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TITLE OF ASSIGNMENT – An Assessment of the Operations of Trinidad's Art Galleries in the Time of the Covid-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT:

This research paper intends to identify and analyse the solutions that Trinidadian art galleries came up with to keep their businesses going in light of the restrictions imposed due to the spread of the Covid-19 virus . The case study asks: how have Trinidadian art galleries' operations evolved in light of the Covid-19 Pandemic? Data collected from questionnaires given to multiple galleries in Port Of Spain was collected and compared to find out what measures were taken by art galleries, particularly involving digital platforms, to operate during public restrictions, assess how effective these methods were and determine the possibilities of these being implemented in a post-covid world. The study's main findings were that an increased online presence and a reliance on social media platforms and their various features allowed these establishments to provide access to an alternative version of the gallery experience, however there was overall hesitation by the business operators towards implementing these measures long term.

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INTRODUCTION

Several local visual artists turn to art galleries as a means of exposure to the art community and the general public. For many artists, art galleries are more than just a place to showcase their creative endeavours. Many artists sell their work and gain new clients through these gallery shows, and have social media platforms that supplement their work both in and out of galleries. The galleries themselves, however, often have limited social media presence and use digital platforms as a secondary form of interaction.

With the onset of public restrictions and temporary closing of many different business sectors due to the Covid-19 pandemic, art galleries were amongst those businesses forced to close. It meant the galleries were not able to have people come into their physical spaces for the foreseeable future. No exhibitions or shows meant many artists had lost a means to showcase their work and obtain new clients, commissions, or art sales.

As time went on, some galleries began to adapt to this new way of life with all its precautions and rules. In order for their business to continue providing services for both artists and the public, gallery owners had to find creative and new ways to function. The main means of interacting with clients and the public had to pivot from physical to digital as it was the only choice.

Rationale:

Documentation of the Covid-19 pandemic has been made easier due to the technology of the modern world. Studies of the effects of this virus and how it ripples through every sphere of our lives are being conducted as the pandemic goes on. One aspect highlighted in the earlier stages of discussion was the repercussions of the virus on the art community. While the focus is often on the plights of larger art hubs such as New York and London, this paper intends to add the perspective of the Trinidadian art community's innovations to the overall research

into the fallout from the spread of this virus. It will document the arc of Trinidadian art galleries changing throughout the first year or two of the pandemic.

Theoretical Framework:

The theoretical framework of this paper involves the concept of pivoting to alternative forms of operation outside of the 'usual' running of these businesses. It will also seek to determine if any of these solutions can continue to be implemented in a post Covid-19 world.

Parameters:

This study will focus on several art galleries located around the capital city of Port Of Spain as it is the area most densely populated with art institutions. Data will be gathered from Horizon's art gallery, Arnim's art gallery and the Y art gallery to gain a relevant perspective on the local art world's responses to the methods of continuing operations.

Research question:

How have Trinidadian art galleries' operations evolved in light of the Covid-19 Pandemic?

Objectives:

- >To find out what measures were taken by art galleries, particularly involving digital platforms, to operate during public restrictions.
- >Assess how effective these measures were in terms of public engagement with these methods and pros and cons to a mainly online presence.
- >Determine if these methods can continue in a post-covid world/be the next step of evolution of galleries in Trinidad.

Thesis Statement:

This paper argues that the continuation of operations of Trinidadian art galleries during the pandemic relied heavily on digital platforms and these technologies can be the foundation for a possible future for the gallery industry.

Methodology:

The methodology of this research will take the form of a case study. A case study refers to the process of researching a particular person, group or situation over time, according to the Oxford dictionary. In this instance, the situation being researched is the sequence of modes of operation of various art galleries during the ongoing pandemic.

A case study allows information to be collected in real time, as it looks at events over a period of time. The rules and regulations have changed significantly over the course of this pandemic, and a case study takes the passage of time into account with data collection.

This method of research enables experiences from people directly involved to be turned into data that can be compiled and studied. It also creates in-depth qualitative information, granting other researchers the option to conduct related research.

Data Collection Method:

>Questionnaires conducted with gallery owners/ operators about the running of their business before the pandemic, ways they adapted and the responses to these methods and new formats.

>Data will be collected and analysed to determine the level of success of the methods in comparison to the pre Covid-19 times.

Chapter Outline:

CHAPTER 1:

- Examining art galleries around the world, with reference to art hubs, such as New York and London. Explore the issues they faced and solutions they came up with to continue operations.
- Establish what the Trinidadian art scene entails.
- Touch on the reliance on analog methods of experiencing art in the Trinidadian art scene.

CHAPTER 2:

- The concept of pivoting during the pandemic.
- Define pivoting from a business standpoint. What it requires and its importance.
- Pivoting to a more online focused world: ‘crisis breeds opportunity’
- How pivoting affects all related parties in the art gallery industry locally (the artists, the gallery owners, the public)

CHAPTER 3:

- Analysing the data collected from questionnaires sent to the local art gallery owners.
- Discuss similarities, differences in mindsets, the reactions to the changes and the possibilities for the changes to be long lasting.
- Discuss possibilities for the digital realm to be incorporated with the physical as a smaller art hub.

CHAPTER 4:

- Conclusion of ideas

CHAPTER 1: The effect of the pandemic on the art world

During the Covid-19 pandemic, global operations in all spheres of life have been changed. It will likely remain this way for the foreseeable future. Like with many events before, the human race has adapted. We have found ways to continue to live, work and socialise in this ‘new normal.’ Economically, businesses have found innovative ways to adapt to these parameters and restrictions to minimise the risks to the health of their workers and their customers.

In November of 2020, the International Council of Museums estimated that across the globe, 6.1 percent of museums globally seemed to be closed permanently due to the pandemic (Ings, 2021). Art hubs such as New York have a wide range of galleries, exhibiting a wide range of artforms and curating shows to highlight talented artists year-round. When the spread of the Covid-19 virus turned into a pandemic in March of 2020, many gallery staff weren’t expecting to be at home for an extended period of time, and opted to just close until things were settled. As time went on, and stores stayed closed and “galleries were stuck with shuttered spaces for which they still had to pay rent, which can account for as much as 40 percent of New York galleries’ expenses, and channels for selling art beyond conventional means were not clear” (Boucher, 2021). As a business, the galleries had to find ways to continue to generate revenue and pay their employees during this time of crisis.

The story is very similar when looking at other art hubs such as London and Italy. In 2020, they believed that things would be back to normal in a short time, and were happy to do their part to stop the spread of the virus. When things did not get better, they began to change tactics and look into alternative ways to run their businesses. There was no one-size-fits-all solution and nobody to turn to for the answers. No business was prepared to function during a global crisis like this one. Different galleries catered to providing different experiences for

their audiences, and they all came up with their own unique ways to adapt to the new way of living and operating.

One solution included the creation of virtual reality exhibitions in museums that could be used with the technology of virtual reality (VR) headsets. The Victoria and Albert Museum in England used this software to create an immersive virtual reality version of Wonderland as part of the “Alice: Curiouser and Curiouser” exhibition in summer 2020. The experience could be had in the museum or could be accessed through digital platforms for anyone with access to the headsets. It allowed the viewer to be immersed in a whole new way with the well known tale of Lewis Carol’s works.

The Petzel gallery in New York invested in a van specifically to take work from gallery artists’ studios to have private client viewings in the gallery when they couldn’t afford or rely on third party driving service to collect the pieces from around the city.

In Utah, the Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art collaborated with a local real estate company to use their equipment to create a virtual tour of their exhibits.

While the breadth of the art scene in Trinidad is not as expansive as that of New York or London, art galleries in Trinidad relied heavily on in-person interactions and foot traffic. In addition to being a space to showcase art, these spaces also operated as framing studios and art supply stores. Many are located in the capital city of Port Of Spain, drawing many creatives and art enthusiasts to the city. Due to the location of these galleries in the capital city, a type of cultural art hub was formed.

People used these events to network and artists gained new clients through these gallery shows, particularly opening night ceremonies. This was a heavily social affair. According to Lisa Leid, manager of Horizons Art Gallery in an interview with a local newspaper, “...we would have a large amount of people with eats and drinks but we couldn’t really have that with masks and social distancing...”(De Souza, 2021). An art gallery was seen as a place for

making connections and having discussions about the art and the artist's motivations or thought processes. The gallery provided an atmosphere that seemed optimised for appreciating art. It allowed people to focus on the pieces and open the floor up for conversation.

The galleries would showcase new talent through their group shows and open calls. They would also exhibit artists who contributed to the cultural art history of Trinidad such as Leroy Clark and Sybil Atteck. Museums and galleries were constantly exhibiting talent, both new and old. They functioned as cultural spaces to educate the public about our rich history and brought art from a wide range of perspectives to the public.

When businesses were allowed to reopen in some capacity, art galleries could not operate the way they used to. Changes needed to be implemented to keep the businesses running. Perhaps in the process of facilitating business operations during this pandemic, these innovations can shed some light on a new future for the local art community. A future that allows galleries to survive in an increasingly digital world.

CHAPTER 2 :The ability to pivot a business

Finding alternatives and adapting to survive in a new future means reassessing priorities in business. The invention of the internet facilitated a massive change in the way business was conducted. Many companies before the Covid-19 pandemic were exploring the digital realm when it came to conducting their business transactions and communication. You could book your appointments online, buy movie tickets, pay bills or have clothes delivered right to your door. The store was available from the comfort of your own home. Creating websites for products for your business became just as important as having a physical store. This helped level the playing field between large and small businesses and opened a store's goods and services up to anyone with an internet connection globally.

Social media has further diversified the business market and contributed to the rise of online transactions. You can be recommended a new brand or product at any point in time, without you seeking it out specifically. Companies advertise their goods and services on social media and some businesses operate completely online. They do not have any physical location for a storefront.

The rise of e-commerce has changed our understanding of business and it will continue to evolve as technology advances. It has shifted our priorities when it comes to conducting business. To keep up with these changing demands from their markets, many businesses will pivot.

Pivoting, according to a Forbes article, involves realising the current services no longer meet the needs of the consumer and changing the direction of the business to survive in the market (Agrawal, 2020). It is often done when a company notices that they have plateaued in sales or certain aspects of their business get significantly more attention than others. When this is noticed, a company may feel the need to reevaluate what they prioritise in their business. A pivot in business can also include “changing your target market, adopting a different technology for your platform, or having one aspect of an MVP (Minimal Viable Product) become the exact product you were trying to develop originally” (Phua, 2021). The need to pivot often occurs naturally as a business progresses and the customers’ needs change. Over time, the market demands change, and a company can either evolve to cater to these changing needs, or remain the same and risk losing out on business transactions.

The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic brought most business sectors to a halt outside of the natural ebb and flow of customer interest. The demand for the services provided was still present, but restrictions imposed to help curb the health risks of the virus compromised the ability of many businesses to provide any services. Company owners and managers had to pivot in the ways they provided their goods and services. An example of this would be the

closing of in-house dining in restaurants. The pivot came in the delivery systems for food; “...many quick-service restaurants (QSRs) and casual-dining establishments rapidly pivoted to off-premise channels—primarily drive-through, delivery, and takeout....”(Haas et al, 2020). Locally, restaurant owners created curbside pickup systems for customers to call in and wait in their cars for their food, and expanded the restaurant’s delivery zones. They pivoted to continue to supply their customers with their product.

In regards to art gallery establishments, being physically present in the space is regarded as a crucial component to the experience. In a pre-covid-19 world, the works of artists of varying disciplines were displayed primarily in galleries. An examination by Pelowski et al (2017) identified three groups of factors that influenced the museum/gallery experience. These groups were [1] features of the artwork being perceived, such as scale and textures, as well as the acceptance of the object being viewed as ‘art’, [2] characteristics of the viewer themselves, their age, wealth and motivations and how these individual differences contributed to the overall composition of the group viewing the piece, and [3] the context of the space itself, how the piece is framed, lit, labelled and the viewing distance of the piece. These factors that extended outside of the artwork itself, contributed to the overall quality of the viewing experience and therefore influenced the value that a viewer put on a piece of work.

Many people share the belief that online viewing of artwork hinders the ability of the viewer to appreciate the art. They believe that seeing it in a real life setting is the true way to consume art. Walter Benjamin published an essay entitled “Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” in 1935, and concluded that there is, for lack of a better term, an ‘aura’ around seeing art in person that could not be replicated through a picture (Benjamin, 1935). Benjamin believed that a work of art, once created, takes up a unique presence, and that space cannot be occupied by another, no matter how good of a replica it is. He places a higher value

on the true version of art and argues that reproducing a work of art via mechanical means removes the realness of the piece. The essay was written before the technological advancements and digitization of our world, but even in the present day, many share the sentiments of Benjamin, believing that there is a purity in viewing an original art piece that cannot be duplicated.

Perhaps it is not so much the authenticity of the artwork, but what we perceive as being real. An experiment was conducted by Martin Kemp, an Oxford art history professor in 2011 where the activity of the pleasure centres of people's brains was scanned while they were shown genuine Rembrandt paintings and copies of the style. Participants were told that a painting was either genuine or a copy before they saw each one. The study concluded that being told that a piece was authentic, regardless of if it actually was or not, activated the pleasure centres of the brain more than if they perceived it to be a derivative work (Coughlan, 2011).

There is also evidence from a study done in MIT that factors in the use of technology and the responses of the brain to viewing art via these devices. Dr. Sinha and Brendan Ceicko analysed the neurological responses of participants looking at a piece of artwork in four forms. After recording their responses to the art in person, through a 2 dimensional image shown on a screen, an augmented reality image and a virtual reality simulation, they actually found an increase in stimulation when presented with a virtual reproduction of the piece(Ceicko,2019). They were able to support the claim that virtual reality and augmented reality methods for viewing art were on the same level, neurologically, as viewing a work of art in person.

An article by the Artist Archive puts forward several points advocating for an increased presence of digital and virtual versions of artworks. They believed that a digital presence removes the geographical barrier of the standard art viewing experience. You do not need to

travel to another country to experience the museums and exhibits. Similarly, you are not surrounded by other people, a major health risk due to the pandemic. People can be comfortable and feel secure in observing artwork. High quality photographs can provide the ability to zoom in and take in multiple angles of a piece of art, seeing the intricate details that you might not be able to see if you were standing a few feet away in a gallery filled with people. A viewer can really take their time when looking at a piece, not being distracted by other patrons. While it might not be a perfect substitute, having art presented in a digital space can work as a way of still providing people with some level of comfort from viewing art. Seeing art through a screen is better than not having access to art at all.

The Trinidadian art gallery scene is firmly in a traditional art experience. The online presence of many of these establishments are limited. They use their websites to provide some contact information and general announcements of exhibitions or open calls for artists and rarely keep full records of past exhibitions. In recent years, social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram were utilised by a few of the local galleries in varying capacities. Galleries such as the Y Art Gallery have a very active online presence and use it as a way to preview certain exhibitions and entice viewers to visit the gallery. Generally, online platforms were an underutilised resource in the Trinidadian gallery world. There is room, however, for them to be brought into the forefront of operations due to the restrictions and lockdowns. The pandemic provided a clear opportunity to take a page out of some of these international galleries books, and pivot their operations into a more digitally compatible space.

One cannot discuss the art gallery pivot without looking at the artists who collaborate with the galleries themselves. Many visual artists were used to producing work with the typical 'gallery experience' in mind. They may ask themselves questions such as 'how will this work be viewed with the lighting of the space?' or 'will the meaning of the piece translate to the viewer if they approach the work from this angle?' The pivots from the artists' perspective

occurred in many forms. There was a changing of the means by which the art is viewed, the type of art being produced in terms of the materials being used, the subject matter being focused on. Many artists pivoted in multiple ways.

Some went in the direction of using being in quarantine and showing appreciation for the frontline workers as a subject matter for their work. For example, Heather Olsen, an artist who was interested in capturing the human condition, created a series of figure paintings depicting the healthcare workers in their hospital gear.

Other artists worked in conjunction with the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC] and other health organisations to bolster confidence in vaccines and to spread awareness. The Living Walls group of artists worked with the CDC to create multiple banners to be hung up around Atlanta to encourage people to get vaccinated.

The pandemic's effects provided a universal common ground for the creation of art that could touch a wider audience. Photographs, paintings, collages and mixed media works depicting the new reality of isolation posted to social media helped people feel less alone. Artists from all disciplines, professionals and hobbyists alike, made art to share their interactions with the various aspects of the covid-19 crisis. An online journal, Nature Medicine, asked some professionals in various medical fields to share the ways art has aided them during the pandemic. A field hospital in Mumbai used art to brighten up the dreary interiors and soothe the patients. In the high stress environment of a hospital, the colours and vibrance of artworks can help give hope to those who need it (Stower and Guennot, 2021).

Some took the opportunity to fully embrace this digital space as their platform. There is an Instagram page for a virtual modern art gallery for art made during the pandemic. It goes by the handle '@covidartmuseum' and posts a collection of modern art created by many different artists and creatives.

Many local art galleries have begun to change the relationship between artists and the public. Direct interaction with the artist responsible for an exhibition will often only happen on opening night. After that, anyone else coming to visit is relegated to pamphlets or little blurbs next to each piece. Hosting online livestreams on social media, where the public can ask an artist questions about their work, makes the artist more accessible to the public. They do not need to be in the same physical space as the viewer. An example of this is Halcian Pierre, who livestreamed an artist's talk in Arnim's Art Galleria. According to the Newsday article, she factored a primarily online audience into her process. The creation of videos to record the artist's thought processes and inspiration provides extra context to appreciate the work. It also creates a concrete record for possible future studies of the artist's work.

The 'lockdowns' of the pandemic provided some local artists with an opportunity to take the final leap in establishing themselves as a professional artist, as was the case with Keiba Jacob Mottley. In an interview with the Guardian, she states that the past two years enabled her to fully focus on her craft and create enough paintings for a solo exhibition (Lee, 2021).

Generally, when it came to the business of art during the covid-19 crisis, there was the pivoting of many aspects of the processes of those involved. They were forced to innovate and adapt. It created new opportunities and purposes for art that would not be as prevalent without the conditions of the pandemic. If the local art community can see the value in these digital realms, this could mean an evolution in the art culture of the country.

CHAPTER 3: A discussion of the results

The intent of this study was to analyse the responses of Trinidadian art galleries to the covid-19 pandemic and assess the effectiveness of the measures they took to keep their businesses running.

Prior to the pandemic, galleries main mode of operation were in person gallery openings and having regular exhibitions every few weeks.

At the start of the pandemic, the gallery portions of the businesses were closed until the restrictions were lifted on non essential services. Horizon's framing business and private personal sales of paintings continued, however, as it did not require public gathering. When they were closed the assumption was that it would be very short term and soon they would go back to normal. After some time, it was clear that this virus was here for the foreseeable future. When the galleries were allowed to reopen, the uncertainty of what the future would hold and the ever changing restrictions seemed to be a hindrance to creating concrete plans for new operations. As with many other art galleries around the world, there was no set path or answer as to what they should do. The solutions of many art institutions internationally were to embrace technology and utilise digital platforms to share art with the world. Local art galleries seemed to have a similar idea, but on a smaller, less complex scale.

There was an increased emphasis on the websites and social media platforms of these galleries as the primary mode of communication. With everyone being confined to their homes and public gatherings being limited, the gallery operators had to find formats that enabled art to be viewed and appreciated.

An increase in clicks on the websites of galleries and sales made via their websites was noted by one gallery. There was added attention from an international audience with sales made to international clients going up. With the art associated with the gallery becoming more accessible to a wider audience, business increased. Not only sales, but exhibitions are no longer limited by who is actually present in a room with the piece of art. This is in line with the perspective of the Artist Archive on making art more accessible by placing it in a digital space.

Virtual exhibition launches with live-streamed artist talks and question and answer segments for the exhibiting artist were employed by some galleries as time went on. Arnim's and Horizon's art galleries had similar approaches to their gallery openings during this time. An example of this was seen in Halcian Pierre's exhibition created during the pandemic. She was catering to presenting her work on a digital platform as opposed to a live gallery opening. Horizon's gallery owner expressed that it was "hard to say for sure if there was more engagement than if they were live openings, but they seemed to go well."

From what they could tell, the public showed a fair amount of interest in attending and participating in these virtual shows and artist talks. The implication here is that new digital methods of operations have a generally willing audience in the future. People would still like to view art even if they cannot be physically in the same space with it.

When presented with the choice of viewing art through a screen or not having access to art at all, people seem to be willing to view these reproductions of the real thing. The gallery owners admitted that while they were not generally keeping track and comparing the engagement of an in person gallery to these new virtual formats, they all shared the sentiment that the livestreams went well and were well received.

The responses of the public to these digital methods of viewing art is interesting to compare to the perspective of Walter Benjamin's essay. Art is only really valuable when viewed in person according to Benjamin. The aura and context of viewing art in person cannot be replicated by any means. The circumstances of the pandemic have made the only option available for viewing art a digital or virtual one. It may be true that we might be missing out on the depth or true essence of an artwork through photographs or videos, but the results of this study seem to find that the art community can still appreciate the art. The aura of a piece of art might not fully translate in the format of a virtual tour, but it still allows the viewer to experience the artwork in some capacity. Perhaps these digital formats can capture a fraction

of this aura, since they are not striving to recreate the piece of art, but freeze it in time and space as it is. It must be said that a different format provides a different viewing experience. A photograph of a painting is capturing the space that the painting holds, not trying to replicate it. It can capture some of the context around the piece, contributing to the experience of viewing the artwork. You can get the exact lighting and mood that the environment of the artwork was supposed to create through a photograph, while sacrificing elements such as texture of the paint or the delicacy of the brush strokes or the physical scale of the work in comparison to yourself. A photograph may never truly compare to the real deal, but if it is the only format that allows a person to experience a work of art, chances are, they would look at it.

Taking into account the views of Pelowski et al, the context of the factors that make up the viewing experience has been altered when art is viewed digitally. There is no physical interaction, but the interactions of the viewing group is significantly larger than if it was being viewed in person. People of a wide variety of backgrounds and opinions can view an artwork at the same time, and leave their thoughts on the piece through a comment or review on a website. A viewer can have access to a range of opinions on a piece, which in turn, influences their opinion of the piece. This was also endorsed by Kemp in 2011 as the context given for the painting directly influenced the value they ascribed to it. We know that these images are not the true painting, but we still want to experience art, even if it is through a screen.

Some galleries preferred to keep their presence mostly physical, adhering to the guidelines of gathering in a space. The Y art gallery preferred to limit the people coming into their locations and accept this decrease in attention and sales as part of living through a pandemic. They did, however, host a live streamed artist chat for Irénée Shaw and advertised the exhibition on their social media pages as they normally would. The gallery representative

commented that it was “hard to tell if it was well received” in comparison to if it was done in a pre-covid 19 setting.

Comparing the approaches of some international art establishments to the pivots in business strategies in Trinidad, the scale of their solutions differs. Trinidadian art galleries are a fraction of the size of a gallery in any of these art hubs. The art culture is also quite different. The type of art that was being converted to a digital space will also affect the level of interest in it. Many local artists tend to cater to physical spaces. Adapting these artworks using traditional mediums to a virtual space did not really seem like the best course of action. For example, the Y art gallery is showcasing a series of handcrafted jewellery. They believed that art objects were meant to be “viewed in person to really appreciate the craftsmanship and detail” of them. This can also be linked back to the ideas of Benjamin, where full understanding and appreciation for an artwork can only happen when looking at the real work of art. A virtual recreation of a 3D object may allow a viewer to get a glimpse of how it would be in a real world scenario, and even interact with the work in a way that they might not be able to in person, but it is still just a mimic of the real thing.

Technology such as virtual reality headsets and augmented reality software are also not as prevalent amongst Trinidadians as in America or Europe. Due to the relatively smaller sizes of the galleries locally and the level of engagement they receive, it might be too much of an investment of resources to create these virtual versions of their space and artwork to only attract a fraction of their audience.

An increase in online engagement and the positive reception of the ways they pivoted their businesses could signify a turning point for local art galleries. Embracing the digital and virtual platforms could help these businesses to evolve to keep up with the ever growing art industry. The gallery manager of Horizons commented that they “hoped to make these virtual gallery openings part of their ‘regular’ operations once things went back to normal.” They

seemed to see the potential for online formats to expand their reach and garner more business. The other galleries expressed scepticism towards keeping these new ways of operating, but were “keeping an open mind to it,” according to their final comments. The galleries shared the sentiment that they were waiting for the pandemic to be over to then gauge whether or not it makes sense to continue with these methods.

Indeed, after we exit a pandemic there will either be a surge of people wanting to go out and experience life in person to the fullest and jump at every opportunity to socialise, or there will be an air of caution that lingers after the threat to our health has dissipated. Only then can they truly say if the virtual world has a more permanent place in the gallery scene.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of the data collected, it can be concluded that art galleries were able to successfully pivot to keep their businesses running. As an industry that relies so heavily on physical interactions, the gallery owners were able to find solutions and ways to work around the restrictions of the pandemic. The pivots came mostly in the form of embracing technology and digital platforms such as the livestream feature on social media and their websites to communicate with the public. There was generally positive feedback from these endeavours. This indicates that there is a willing audience who would accept these methods as new ways to regard art. Some even saw an increase in interest in their services and sold more art because of their increased online presence.

We live in a very digital world. The first thing a person does when hearing about a business is look it up on the internet. An online presence has become an expected part of having a business. Increasing accessibility of the product or service you provide opens up the potential audience, which was seen by the results of this study.

This research was able to ascertain that while the digital world is becoming an increasingly large part of business transactions, the viewing experience of some artforms may need to remain in the physical realm for the time being.

Perhaps as time goes on and advances in augmented reality technologies become more commonplace, the art gallery experience may become a more digital one. It was seen in this study as well as others that if given the access to the means to view these artworks in a new way, they will take it. Augmented reality may be more accessible for a viewer, as it may only require a smartphone camera. Technology can be used to bridge the gaps of the physical experience of being in an art gallery setting. Being able to hold a smartphone up to a wall in your home and seeing a recreation of a piece of art, appearing as if it is right in front of you, can be a good substitute for not being able to visit an art institution. Technology removes barriers of physical space and communication from a scenario. Persons on different continents could enjoy the same piece of art at the exact same time. They can also have discussions about it with relative ease. Technological developments have made so many other aspects of our lives better and reshaped the way we view the world. It only makes sense that these advancements permeate the gallery world as well. As stated before, the crisis of the pandemic has created opportunities for innovation across the board. The unique effects of this time period can allow for the evolution and advancements of so many different systems and services. Relying on technology has been successful so far, but there is room to find even more innovative ways to help their business evolve. The world is becoming more and more digital as time goes by, galleries may have to engage in more online methods and explore more technology based services in order to keep up.

While an attempt was made to measure the effectiveness of these methods with the viewing public, it was difficult as the circumstances surrounding their implementation were less than ideal. Audiences were not really given equal opportunity to choose which of these methods

they would prefer. They were given this new version of the gallery experience as a replacement for not being able to see art in person or interact with the artists like they normally would on opening night of an exhibition. To be able to truly judge the effectiveness of these alternative means, the galleries must continue to offer these experiences in a post covid-19 world and see if the interest remains.

It is recommended that more research go into the local art scene and how it can evolve to fit in this modern world. Perhaps studies of the viewers and the consumers of the art that is put in these galleries can reveal some insight into the possibilities for the future of art galleries in Trinidad. A look at the experiences of the gallery artists themselves can also be beneficial to the overall running of these businesses.

Overall, the Covid-19 pandemic has facilitated pivots of the Trinidadian art gallery scene into more online based operations. These methods have been positively received and have opened the door to having more technology involved in the art gallery experience.

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APPENDIX

Adjusting operations to Covid-19

A look at how your gallery had to change to accommodate the covid 19 pandemic as part of a year 3 dissertation. Please fill out the answers to these questions. (If any questions do not apply to your business, simply put N/A as the answer.)

1. Around what time did you reopen your operations after the initial lock down in 2020?

2. What services did you provide?

Art Gallery

Framing gallery

Selling art supplies

Other:

3. Can you state the main ways your business operated and interacted with the public in a pre-pandemic world?

4. Would you say you had to come up with different ways to conduct business after reopening?

Yes (Move to question 5)

No (move to question 6)

5. Can you state the adjustments you had to make?

6. Which did you use to communicate primarily with the public and your gallery community pre-pandemic?

word of mouth

email

website

social media posting of shows

Other:

7. Which would you say is the primary form of communication now?

word of mouth

email

website

social media posting of shows

Other:

8. Were there any methods of operations that you considered but decided not to do? if yes, what were they?

9. Would you say that the adjustments made to the mode of operations has helped or hindered the public's engagement with your business?

More engagement after making these modifications

Less engagement after making these modifications

Same level of engagement

Hard to tell

Other:

10. Do you think these adjustments to your business will remain after the pandemic is over?

Yes

No

Maybe

11. In your opinion, do you believe digital platforms and virtual spaces can be the future of art galleries in Trinidad? (why/why not)

12. Any extra comments you would like to make regarding operating a business during a pandemic?