

REVIEW → ART & TECHNOLOGY

## Untitled, Art Online fair and Artland: vast data collecting capabilities and some great art

An expert view brought to you by our XR Panel of artists and storytellers who create in virtual reality and augmented reality

THE ART NEWSPAPER'S XR PANEL

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Untitled added VR capability this year

**UNTITLED, ART Online**

Created by: Artland

Produced by: Untitled

Untitled has been around as an art fair since 2012 but this year is fully virtual and entirely available through a web-based VR experience built by Artland. The fair was originally scheduled to run from 31 July to 2 August but has been extended to Sunday 9 August at 9pm PST. There are 40 international galleries participating.

**Launch date:** 31 July 2020

## Where to Find it

<https://www.artland.com/untitled-art-online> 

UNTITLED, ART Online is an Artland web application accessible via computer and mobile devices, but it is much better experience on a computer, both in terms of navigation and artwork resolution.

## They Say:

As a gallery partner you can take over your gallery profile to get discovered by buyers from around the world and receive qualified leads that ultimately drive sales

**Artland:** We believe everyone can transform from an aesthetician to a collector. We believe everyone can take part in art. No matter if you are an artist, amateur, collector, connoisseur, fan or challenger, we believe everyone deserves to be moved. As a gallery partner you can take over your gallery profile to get discovered by buyers from around the world and receive qualified leads that ultimately drive sales.

## The XR panel's ratings

- **Eron Rauch** gave a rating of **3/5** stars.
- **Gretchen Andrew** gave a rating of **4/5** stars.
- **Carole Chainon** gave a rating of **4/5** stars.

Giving an **overall** panel rating of **3.5/5** stars.

## We Say:

# UNTITLED, Art Online is replete with both excellent art and vaporwave's uncanny retro-80s aesthetics.

## The website for UNTITLED, ART Online

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**Eron Rauch:** A marble bust, 3D chequered floor, a painting drop-shadowed on a pink background; perhaps you too have slid into YouTube's cache of vaporwave art. While perhaps an odd place to start examining UNTITLED, Art Online, the self-proclaimed "First-ever VR fair" is replete with both excellent art and vaporwave's uncanny retro-80s aesthetics.

Utilizing Artland's newest platform, a simple click in your browser opens a white, translucent-ceilinged hall with two main booth-lined aisles, the walls punctuated with a few bay windows. In the centre, a large lounge extends to an outdoor patio. Both social spaces are adorned with classy computer-generated (CG) furniture, on which your virtual self has no ability to sit. Each glimpse of "Outside" reveals pixelated photography of a posh beach scene with palm trees and distant condos.

Windows at the fair show a faux beach landscape

As with many of the platforms we've reviewed, UNTITLED is not without frustrating user experience issues. Namely, you can click or use the WASD keys to move (as in gaming), but to look left, you drag the mouse to the right, and visa versa, which is very disorienting. While I might make the connection to vaporwave because of occasional pastel walls, eerie beach vibe, and slick CG furniture, these all significantly help create landmarks for navigation. Another nice feature is the ability to jump to any booth via a 2D floor plan or a spinnable toy 3D model.

For the art, 40 top international galleries are displaying works are on the walls in virtual frames. I was impressed by the overall exhibition design, which captured that critical quality of exploration at fairs of wandering to whatever catches your eye next. Many (but not all) of the artworks had excellent documentation. 3D pieces still sit awkwardly out of spatial perspective and lighting, with the exception being the surprising, well-executed Tsedaye Makonnen pillar installation.

Ultimately, this Artland VR platform is clearly an advance over other virtual platforms. But for UNTITLED, the overall feeling is somewhat eerie, like vaporwave's purgatory mall contortions. The hall is silent; no people to mingle with; no fashion to watch; no critical arguments to overhear; you walk alone in the forever frozen moment amidst the soft, digital sunlight falling at a slight angle.

## Is the app easy to use?

**Carole Chainon:** It is very easy to access the Untitled VR Fair, whether from your computer or mobile phone. The onboarding is intuitive. Equipped with the link, we are invited to enter the fair in VR or we can browse the artwork booth by booth. Once in VR, navigation is straightforward and exploring the fair feels effortless, apart from a few wall run-ins. Connecting to the galleries is also a straightforward process.

**Gretchen Andrew:** Within the in-real-life (IRL) art world, there are different user types, known as "roles". For example, artist, gallerist, or collector is a role. As in software, roles represent a collection of users that are assigned permissions to perform similar actions or functions. As a system, the art world is not designed to support the usability of all groups equally. Projecting our artworld roles into software facilitates a discussion on which roles the system is best designed to serve.

The reverse is also true. Any software system such as Untitled, ART Online is designed with the priorities of certain user types. While as a computer user it is a great deal more intuitive than the other VR exhibition apps, Artland is essentially a customer relationship management platform (CRM), a Salesforce for art, and its vast data collecting capabilities are a boon to galleries while offering collectors a value proposition worth reflecting upon. As with most free software, the collector is trading their data for convenience. As for the artist role? It is, after all, an art fair but it would have been neat to see Untitled extend its artist-run spaces into its virtual fairs.

## How good is the art?

Stephen Chambers' Portrait of Robert Creeley at Vigo Gallery

**Carole Chainon:** With 40 international galleries, it is a delight to see such a selection of wonderful works. As we get closer, some appear blurry which is unfortunate. I particularly enjoyed the 3D installations and being able to rotate around them.

**Gretchen Andrew:** Just as at an IRL art fair, UNTITLED, ART Online provides the opportunity for discovery. While on the hunt for a specific gallery or artist I found myself pleasantly distracted by that which I was passing. In this way, I fell in love with Stephen Chambers' *Portrait of Robert Creeley* at Vigo Gallery.

## **What is gained by viewing in VR rather than In Real Life?**

**Carole Chainon:** We might not be able to enjoy the fair in person this year due to Covid-19, so having the fair in VR really was the next best thing! It's great to see the medium being used effectively. The low-poly appearance is quite minimalist and feels a bit lonely without the real-life crowd. On the other hand this allows us to focus on the artwork.

Artland offers built-in communication features

**Gretchen Andrew:** When you click into a gallery a chatbox pops up with a message from the gallerist asking if you'd like to talk. This happens for everyone, meaning that attention by a gallery is not contingent on your perceived-are-those-expensive-shoes-wealth. That being said, if you are signed in and if you engage with this chatbox the entire interaction, as well as what you looked at and for how long, is data that can be leveraged as part of any future negotiation. Some galleries offer a "make an offer" button which facilitates such negotiations.

## **What medium-specific qualities of VR/AR does it employ?**

**Carole Chainon:** This is a WebVR gallery making the experience readily available from web browsers without downloading an app.

bitforms gallery makes use of Artland's 3D and video capabilities to show sculptural and new media work

**Gretchen Andrew:** Other than the immersive 3D rendering, UNTITLED, ART Online provides no medium-specific qualities. Very few galleries made use of its ability to display 3D sculptures and videos within the booths. One such gallery that did is bitforms gallery out of New York City. They pushed the feature limits of the Artland software by displaying the beautifully and successfully rendered *Fauna* by Auria Harvey as well as videos by Marina Zurkow and Claudia Hart.

## Does it break new ground technically?

**Carole Chainon:** It doesn't break new ground technically, but overall the space (based on the Miami Beach Edition of the fair) was intuitive to navigate, the artworks are of overall high quality and the ease of the process makes the Untitled VR Fair a smooth experience. I hope to see more art fairs and galleries using immersive technologies to showcase artists and their work.

**Gretchen Andrew:** Artland's success is not in breaking new ground but in applying customer relationship management and data collection tools behind a slick 3D interface that provides a compelling eCommerce experience.

## The Art Newspaper's XR Panel

[Gretchen Andrew](#)  is a Search Engine Artist and Internet Imperialist who programs her vision boards to manipulate the internet with art and desire.

[Carole Chainon](#)  is the co-founder of JYC, a XR development and production studio based in LA with a presence in Europe, creating XR experiences for the entertainment and enterprise sector. She is also a Spark AR Creator.

[Eron Rauch](#)  is an artist, writer, and curator whose projects explore the infrastructure of imagination, with a focus on subcultures, video games, and photography history.