



Interview with Art World Expert **RENEE VARA**

By Adam Kluger
Photo credit: Jo Broughton

Any thoughts about the recent New York Art fairs and auctions?

We just got off of three incredible weeks of nonstop auctions, fairs, and gallery openings - it was great to see everyone after the lull. And I am happy, as a feminist art historian undergraduate, to finally see the long-awaited moment of "corrective history." There is a refocus in the market on diversifying art and properly recentering neglected artists including female artists, artists of color, and activists.

Why do you love NYC?

I love New York because it is truly a place of inclusion - where no one has to feel bound by any metaphorical box. It has always been personally and professionally to me, the ultimate place to claim your complexity. There is such a collective sense of creative capital and even after I have worked around the world in many art centers, NYC is still extraordinary. I came here for that freedom that I have enjoyed for over three decades, and now think there is an upside to the pandemic because it has afforded a new youth culture that is formulating its own generational expression.

What's going on with the Art Market these days?

Well - the Art World is back and like a Phoenix rising, New York is yet again the center of the art world. More business is transacted here, and even more so after the pandemic than in any other city in the world including Hong Kong, London, and Paris. I think the Pandemic in a way made the art world better - as galleries, auctions, and fairs were forced to pivot online. So, it opened up access to a

great extent, and the art world is no longer an exclusive enclave of insiders. Now people across the world can learn, listen, and look at what's happening on a very sophisticated level of participation.

What type of consulting and conservation work are you up to?

I am a recognized valuation specialist who works with investment-grade objects to help navigate the complexities when they are damaged. I work closely with artists, conservators, collectors, galleries, and companies to ensure the work is conserved for posterity, to preserve value, and also ensure that the artist's legacy is honored. It's a collaborative process and the opportunity to consult with talented conservators, who are like art surgeons, makes it extremely technical and nuanced work, but also a fascinating process because it equalizes all the stakeholders to achieve a common good for the artwork and artist.

Renee, please tell us about the artist advocacy you have been involved with.

Besides building collections responsibly for the last several decades, I was recently the art expert for the successful 5Pointz landmark case that set a legal precedent for protecting artists under the Federal Visual Artists Rights Act (VARA). That advocacy work has expanded beyond NYC, and I have been advising other artists across the US, including my most recent high-profile cases which involve upholding the rights of two female artists and the integrity of their public sculptures. I also actively lecture on these concerns to artists, art professionals, and lawyers because moral rights are seemingly esoteric in America.