

# dear diary...

BLOGS, OR ONLINE PERSONAL journals, which came to prominence in the wake of 9/11 as a forum for political commentary and reporting, have broadened in scope. These days, more and more blogs (short for "Web logs") devoted to the visual arts have been popping up—so many, in fact, that Forbes.com recently published a list of its 11 favorites.

Art bloggers are covering the art world, trying their hands at criticism and reportage, rounding up and commenting on other online content, giving publicity to events in their cities and providing diaristic accounts of their art-viewing (and sometimes art-making) activities. Like the legions of political bloggers who descended on last year's presidential conventions to file minute-by-minute dispatches, art bloggers are gaining press access to museums and art fairs, weighing in on questions of ethics and doing their damndest to break news ahead of the daily newspapers.

Perhaps the most prominent among them—and one who made the Forbes list—is Washington, D.C.-based Tyler Green, who was working as a political consultant when he began the site Modern Art Notes. He is now the staff art critic for Bloomberg News, a job he was offered largely on the merits of his blog. One of several sites hosted by Douglas

McLennan's popular online digest, Artsjournal.com, Modern Art Notes is four years old—which qualifies Green as an elder statesman of the blogosphere. According to other online art writers, a link from his site drives substantial reader traffic. In addition to being a critic, Green is an opinionated and tenacious newshound with a growing list of behind-the-scenes sources, and he prides himself on breaking stories.

Some popular art blogs are more community-oriented. Caryn Coleman, who runs the gallery Sixspace in Los Angeles, is responsible for the 1½-year-old Art Blogging.LA, also a Forbes favorite. She posts news and opinions, and supports the L.A. art scene by listing gallery openings. Other bloggers offer a hearty dose of art world snarkiness, such as Dennis Christie, co-founder of the Chelsea gallery DCKT, on his increasingly popular site, I Get My Show on the Road.

While few sites deal primarily with the business side of art, blogs may be having a subtle effect on today's frenzied contemporary market, since they are often the first to pick up on new talent. Todd Gibson, a New York-based marketing strategist who is a docent at the Whitney Museum in his spare time and maintains the blog From the Floor, writes that art bloggers "will have an increasingly important hand in creating and enhancing

demand" for emerging artists. Google searches for young artists, Gibson has found, lead directly to blogs such as those of Barry Hoggard (Bloggy) and James Wagner (jameswagner.com), who have written supportively about those artists' work and often provide images. Gibson himself recalls finding a printout of one of his blog posts at the front desk of a gallery showing work by a video artist he was the first to write about.

Museums and other arts institutions are starting to pay attention to blogs. Jan Rothschild, head of public relations for the Whitney, says, "Within the past couple of years, blogs have hit the radar screen of every museum. We've gotten to know some of the bloggers because they visit the museum and attend our events and their names are on our press lists. We didn't use to circulate information from blogs to the trustees, but now occasionally we do." David Resnicow, president of the New York PR firm Resnicow Schroeder, which represents some of the nation's top museums, notes, "Reporters troll the blogs for the germs of a story. That's why museums keep an eye on them. They might catalyze a story in a high-circulation outlet."

Bloggers are often the first on the trail when it comes to institutional political developments—for example, director Andrea Rich's recent departure from the Los Angeles County Museum of

Art. "When Tyler and I wrote about speculation that Rich would be on the outs, an L.A.-based publication wanted to know how we knew that and who our sources were," Coleman recalls.

Of course, mainstream news organizations may want to check the facts they obtain online. The blogosphere can be a journalistic Wild West, where opinion bleeds into fact, speculation runs rampant and speed sometimes trumps accuracy. Green acknowledges the problem,

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but points out that when he discovered he had made a mistake, he was able to fix it immediately online.

For someone so widely followed, Green can be refreshingly blasé about his blogging activities. "I spend less time blogging than people think," he says. "Maybe one or two hours a day, total. Of course, I spend eight hours a day writing and thinking about art—it's what Bloomberg pays me to do. Keeping track of open museum directorships, of art and art making, is my job. The blog ends up being my notebook of what's going on." Like a handful of other sites, it's one worth reading over his shoulder. ☒ SARAH DOUGLAS