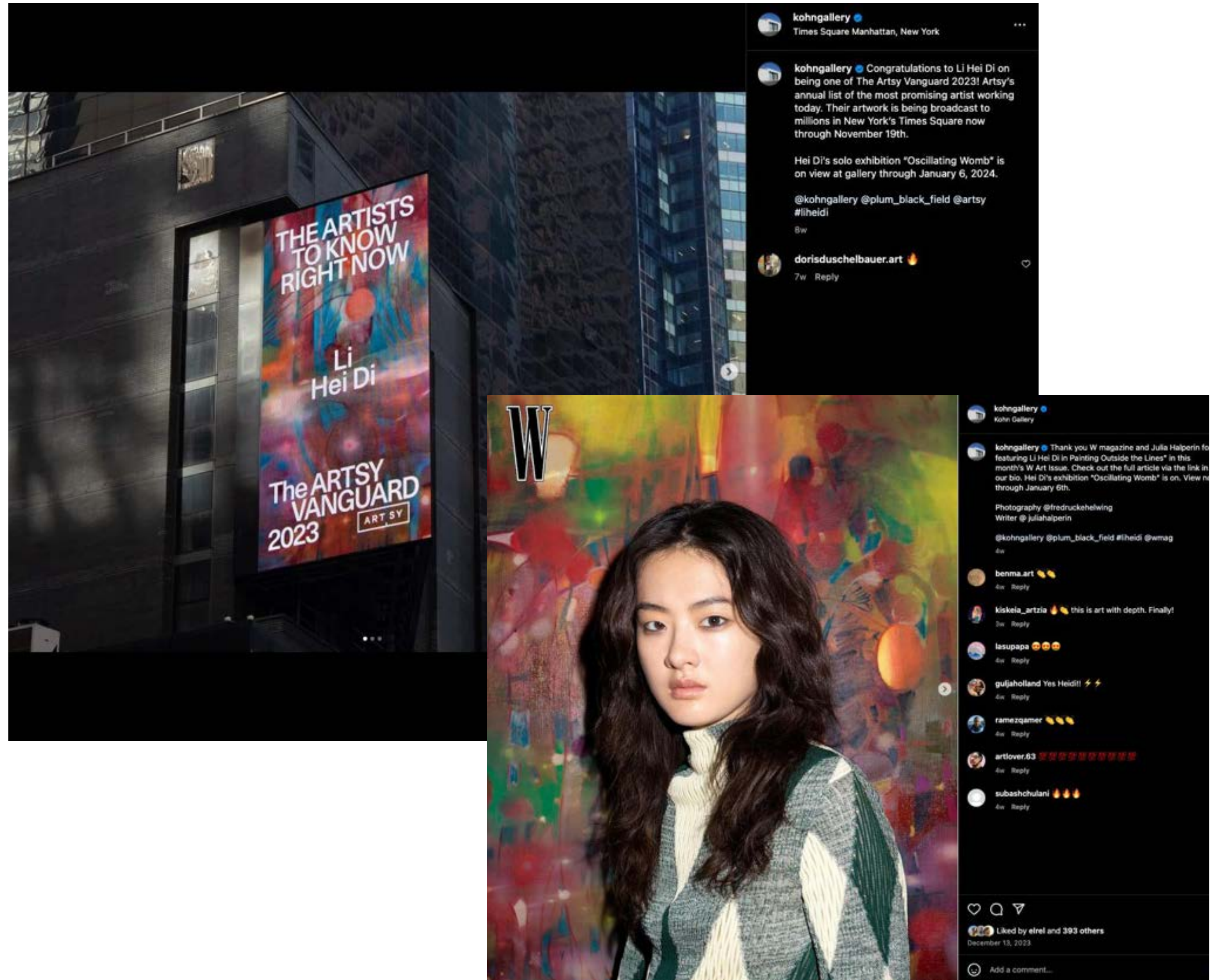
Remember to include links for browsing the exhibition, viewing room, or fair booth directly. Tag your artists and curators, and encourage them to repost.

Pro tip

Services like [Link in 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.

Partner Social Media Spotlight: Kohn Gallery

Kohn Gallery regularly shares news of its artists, such as Artsy Vanguard 2023 artist Li Hei Di, through Instagram. By leveraging the Link in Bio feature, the gallery directs users to its website, Artsy page, and press mentioned in its posts — helping collectors easily learn more about topics that interest them.



Step 3: Experiment with video

Managing an Instagram presence has its challenges. There's only so much time in the day, and the steady stream of product updates means you're constantly needing to learn new features. In recent years, Instagram has added a slew of new tools to help businesses, including Instagram Shopping, Shopping in Reels, and Insights for Reels and Lives.

According to Adam Mosseri, the head of Instagram, 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 maximize engagement by developing more video content for your Instagram channels. 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.

Below, learn more about Instagram's video formats and content ideas to consider.

Instagram Reels

What are Instagram Reels?

Short-form videos up to 60 seconds.

Where are they?

Discoverable on Stories, home feeds, the Explore page, and your profile's Reels tab.

What could galleries use them for?

Behind-the-scenes footage of an artist creating a work; a walk-through of your current show; an artist or curator discussing a show; snippets from panel discussions, etc.

Instagram Story Videos

What are Instagram Story videos?

Short, casual, promotional, and entertaining videos with a variety of editing options including normal video, boomerang, superzoom, rewind, and hands-free.

Where are they?

The Stories feed and by clicking on your profile image.

What could galleries use them for?

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

Instagram Video Feed Posts

What are Instagram video posts?

Short-form videos up to one minute, that are uploaded within a carousel post of other photographs or videos. Beginning in 2023, Instagram changed its product so that all videos are posted as Reels. You can get around this by nestling a video within a carousel post.

Where are they?

Discoverable through your profile page, home 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; and snippets from panel discussions.

Instagram Live

What is Instagram Live?

A livestream (up to 60 minutes) recorded from your mobile device for your followers to tune into in real time. Instagram Lives are easily discoverable and promoted 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 recordings of your Instagram Lives to your main feed, where they'll show up in your followers' home feeds as Reels.

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 share it to your feed.

Best practices for video on Instagram

1

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

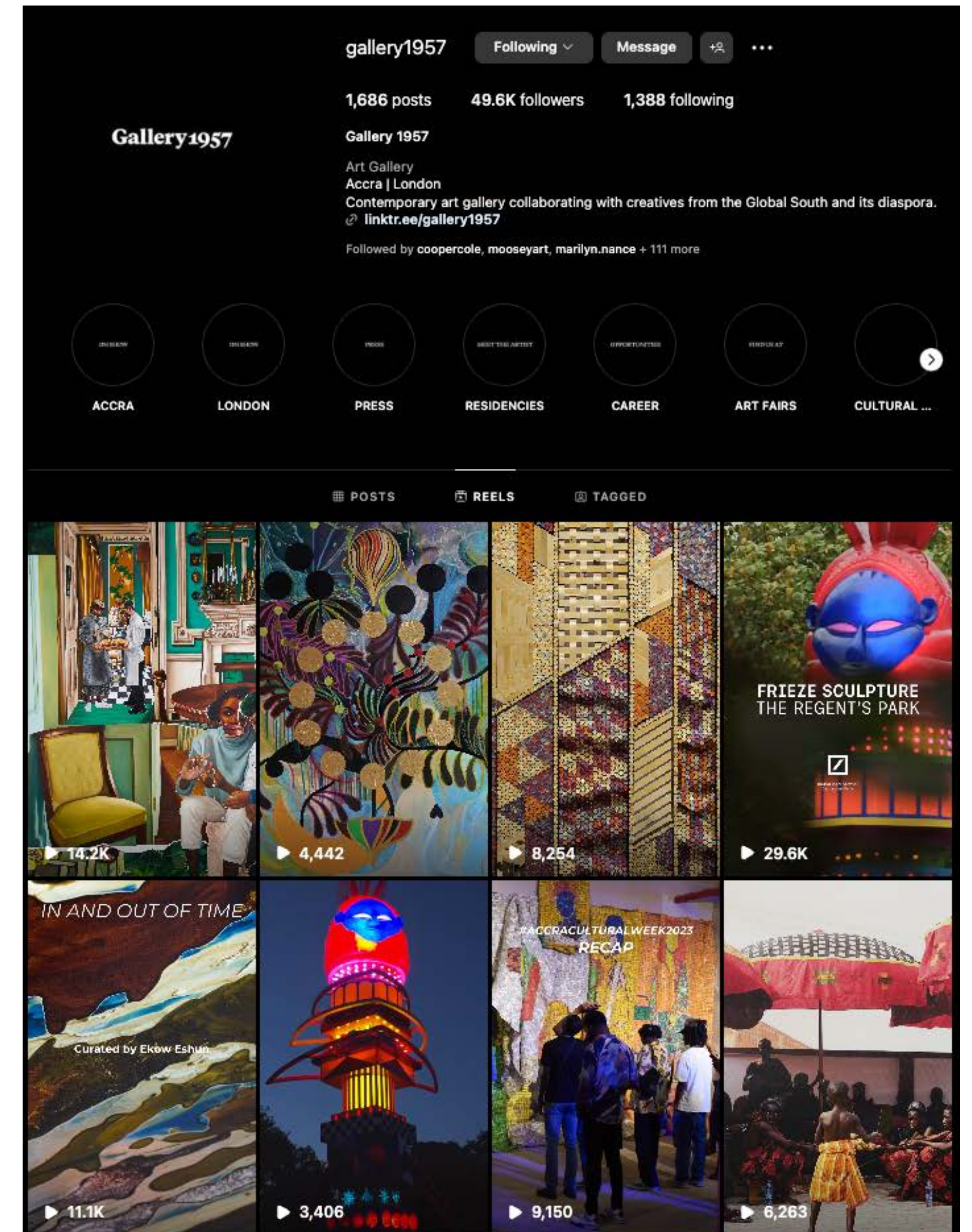
Select a photo that captures the overall message of your video and will make scrolling Instagram users want to stop and look at your content. Also, do your best to hook your audience quickly with the video — the first three seconds are key to grabbing attention.

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.



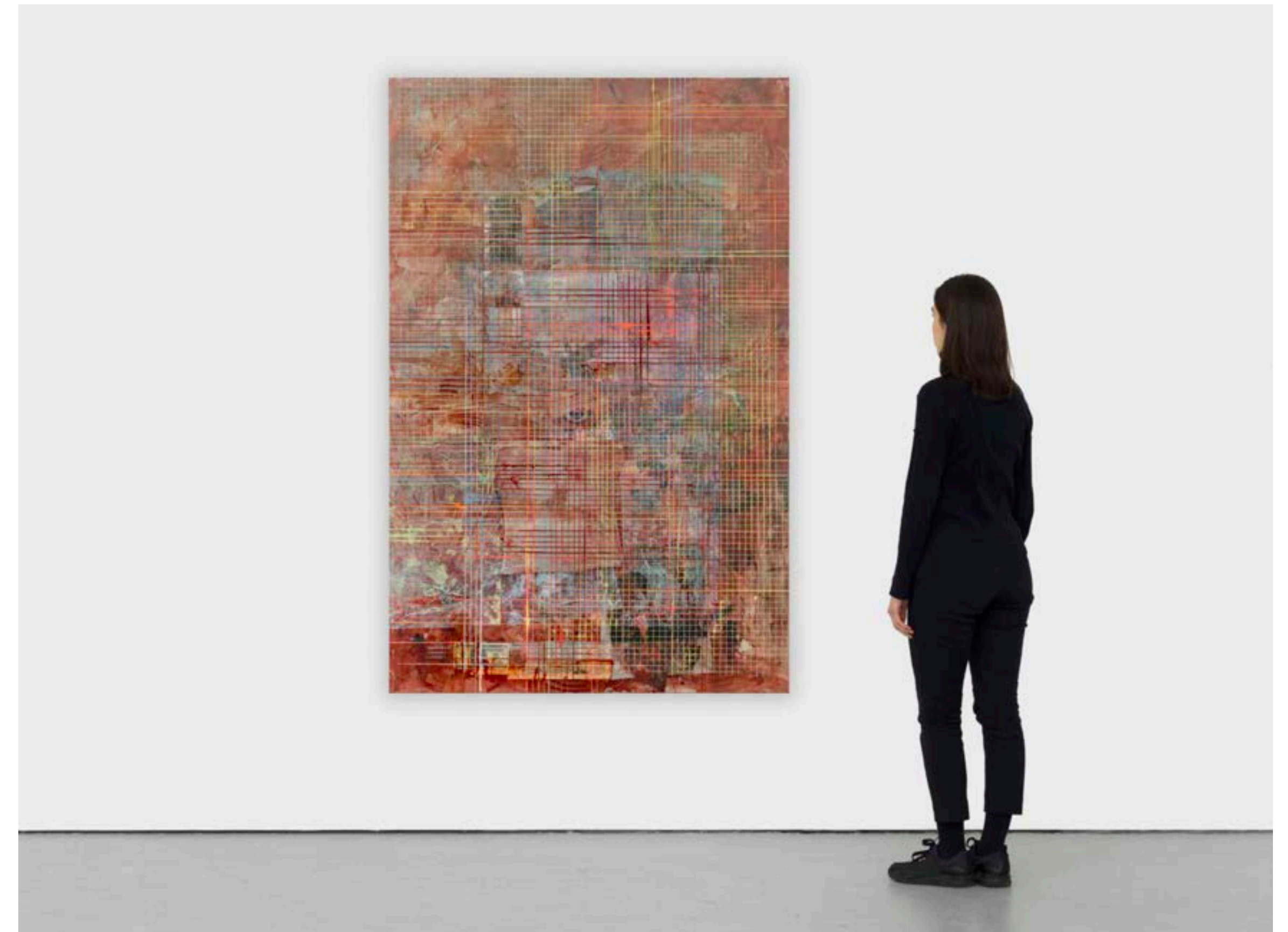
Courtesy of Gallery 1957. Artsy's social media team loves Gallery 1957's bold use of full-bleed artwork images and striking images of its artists at work.

Step 4: Take great photographs

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

There are many image types that work well on Instagram—the most important thing to remember is to use a mix of angles and shot styles to keep your content fresh and dynamic. When shooting your exhibitions, our social media team suggests:

- Wide angle images of the installation, allowing the viewer to get a sense of what it feels like to be in the room
- Centered shots of your artworks installed on a wall (or floor, plinths for three-dimensional works)
- Cropped shots of your artworks, at a range of depths, to capture all of the delighting details
- Angled shots, to show off any framing or special corners of works when relevant
- Shots featuring a human somewhere in the frame, to help viewers understand the scale of the artworks



Mandy El-Sayegh, installation view of *Net-Grid Study (True Stories)*, 2023. Courtesy of the artist and Lehmann Maupin.

Step 5: Schedule your posts

When dealing with social media algorithms, consistency is key. The Instagram algorithm shows users the content they're most likely to find engaging at the best time of day for them. This mechanism rewards accounts that consistently share high-quality content — 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.

That said, don't overthink it. The days of a perfectly aesthetic Instagram feed are over, as users lean into authentic content that looks like it was made by real humans.

Jordan Huelskamp, Artsy's head of social media, uses Later to pre-schedule Instagram posts.



Kathleen Migliore-Newton, *Virtual Travel*, 2023. Courtesy of the artist and Denise Bibro Fine Art.

How to improve engagement



Vaughn Spann, installation view of *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, 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 or as "Suggested Content" in your feed), 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).

Use Instagram 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.

Hashtags

What they are:

A string of characters placed after a pound sign; for example, #TheArtsyVanguard or #ChrisOfili. 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.

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.

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

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 allows the tagged accounts 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

With more collectors discovering art through Instagram than ever before, investing in your gallery's digital strategy will expand your audience, help develop your client pipeline, and introduce your artists to the world.

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

Thank You

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Contact us
partners@artsy.net

Melissa Brown, *3 Times of Day in LA*, 2021. Courtesy of Anat Ebgi.



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