

TRAVEL AUSTRALIA





Artworks by Nell Pearson, Lucas Golding, Lauren Dunn, Basil Papoutsidis and Ben Jones, courtesy of Sunday Salon.

HOME / VOGUE LIVING / ARTS

# Meet the Australian women reshaping the art world for the next generation

LILITH HARDIE LUPICA

2 NOV 2020

Modernising the Australian art scene is a matter of fighting exclusivity and inaccessibility; because owning art shouldn't be the reserve of a select few.



---

Trading on exclusivity is no longer a viable option, not with closures and cancellations causing the art sector to slump and rethink its approach. New audiences, new tactics and new approaches are needed to revive the industry, and a fresh cohort of Australian businesses are ready to rise to the challenge, armed with just that.

“I think the art industry has traditionally operated using unspoken codes and a system of value based on hierarchies,” Alana Kushnir of Australian-based art advisory subscription service and membership network [Guest Club](#), tells *Vogue Living*. “This can make it an intimidating place for people who don't work within the industry to engage with. There is a lot of ‘mystique’ around appreciating and collecting art which I find intriguing, but understand that it can also be unhelpful for those just starting out their journey.”



Alana Kushnir. Image credit: Justin Ridler. Courtesy of Guest Work Agency.

Periods of uncertainty and upheaval present unique opportunities to change, grow and challenge the status quo in remarkably short time frames and the pressure cooker that was 2020 has been no exception. While many would argue this change, though on the horizon for some time, was long overdue for the art industry, it has, historically, been slow to adapt to the digital present until Covid-19 hit.

Kushnir, founder of art law and curatorial practice [Guest Work Agency](#), sees the “born and based in Melbourne” Guest Club as the bridge between would-be collectors, artists and the gatekeepers of the art world. The rationale is simple: provide the art-inclined but not-yet-confident with a tiered service that caters to all interests and budgets but doesn't rely on exclusivity to breed interest, instead, it fosters a community ready to invest in and support the industry. A model, Kushnir reveals, is “set-up to react to the current climate”.

“I found that many of my close contacts and friends were after ways of engaging with and learning more about art and how the market works, so I set about developing a membership platform that would address the need to provide more transparency and advice to this emerging cohort,” Kushnir explains of the subscription platform which starts at AU\$55 per quarter for the ‘Art Lover’ and rises to AU\$2750 for the ‘Art Collector’. “We aim to foster the next generation of art enthusiasts through a range of bespoke services including exclusive access to events with leading Australian and international galleries, artists, art fairs, curators and experts.”

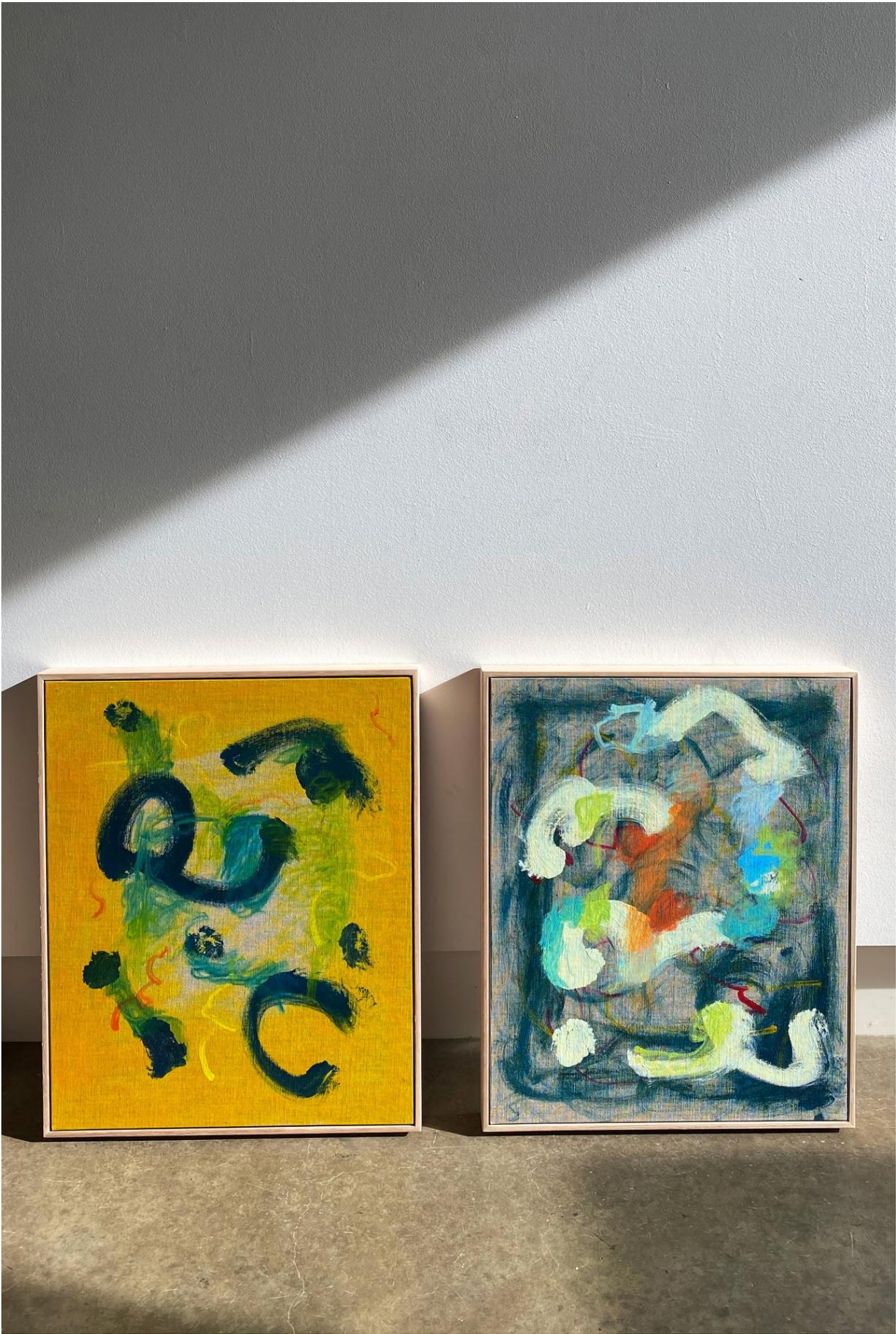


Image credit: Martin Behrman. Artist Oliver Beer and Guest Work Agency's Anais Lellouche at 'OMA', a solo exhibition by Oliver Beer. Artwork: Oliver Beer, 'Recomposition (Girl with a Mandolin)', 2020.

A smart, forward-thinking move on Kushnir's part as the tiered approach is designed to grow with the collector and allows for personalised, responsive approaches to education and investment. A seemingly winning combination Kushnir shares, noting that the platform's membership base "has grown by 180 per cent since March, when lockdowns started, and now includes members all around Australia". Consider that Kushnir is amassing a captive audience of would-be collectors who can access Guest Club's virtual events, the most successful of which in the last six months saw members treated to a 'tour' of the world's great public art parks and spaces, and now, amidst gallery closures, has legion of members giving Guest Club their precious and profitable time but who are also now primed to spend.

These stats are impressive given global art sector sales were down 36 per cent in the first half of 2020 according to Art Basel and UBS's recent mid-year market report. Australia wasn't immune to the slump either, witnessing its slowest trade in 22 years, with just \$25 million worth of art sold at auction as of July 2020, almost half the gross sales fetched compared to the same date last year.

“Most of our new members come in to cultivate their appreciation and knowledge, before scaling up to the upper levels where we can provide more strategic advice on buying and collecting. It’s about providing the structure to grow with our members, and being honest and open about what buying art entails,” Kushnir explains, noting the platform also provides a sense of escape in the midst of 2020 and into 2021.



'El Guapo's Birthday' (2020) and 'Fiesta and Flamenco' (2020) by Lucas Golding. Courtesy of Sunday Salon.

Lily Mora of [Sunday Salon](#), a platform that connects budding collectors with Australian artists and a curation of affordable artwork, noticed the same opportunities going to waste when she returned to Melbourne after a stint in London at the beginning of 2020. While the inception of Sunday Salon occurred pre-COVID, Moira notes it was in the city's first lockdown that she was able to give the platform her "full attention and get it off the ground".

"I had a sense from talking to local artists that there was an appetite for something a bit different to the traditional gallery model," Mora tells *Vogue Living*. "I also felt that there was an abundance of brilliant work being produced in this country at the more accessible end of the pricing scale but that most people didn't know where to find it."

Artists Elyss McCleary, Wes Waddell, Lauren Dunn and Bryce Anderson are just some of the names that can be found via Sunday Salon, which aims to rotate a "small group of exciting early and mid-career artists", with prices ranging from AU\$200-\$4000 though the majority of works are available for less than \$1000.

"Owning and enjoying artwork in your home shouldn't be something that is only available to a select few," Mora continues. "Making the art world more accessible allows us to better support our artist community. It can be difficult for artists in the early stages of their career to make a living from selling their art which is why so many give up and pursue other careers. By making the art-buying process more accessible, we are creating more opportunity for emerging artists to sell their work."

Both Mora and Kushnir point out just how important accessing new ways of the art world are to the industry and its artists, especially in a year like 2020. But these new formats aren't designed to step in and replace the existing structures or make facets of the industry redundant, only to demystify and complement what already exists.



'Bloom with Blue Stripes' (2020) by Bryce Anderson. Courtesy of Sunday Salon.

“There is so much that art can offer us, especially in times like these where we are all increasingly prone to mental health issues (as well as the physical implications of Covid-19 of course). Art allows us to explore, to learn, to question and to dream,” says Kushnir. “If the experiences of engaging with art, and buying art, remain a niche opportunity designed for the privileged few, art will remain under-appreciated and we all lose out. The more pathways we create for people to access, learn, appreciate and cultivate knowledge, the more sustainable the future of the art world will be.”

Echoing Kushnir’s sentiments, Mora believes that the new accessibility of art will only bolster the current framework and lay foundations for the future: “Covid-19 has perhaps accelerated digital initiatives for a lot of galleries in the commercial sector. Ultimately this is creating greater access to a wider range of artists both locally and internationally. There is great opportunity in this for collectors but also for emerging artists. Accessing art digitally doesn’t replace the in-person experience, but it does create greater opportunity for discovery.”

It also doesn’t escape us that, at least in Australia, the people at the forefront of driving this change are women. “Perhaps women are more familiar with facing barriers to entry and that perhaps inspires a desire to drive change,” Mora posits. Kushnir, a mother of two, admits to feeling like a she “never ‘fit’ well within the prefabricated boxes of ‘the lawyer’, or ‘the art curator’, and that for her the question of accessibility isn’t just about virtual exhibitions but a necessity for the broader industry as a whole if she is to survive within it.

“I’m ‘doing my own thing’ precisely because I have felt that the art industry, and the law industry too for that matter, is not comfortable with a person that can wear multiple hats, and (excuse the pun) can wear them well,” Kushnir explains. “It’s only very recently, probably since having my children actually, that I’ve had the confidence to say, ‘I can do many different things well, and that’s a positive, not a negative’. Perhaps that’s why I, as a woman, am trying to make the art world more accessible, because I’ve never really felt truly accepted by it either.

Accepted or not, both Guest Club and Sunday Salon are proving that the need to shift thinking and provide audiences with unconventional and modern ways to interact with and consume art was long overdue.