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**Artist Support Pledge**

# Artist Support Pledge

## A Q&A with Matthew Burrows

### 1. What is the Artists support pledge and how does it work?

#artistsupportpledge is a movement. It grew out of my own practice as an artist and my work as an artist mentor as Artist Support Projects (@artistsupportprojects); and the spirit of generosity in which artists operate. Saddled with debt and working in the gig economies, emerging artists often take huge risks and display a generous spirit to do what they do.

The project uses social media platform Instagram, which is a popular platform for artists to post images and share their work. Artists post their images for sale using #artistsupportpledge giving details of their works and price. If people are interested in buying, they message (DM) the artist. **Anyone** can buy the work and artists don't need permission to join.

Every time an artist reaches £1,000 of sales, they pledge to buy £200 of work from other artist(s). I'm encouraging donations too, made to particular concerns such as @\_hopsitalrooms

The pricing structure (up to £200) is deliberately low, it's an act of generosity to take part, but that makes it exciting and accessible to so many. It's a real leveller. It's also a gift economy, as artists selling work pledge to give back, to buy another artist's work. It's a moral contract and I know it's working.

### 2. How did you come up with the idea?

In the build up to the Covid-19 pandemic I could sense the likely impact on artists. The art market is global and dynamic, yet art fairs and galleries were closing, which I could see would inevitably impact on the movement and sales of artworks. I had sat at my dining room table last week, having had to cancel forthcoming projects and income streams, thinking this is an impending global crisis, how should I respond to this? The specifics of #artistsupportpledge came to me shortly after when I went out for a run (I'm a bit of a running addict and have been training for the South Downs Way 100-mile ultra-marathon). The ethos of generosity is so important to this, because it is something, I have always fundamentally believed in.





Matthew Burrows

**3. How's it going? Do you have an idea of how much kind of income its generating for artists? I gather the project is also spreading geographically in terms of its uptake by artists and collectors...**

There're over 70,000 posts now and rising... and each can have up to 10 artworks! Both the volume and the quality of the work posted, by both established and lesser known artists has surprised me. We think around £15m of sales has been generated.

I've been overwhelmed with incredible feedback from many emerging and established artists from all over the world – UK, Europe, North America, South America, Asia, Australasia, and now Africa. The list is endless, but the feedback is consistent and profound.

Perhaps the greatest surprise was the overwhelming success of the message – of generosity. This gift economy is bringing income to thousands of artists globally and self-perpetuates. It's an amazing virtual gallery and network and for the first time, allows artists to be patrons. That's powerful.

**4. Do you have idea who is buying all the work?**

Anyone and everyone, even my neighbours are buying work. I'm messages of good will and thanks from all over the world. It's truly humbling and shows the power of art in connecting people. New networks are being created. And new talent is coming to the fore. The accessibility of the process for seeing work and approaching artists has been empowering for artist and collector alike. Who knows, perhaps collectors of the future are starting their collections, right now through this initiative. Artists are certainly becoming patrons. It's very powerful.

**5. Could you see this project or similar, taking root and becoming a permanent feature of the art market?**

The strength of the movement is that it taps into a gifted culture, which is the natural habitat for artists. Art is a gift to the world, so to create an economy that completes that cycle and allows artists to go on to support colleagues, has a momentum that is hard to stop. It's a moral contract that most artists have been practicing for years, they don't need to learn it. If I stopped tomorrow it will carry on. The only real question is, can it maintain integrity? And is there a big enough market to sustain the numbers as it grows? So far, it's been self-sustaining. The potential for creating a generation of collectors is exciting, even if it's at a modest level like this.

## 6. Are there any similar models / projects out there?

I've come across others that have a charitable mission, but they still work on the linear economic model we're all familiar with. That's great for fundraising and sits well in the art market as we know it. This is more about creating a sustainable economy for artists. It won't make anyone rich; the numbers are too low. But it can give artists more liquidity, which is a huge problem for many artists, even successful ones.

## 7. Can you quote us a few of the messages you've got from people in response to this project?

I've hundreds of messages. New messages of hope and gratitude arrive each day. Recently I put a call out for people to post videos of their experiences. You will be able to see those for yourself as they get posted. Below are some private messages I captured at an early stage:

*"This has been such a privilege to experience... caring and transcending borders! It made me realise why I have no choice but to make art, as the heart of art is this power to dissolve borders... again , experiencing that at the CORE artists are serving most sincerely and unconditionally the great good of All".*

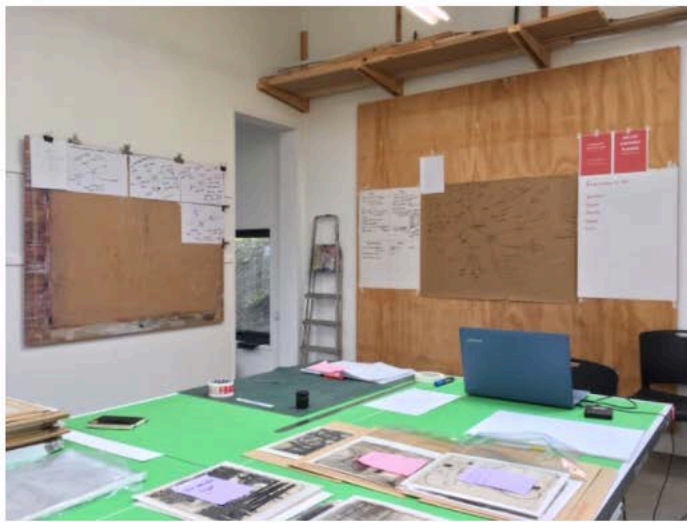
*"I'm self-employed and can't get benefits [be]cause I'm technically still a student (doing corrections on a PhD with no funding and now no job). The money from the pledge will help a lot and although it's a stop gap, it will allow me to breath and consider my options. I also bought a friend's artwork today, a friend with kids and a mortgage. He was also appreciative. Crazy times, take care and stay sharp!"*

*"Thank you for creating this and supporting artists and inspiring everyone, it's just brilliant. I've had the most amazing week and have been overwhelmed by the love and support from people. I've reached the pledge target twice with sales, I'm about to pledge again and buy my second piece from a fellow artist, I love this bit the most! Art is definitely supplying some joy in these dark times."*

## 8. How is your own work going? I know you've been having a good year creatively. Pleases tell us about it...

Yes, perhaps timing is everything. So much has come together for me this year. I don't think I would have been able to do ASP if it hadn't, you need a solid footing to make bold leaps.

For a long time, I've been trying to develop an understanding of environmental and cultural sustainability that didn't rely on the usual power structures of objectification and containment. My work has now found a way to connect to both an embodiment of experience and connectedness to environment. Of course, this is always an open-ended experiment, perhaps all I've really done is let go of the assumptions and concepts that were holding this back. I call it a mystical realism. I know that sounds pretentious, but it's quite the opposite, it's borne out of the ground at my feet.



Matthew's studio

9. Can you show us a few of your favourite recent works of yours?

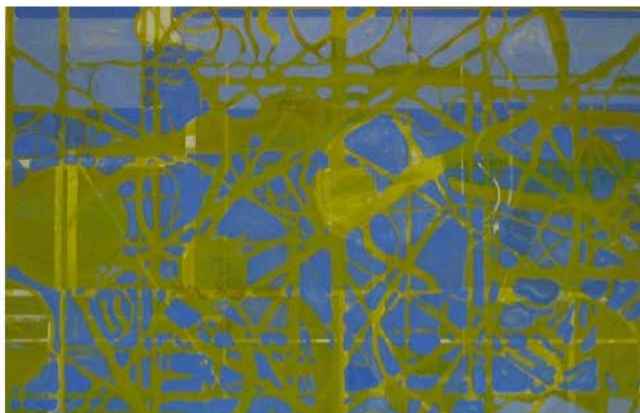




Strata, 2019, Oil on board, 152.5 x 119.5cm



Strata II, 2019, Oil on board, 152.5 x 119.5cm





Gatescape, 2019, Oil on board, 180 x 149 cm

For more info on Matthew's work please see his artist's page at Vigo Gallery:  
<http://www.vigogallery.com/artists/37>

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