

# ART MARKET MONITOR

## New Online Auction Platform Centered on Emerging Artists Seeks to Address Industry Blindspots

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Nick Farhi, Homes That Morph (2020)  
Courtesy Greenhouse Auctions

Launched in October, Greenhouse Auctions, a new online-only auction platform designed around bolstering access to emerging artists, will hold its inaugural sale on December 2. The hybrid model aims to combine the selectiveness of primary market sales with the accessibility of auction by selling works directly from artists and small to mid-sized dealers.

Developed in just six-months over the course of the pandemic, Greenhouse's founder, Shlomi Rabi, former Christie's vice president and head of the photographs department in New York, conceived of the platform as a way to address disparities in the auction market. The digital platform, Rabi says was

meant as a “hybrid model that leveraged the advantages of the [auction industry], but, on the selling side, exclusively caters to the primary market.” The concept, which Rabi says is centered around “community and transparency,” has entered the scene at a time when disruptive models and hybrid sale formats are proliferating in the post-pandemic market.

Comprising just 17 lots by international artists, the digital platform’s inaugural sale, “Sourdough,” will offer new-to-market works made during the pandemic. Works by newcomers and mid-career artists including Shai Azoulay, Molly A. Greene, T. Elliott Mansa, William Osorio and Tony Vazquez-Figueroa will be on offer at prices between \$8,000-\$12,000. Among the participating dealers in the auction are LnS Gallery in Miami and New York’s Meislin Projects.

While estimates will be available publicly, only final sale totals will be revealed post-sale, with results of individual works remaining private. Each Greenhouse sale will offer a small, curated selection of artworks valued up to around \$20,000— the primary market price entry point. “This is where we think there is a lot of potential for growth,” said Rabi of the affordable pricing threshold.

Price transparency, competitive bidding, and the “cross-pollinating of various artists in a single sale”, are key advantages to the auction process that the model retains, according to Rabi. Yet, the platform’s set-up is also meant to quell speculative buying practices. “Because auction houses offer such anonymity to the buyers and sellers, they are a very fertile ground for speculators,” said Rabi. Inflated auction prices have in some cases proved to be disadvantageous for artist’s with nascent markets; spiked auction prices can pose hurdles for primary dealers in matching prices. Especially for emerging artists Rabi explains, “The one who is really benefitting from it is not the artist or gallery, it’s the person who bought it early.”

“A lot of these artists are not necessarily household names,” said Rabi, “They may not have been at the big auction houses, but its not because they are not at the caliber, its simply because they haven’t necessarily had the break, and this is what the platform is meant to do: its exposure, visibility, empowerment, access,” adds Rabi.

The digital platform touts the appeal of low risk consigning; sellers keep 95% of the hammer price of works sold, while collectors are charged a 20% buyer’s fee.

For collectors, Rabi explains, the platform allows for a direct experience unavailable at larger auction houses. “You know that you’re providing the original talent,” said Rabi, who also serves as a liaison between the buyer and seller during the post-sale process. “At the same time, we do want to hold collectors’ feet to the fire,” said Rabi. In the case of a competitor offering another piece by an emerging artist appearing in a Greenhouse auction sale, Rabi said the question becomes: “Who would you rather support, the original talent or someone who bought the work two years ago?”

The model is also meant to appeal to a new generation of emerging collectors and consignors, some of whom, according to Rabi, are less comfortable with the traditional auction process. In the same vein, certain aspects of the primary market, including buyer waitlists and pre-selling inventory can make the acquisition process for new collectors more competitive. These restrictive practices, Rabi explains, hold less water in today’s marketplace. There is a demand among emerging collectors, for “an open, transparent platform,” said Rabi, “Especially the Gen-Xers, who have got the money, who are very comfortable buying online, and they don’t necessarily want to have to deal with the old school etiquette of buying.”

With a philanthropic feature baked into its model, Greenhouse also appeals to an increasing attention to activism and community support in the arts. A seller’s fee of 5% of the hammer price on sold works will go towards a scholarship benefitting art history students at historically Black colleges and universities in the U.S, administered by the Thurgood Marshall College Fund.

“Its about empowering artists and giving them an additional platform, about providing collectors a greater deal of transparency,” said Rabi. Describing the initiative as “a grassroots effort,” Rabi adds that the sale platform, and its philanthropic feature “pay attention to the next generation of those who will be studying art and selling it— and we need to see a lot more diversity there.”