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“2 Art Gallery Shows to Explore From Home”

By Jason Farago



“Freedom Club,” from 2009, woodcarving, by James Benning, in a show hosted on the website of the Los Angeles project space O-Town House. Credit: James Benning and O-Town House, Los Angeles; Martin Beck

Galleries and museums are getting creative about presenting work online during the coronavirus crisis. Here are two shows worth viewing virtually

## ‘Down the Rabbit Hole: JB in JT’

Ongoing. O-Town House, [otownhouse.art](https://otownhouse.art).

If an online exhibition can’t replicate the joy and surprise of seeing art in person, it has one big advantage over a gallery show: You don’t need to move all the stuff! The artists Julie Ault and Martin Beck have spent the lockdown isolated in Joshua Tree, Calif., where they live with

all sorts of art, artifacts and detritus made by James Benning, a filmmaker and longtime professor at CalArts. When the pandemic began, these two artists photographed, cataloged and captioned everything Mr. Benning, their friend and frequent houseguest, had given them, whether it was on their walls or in their kitchen cabinets. And the resultant presentation, hosted on the website of the Los Angeles project space O-Town House, is a rare example of an online show that feels native to the web: a slow and intimate house tour that also maps a community of artists.

Mr. Benning is best known for his experimental cinema, but the art in Joshua Tree is handmade, modest, tender, and a tiny bit menacing — a woodcarving inscribed with “Freedom Club” evokes the isolationist philosophies of both Henry David Thoreau and the Unabomber, who used the phrase as a nom de plume. Some works are conceptual, like three paper airplanes fashioned from \$100 bills, afforded artistic status with an accompanying framed legal contract. Others are more practical, like a hand-painted house sign. And some, like two random pine cones that the artist brought to Joshua Tree from the Sierra, are not really art at all.

Each has been photographed informally, with little light adjustment, in situ in Ms. Ault’s and Mr. Beck’s ranch house. And they have not been organized with any system beyond chronology. An original abstract geometric drawing Mr. Benning made with his daughter, the artist Sadie Benning, has no greater or lesser prominence in this show than copies he has made of a Bill Traylor painting, a Yoko Ono drawing, an Andy Warhol photograph, resting on the bookshelves or else propped up against a file organizer. These replicas, particularly, affirm that what matters here is less an art work’s appearance than its offering — or how each object expresses and substantiates an enduring friendship.

In-depth captions written by Mr. Benning, Ms. Ault and Mr. Beck not only explain the tangled references of each work, but chart the events that led to their creation and preservation. Savor them all. It's like being let in on the sweetest three-member group text.

*JASON FARAGO*