ARTSY

7 Artists on Creating New Work during Quarantine
Written by: Claire Voon
May 5, 2020

Artists are sheltering at home, and despite the disruptions to their lives and limited access to materials and space, many still feel an urge to create. Some are making works that respond directly to the coronavirus pandemic; others, now with unexpected spare time, are realizing suspended projects that have nothing to do with the developing global crisis. We spoke with seven artists about how their practices are helping them find solace and meaning in this period of uncertainty and paralyzing anxiety.

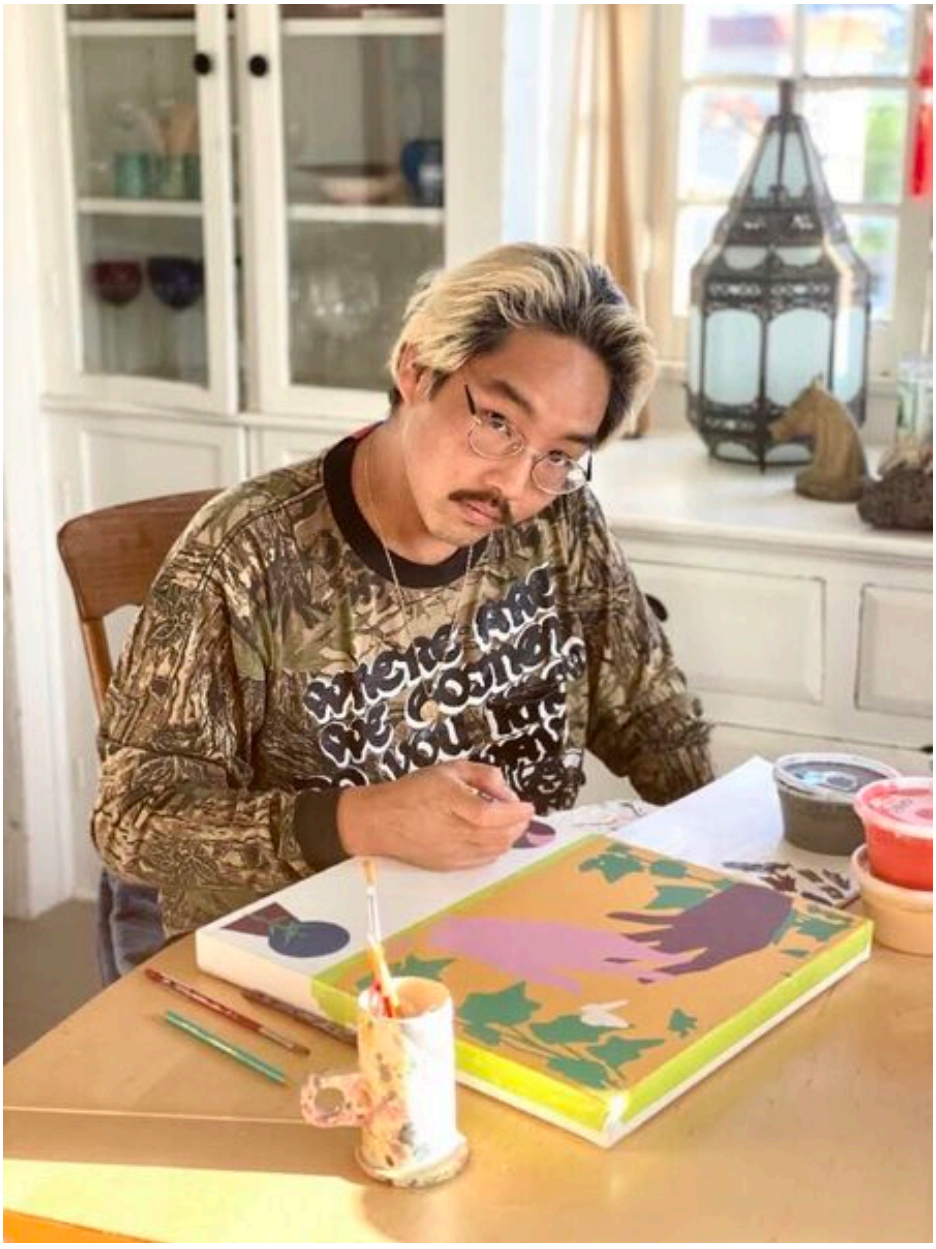
Greg Ito

Greg Ito, Looking For A Sign, 2020

Since March 15th, the day he began his lockdown at his home near Los Angeles's Chinatown, Ito has been painting small apertures to other worlds: windows and keyholes, through which lie dreamlike views of unnamed lands. They are compact riffs on motifs that frequent his works, which often look like fairy-tale scenes—were it not for the presence of fires and ghostly hands that imbue them with palpable tension.

Ito has been painting at home to be with his wife and dog, though he visits his studio to fetch supplies. Working at his dining room table, he has been preparing for a solo show at Anat Ebgi, sketching out familiar symbols that have taken on new significance since quarantine. "Not being able to go outside or see our loved ones brings new narratives to explore," Ito said. "Even the hands in the vignette paintings grew a new meaning as we are instructed to not touch one another or our surroundings."

Motivation has come, in part, from his family history. Ito has been thinking about his grandparents and great-grandparents who were among more than 100,000 Japanese Americans sent to internment camps established by the U.S. government during World War II. “To know that they endured years of fear and hatred and continued to live and cultivate a beautiful life and family is incredibly uplifting,” Ito said. “It gives me hope that things can get better and that people can persevere.” For now, he added, “My practice is my place for refuge and self-reflection.”



Portrait of Greg Ito, 2020.