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Arts Power 50: The Changemakers Shaping the Art World in 2019

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The art industry changes fast. Spurred on by artists who are bringing forward new ideas and radical aesthetics into the discourse, this is an industry where those who promote, represent, exhibit, sell, critique and generally support art have to stay nimble. For this reason, Observer takes a moment each year to consider the power players impacting the arts. This industry is a complicated ecosystem, but we look to the changemakers both behind the scenes and in the spotlight to see who is building the future zeitgeist.

Here, in our second edition of this list, we bring you a group of individuals each working to strengthen the impact, reach, social responsibility or financial stability of a field that is seemingly in a constant state of flux. These are the people you'll be talking about this year. They are artists and curators, museum directors and gallery owners, auctioneers and government officials, creative thinkers and truly hard workers. Each has been building something new in 2019, from reimagining the most prestigious art fairs to establishing a new norm for how artists are paid. The Arts Power 50 is Observer's list of the people who are taking action to bring the art world into a new paradigm.

Canada Gallery: Sarah Braman, Suzanne Butler, Phil Grauer and Wallace Whitney



Sarah Braman, Suzanne Butler, Wallace Whitney, Phil Grauer. Courtesy Canada Gallery

Established in 1999 by artists Sarah Braman, Suzanne Butler, Phil Grauer and Wallace Whitney, Canada Gallery was, as they told Observer, “born out of a kind of necessity.”

“This was the late 1990s,” they said in an email. “So we just banded together to do it ourselves.”

Twenty years later, that has proven a successful business model. Their roster has grown to encompass close to 30 artists, including Katherine Bradford, Katherine Bernhardt and Marc Hundley. The four put their good fortune and ability to stay in business in a sometimes-volatile arts market down to collaboration (“As it turns out, sharing responsibilities and making decisions by committee has helped broaden our influences”) and a certain flexibility.

“Nearly twenty years ago, we moved from Tribeca to Chinatown after the destruction of the World Trade Center. Now we are moving back to Tribeca, forced out of our Broome Street home by Marriott, who bought the building so they could replace it with a ‘lifestyle hotel.’ We keep moving as the city changes around us. Hopefully the fourth time will be the charm,” they said.

More and more galleries are cropping up in Tribeca, it’s true, but once Canada announced the move, the neighborhood’s fate as the next gallery hub seemed solidified.

–J.H.