



4heads' PORTAL ART FAIR WILL NOT BE RETURNING TO GOVERNORS ISLAND FOR 2023

After 15 Years, Trust for Governors Island Declines to Invite the Original "Governors Island Art Fair" Back to the Island

New York, NY—June 8, 2023—*Portal: Governors Island*, the annual art fair and artist residency program hosted by the NYC-based nonprofit 4heads, announced that it will not be presenting on Governors Island this year after the Trust for Governors Island declined to offer 4heads space on the Island for the 2023 season. Previously known as the *Governors Island Art Fair*, the fair was one of the first organizations on the Island and has been an anchor of cultural activity there since 2008, enlivening the Island's historic spaces, and especially the houses on Colonels Row, with the work of nearly 100 contemporary artists each year. The organization is actively assessing options for an alternative presentation space within New York City and expects to again present its fair—with a model that continues to feature low application fees and an emphasis on showing a broad array of emerging, and under-recognized artists—in the future.

“We are deeply saddened by the Trust’s decision not to invite us back to Governors Island this summer, a decision that is especially frustrating considering the tremendous value that our art fair has brought to the Trust over the last 15 years,” said Jack Robinson and Nicole Laemmle, co-founders of 4heads. “In many ways, the success of the Island as a summer destination developed hand-in-hand with the success of our fair. As our program solidified and expanded, our audiences grew. This brought more people to the Island, demonstrating that people appreciated the chance to experience contemporary art in the historic spaces of the Island—an approach that has now been adopted by other organizations. While we are confident that we can regroup and bring our accessible art fair model to other places in New York City, we are disappointed that the Trust chose to end our long and productive relationship and did so with no consideration for the role we have played in their own accomplishments.”

Although there are now many cultural organizations that present programs on Governors Island, 4heads was one of the first to recognize its potential as an arts destination, seeing an opportunity for artists to break out of the traditional square, white-walled galleries. Using the unconventional spaces on the Island—indoors and out—to present works of various media, form, and scale made the experience visually interesting and accessible for audiences of all ages. Starting with TGI’s Building 114 in 2008, the fair steadily grew the number of participating artists. Eventually, the fair expanded to make use of many of the houses along Colonels Row, using the interior spaces as well as many of the front and rear porches and yards, along with organizing larger scale installations in adjacent greenfields. 4heads’ model attracted significant media attention over the years, including major news coverage in [The New York Times](#), [New York Post](#), [Time Out New York](#), and many art-focused news outlets such as [Artnet News](#) and [Hyperallergic](#). During its run on the Island, 4heads served and presented the work of more than 1200

artists—most of whom did not have formal representation and saw the fair as an essential platform to connect with visitors and showcase work.

“When my work was selected by 4heads, I had to pinch myself,” said Sophie Gamand, who participated in the fair in 2019. “The fair was like an incubator for me, a place to grow and test ideas, a place to be brave and messy—things that are essential for an artist. I created several pieces that were meant to be experienced by visitors, including my first virtual reality piece, which was very successful, and a sculpture that could be experienced by visually impaired visitors. The experience validated my path as an artist—and I recently exhibited my largest project in Los Angeles.”

In addition to its annual fair, 4heads also operated an artist residency program on Colonels Row. Beginning in May, with the formal opening of the Island’s summer season, 4heads would present artists who used these non-traditional spaces to develop and refine their work. Over the course of the summer, artists could meet and interact with each other, and with the audiences visiting other activities on the Island, an opportunity for ongoing and dynamic feedback. This program provided another important opportunity to younger artists for whom traditional studio space in New York City can be a significant expense. Although 4heads was unable to host its fair in 2020, the organization worked with the Trust for Governors Island to enhance the length of time and number of artists it could support through its artist residencies. In 2021 and 2022, 4heads combined its expanded residency program with its fair format, bringing together the best of its offerings into a cohesive experience for the artists and visitors.

4heads Milestones on Governors Island

- 2008: 4heads starts on Governors Island with the first Governors Island Art Fair
- 2010: 4heads introduces education and artist residency programs at the request of Trust for Governors Island (TGI)
- 2014-2019: 4heads continues occupying 404-408 of Colonels Row
- 2015: 4heads expands to Fort Jay and Castle Williams
- 2017: 4heads expands to Liggett Hall
- 2018: 4heads’ Governors Island Art Fair is featured in the public art documentation at the Museum of the City of New York’s show [Art in The Open](#)
- 2019: 4heads last full scale art fair, re-branded as Portal: Governors Island at the request of TGI
- 2020-2022: 4heads works with TGI to expand artist residency program amidst the pandemic

About 4heads

4heads is a 501(c)3 nonprofit arts organization run by artists for artists. It was launched in New York in 2008, when Nicole Laemmle, Jack Robinson, and Antony Zito, who are working artists themselves, saw an opportunity to create a platform that would serve emerging artists and the local community through exhibitions, education programs, and artistic collaborations. The organization’s DIY spirit helps catalyze the ongoing dialogue between artists and people from all walks of life. Its diverse slate of initiatives includes art fairs, arts-education for underserved communities, and a summer Artists-in-Residence program on Governors Island. 4heads is committed to shedding new light on hidden culture and bringing new life to unexpected and unique spaces across the city.

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