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It Was Their Big Debut. Then a Pandemic Hit.

Artists, actors, dancers and authors search for a silver lining as openings are disrupted by the virus outbreak.

By Max Lakin

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Most of New York’s culture system — and indeed the country’s — shut down all at once last week. The impact of indefinite closures to the public or by-appointment hours won’t be fully understood for a while, nor will it be uniform. Certainly there’s less at stake in the Donald Judd show at David Zwirner being put on ice, but for young and emerging artists whose openings were scheduled this week, some of which represented large scale debuts in their field, the personal disruption can feel profound.

For a photographer, ‘Blessings to it, too.’

Across town, the photographer Ruben Natal-San Miguel sat alone inside Postmasters gallery in Tribeca on Saturday, before it closed. He had just finished installing his solo show, “Women R Beautiful,” 50 lushly colored portraits of New Yorkers, the bulk of which were made last year. It’s his response to Gary Winogrand’s “Women Are Beautiful” series, expanding its narrow view of race and sexuality. By contrast, Mr. Natal-San Miguel’s portraits comprise an ebullient spectrum of race, age, and gender identification. His humanistic approach extends to presentation; the images are dye sublimation prints on aluminum hung without glass, expressly, he said, so viewers could feel closer to his subjects, a choice that now most people won’t experience.



"I just finished the show and this happens and I'm like, damn," said Ruben Natal-San Miguel. From left, "Carlos (Very Bad Husband)," "Iron Clad Look," "Beauty Make Up Check" and "Jennifer (Unlock The Vixen)," all from 2019. Michael George for The New York Times

Mr. Natal-San Miguel said he plans to find creative ways of presenting his exhibition virtually, suggesting video tours and discussions via social media. "Most galleries and artists are processing all this now. Everyone is looking for that connection."

The show was conceived after the death of Mr. Natal-San Miguel's mother, and assembling it was an act of catharsis. "I had to recover emotionally," he said. "All my energy went into it. And I just finished the show and this happens and I'm like, damn. Friday I was really sad. I allowed myself a couple hours. OK, I'm allowed to feel sorry, yes I worked very hard on this for four months and this happened, but there's blessings to it too. Talking about this right now is a blessing."