

METROPOLITAN

LUXURY
MAGAZINE

METROPOLITANMAGAZINE.NY.COM

WINTER ISSUE: DECEMBER 2020/JANUARY 2021

RACHEL VANCELETTE

Mobilizes the art world
to support global pandemic relief

\$20.00 USD

Fashion | Luxury | Profiles | Features | Shopping | Travel | Art | Design | Auto | Food | Health



Rachel Vancelette

Photo by Sophie Spinelle



PUZZLES WITH PURPOSE

PUZZLING THROUGH THE PANDEMIC WITH ARTXPUZZLES

BY ALYSSA FISHER

In 2018, artist Alteronce Gumby, selected by AXP's first curator choice Alaina Simone, was working on a series of iridescent paintings inspired by how color materializes on Earth when he paused for a lunch break and headed to the bodega. It was a sunny day, and his eye caught a puddle of broken glass by the bus stop, shimmering with the colors of the rainbow. It reminded him of the pigments he was working with, and of how Sir Isaac Newton discovered rainbows refracting through a prism. Inspired, Gumby took two buckets of glass back to his studio, and over the course of a year he incorporated it into his paintings, placing each piece one-by-one, determining where it fits.

It feels like a full-circle moment, he said, that

one of his pieces from the series, Callisto, was reproduced as a puzzle for ART x PUZZLES: Puzzles with Purpose, a project designed and launched exclusive limited collector edition jigsaw puzzles in close collaboration with artists from across the globe. The project launched officially in Fall of 2020, to support artists' studios, existing wider artist relief efforts, and causes of personal, social and economic concern to participating contemporary artists during the Covid-19 pandemic.

"If I were to teach a seminar on how to make one of my paintings, we would probably start with putting together a puzzle without looking at the box," the New York City artist said. "It's heartwarming to think that everyone who

works on the puzzle is going to have the same experience I had in making the painting."

"Callisto" is one of the vibrant pieces selected for the Art x Puzzles initiative, which features more than 100 contemporary artists from around the world. It was art expert Rachel Vancelette's inspirational idea on how to reconnect people with art, and hopefully help people cope with the anxieties of the pandemic while galleries and art fairs remain closed.

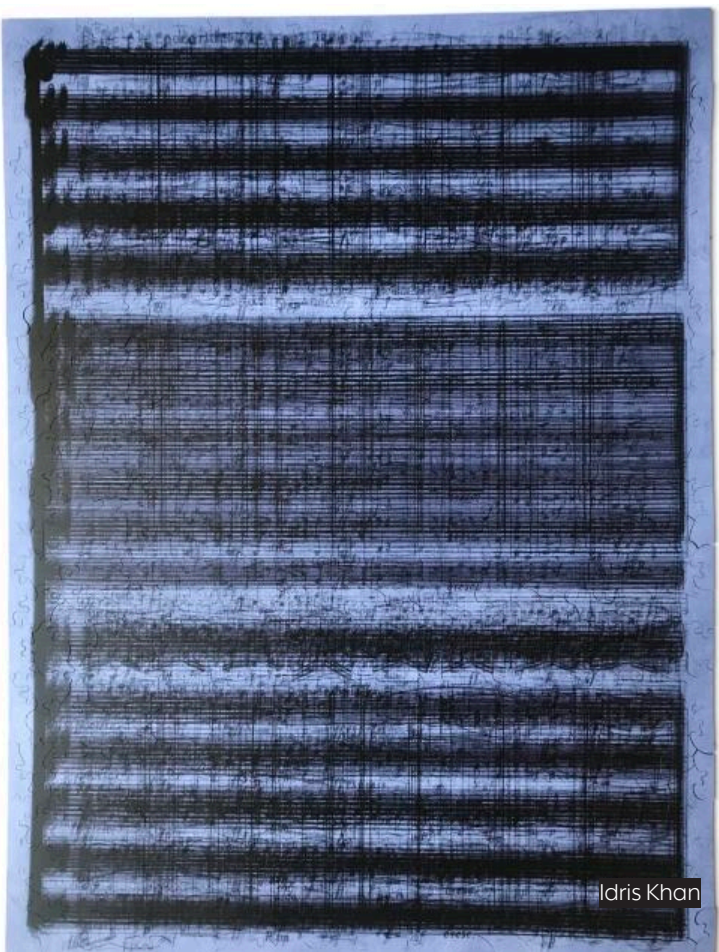
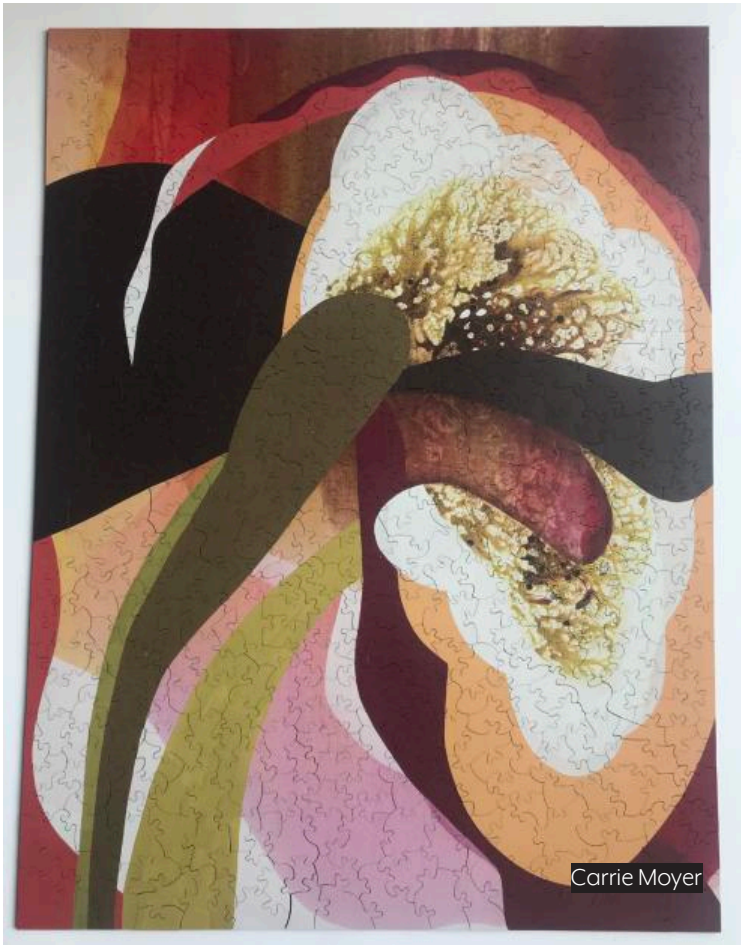
"It occurred to me that the benefits and joy which puzzlers seem to get could be extended and expanded in some way to connect with international artists worldwide and uplift the art world in such a terrible moment," said Rachel Vancelette, Founder of ARTXPUZZLES: Puzzles with Purpose.

The puzzles range from \$65 to \$450, and the sales are divided between the artists, artist relief initiatives and other charitable organizations, including Black Lives Matter, the Animal Welfare Institute, First Responder's Children's Foundation and several other Artist Charity Choices. While Gumby has been a fan of puzzling since childhood when his grandmother always had a puzzle on the dining room table, it made participating in the causes a no-brainer.

"Being an artist of color and someone who cares deeply about their community and who stands against police brutality, I immediately thought it was a great idea," he said.

Christopher Eamon, AXP's 2nd guest curator for December, said the artists "have been very excited and very positive about it." They're not just donating a piece, he explained. "It's a reproduction, it's a multiple, it's more accessible. They like it, it's quite innovative in that way." He paused for a moment. "The word innovative comes up a lot," he said, and we both let out a laugh — puzzles, we know, have been around forever (the first was said to be made in the 1760s).

Yet at the height of quarantine, when uncertainty and fear were pervasive, people around the United States turned to puzzling for activity, distraction and of course, some much-needed fun. NPR reported that in the beginning of March, sales at Ceaco, one of the largest producers of jigsaw puzzles in the country, were up 300 percent compared to the same time the year before. Eamon recalled his social media feed was full of photos of friends who fled the city for their country homes, either attentively piecing together a puzzle or showing off the finished product.





Helina Metaferia

AXP doesn't produce your typical puzzle... while Eamon noted friends were building standard images — landscapes, autumn days, and quarantine puzzles such as clowns - The Collector Edition Art Jigsaw Puzzles by AXP include the striking pieces by top contemporary artists such as Carrie Moyer (Marshmallow Squash Blossom, Rosewater and Brimstone 2020), Donald Baechler (The Kiss), Spencer Tunick (Big Color), Rachel Perry (Lost in My Life), Winston Chmielinski (Bodies of Water), Robert Farber (Laundromat), Marilyn Minter (Wet Kiss), Will Cotton (Cotton Candy Cowboy), Idris Khan (The Old Tune) and many more which are the perfect addition to any art and/or puzzle lovers collections.

While Eamon's was writing his Curator Choice statement, he remembered the dismal figure of museum-goers spending an average of 15 to 30 seconds in front of each piece, taking delight in knowing those who acquire the puzzles will have a unique opportunity to stare, to concentrate, to visually focus on each piece for an extended amount of time.

The last time Megan Connolly, AXP's 3rd curator choice sector, viewed art in person was at the Armory Show in New York, during the first week of March. And then in an instant, she was sheltering at home, breaking out every board game, playing Rummy ("my game is hotter than it's ever been") and puzzling. She said "I'm craving this interaction

with art, and also just the spirit of play, and playing together, and puzzling as stress release is something that I love," said Connolly, AXP's guest curator for February. "It's positive, it's uplifting, it also helps artists.

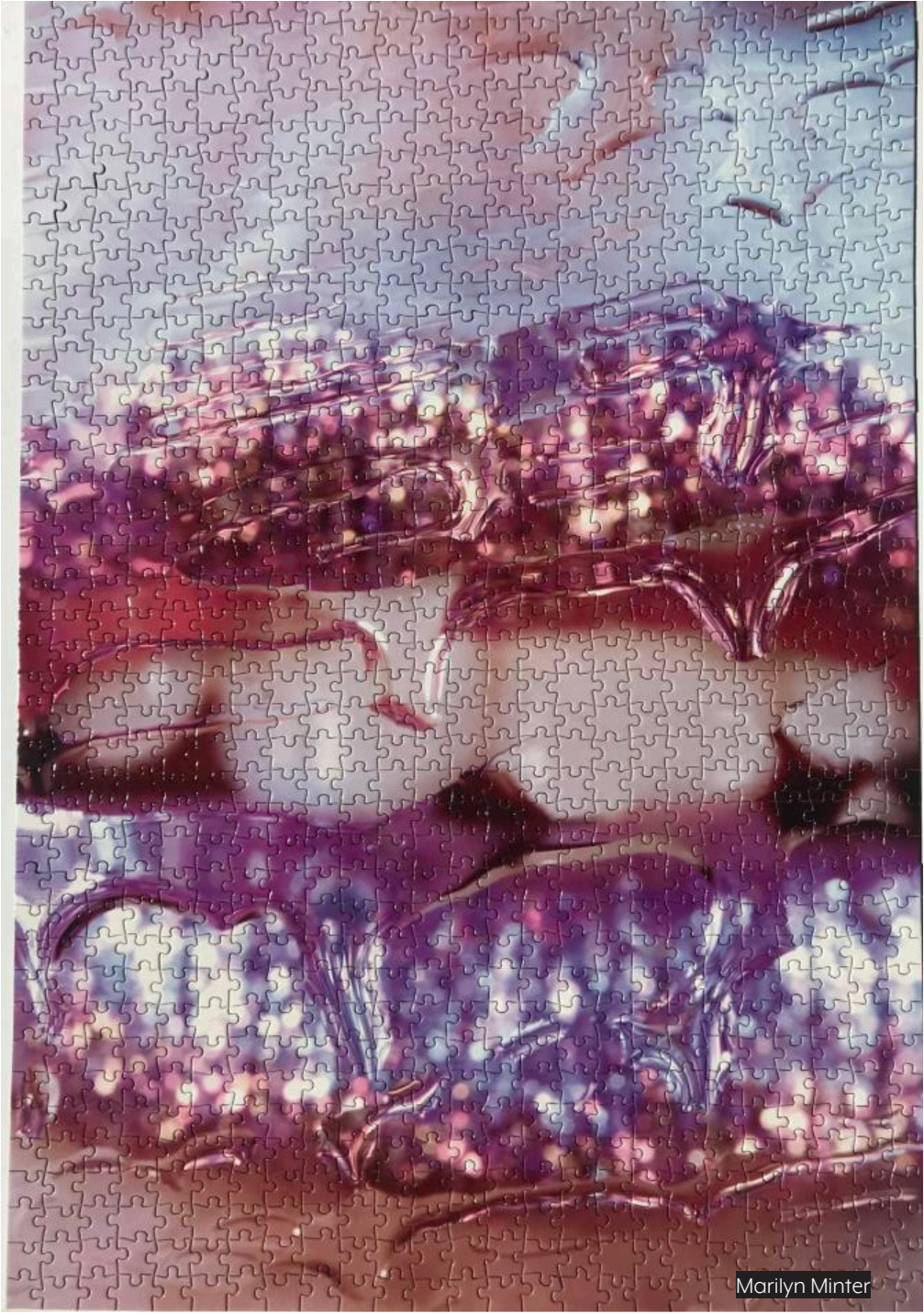
"My whole career has been about sharing the story of artists," she continued. "[Art] tells a story of our time, it adds joy, and if we can help support Covid19 relief and some of these artists who are struggling during this time, why not. And give us all sitting at home something to do with our time and our hands while we're sitting here, rather than

biting our nails and pulling our hair out. Why not puzzle together."

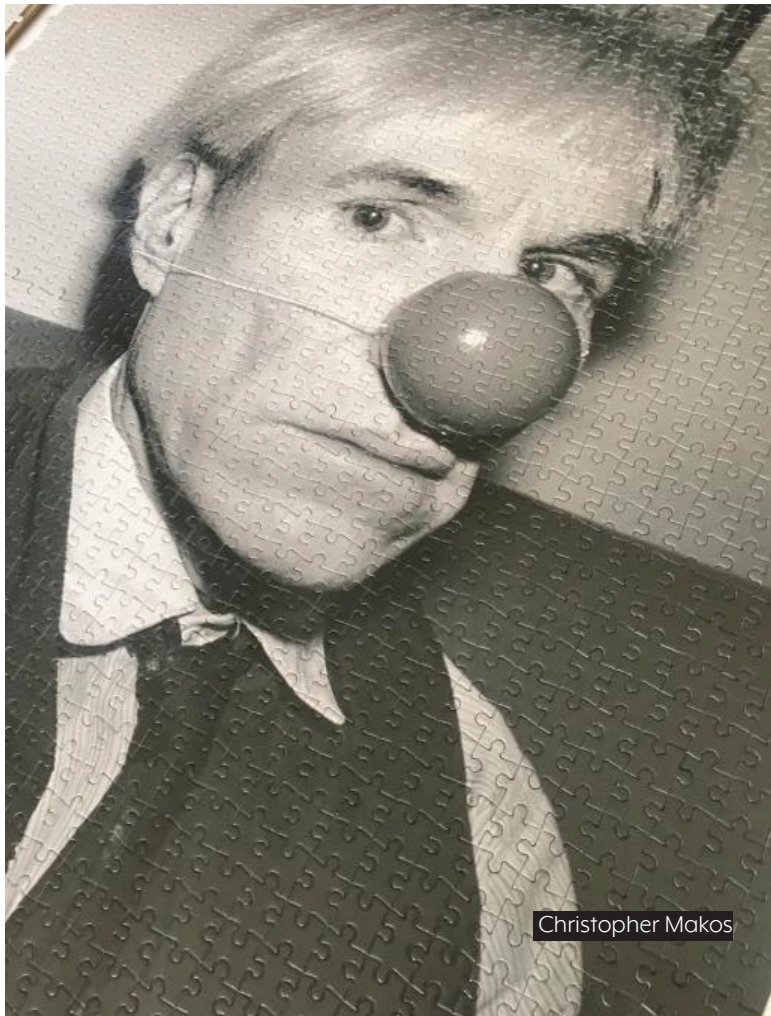
Valentine's Day and the Chinese New Year are serving as Connolly's curatorial springboard for her AXP selections and she's eager to highlight the work of more Asian artists. Christopher Eamon and Alaina Simone, AXP's first two guest curators, similarly took their time selecting artists, searching for works that were vibrant and appeal to puzzlers and art lovers of all ages. All the curators have been intentional in their choosing, even considering the



Will Cotton



Marilyn Minter



Christopher Makos



Matthew Day Jackson

artists' practice and how it relates to puzzling. They took their time selecting artists, searching for works that were vibrant, by artists of a range of ages, that would make for a puzzling time.

Curator Alaina Simone also reached out to Helina Metaferia, an artist and professor at Brown University whose process of collaging is different, yet similarly embodies the joyful mechanics of puzzles. Metaferia's piece is titled 'Headdress 6', part of her 'By Way of Revolution Series' that she started in 2018. Typically, Metaferia's artistic practice uses different research materials such as contemporary photographs, she puts them together in a way that's like "an unfolding of a new story or a new history." For artwork titled Headdress 6, Metaferia photographed a former student, who became the central image. The artist went through archives of the Black Liberation movements and collaged images taken from multiple historic protests. The result is powerful. She enjoys the fact that her art is accessible, that anyone can experience it.

Sometimes, she said, the art world can feel like a mystery. "It's really timely actually for all the

things that we've experienced in 2020," Metaferia said. "It's really appropriate to have this in the hands of everyday folk who want to remember this time period, remember where we are and where we continue to be when it comes to issues of social justice." "In this time when galleries and institutions are having to make different changes according to social distancing — and a lot of times that includes closure — [AXP is] giving people an opportunity to experience art at home, to think about culture, to think about the role of the image and the art in social movements," she said. "I do think this is an appropriate project for everyone and hopefully people can find time, now that we have ample time to enjoy a puzzle.

ARTXPUZZLES: PUZZLES WITH PURPOSE
artxpuzzles.com | Instagram:@artxpuzzles

ARTIST CHOICE CHARITIES: First Responder's Children's Foundation
1strcf.org
Animal Welfare Institute
awionline.org + more can be found at AXPs website.

The AXP CONTEMPORARY ARTIST VOICES:
"When Rachel approached me with this idea, I immediately was taken to it, I have always loved the idea of taking my photos, and dealing with them ways other than just a static piece of paper, and to that extent, my puzzle is clearly not static, but quite a daunting challenge for anyone that might try to assemble my photo. This has been such a terrific experience, hopefully there will be more to come!" - Christopher Makos

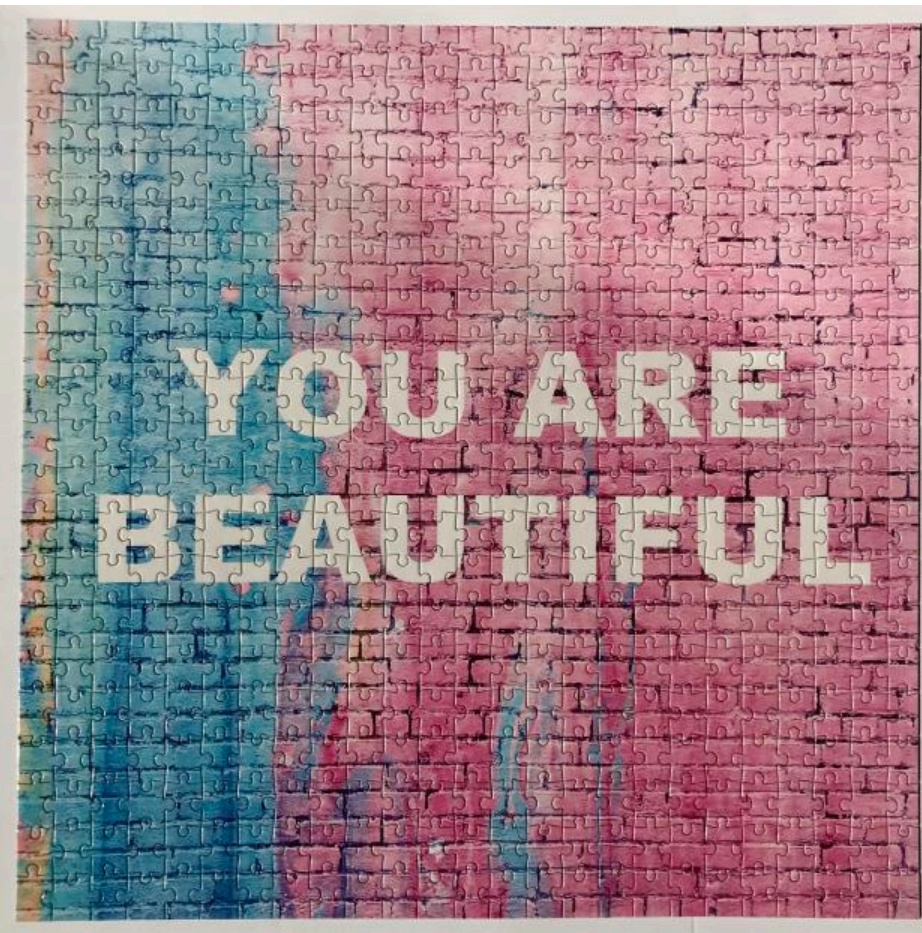
"Puzzle is about fitting — when two and more puzzle pieces are separated they are useless, lost, and only together they make sense, they work. These are puzzling times, no doubts, but one thing is clear — it's time to stick together, help each other, what exactly ArtXPuzzles: Puzzles with Purpose and its curator Rachel Vancelette do" - Veronika Georgieva

"Get it together!" - Kenny Scharf

"It's never been harder to find the beauty in the challenges the universe delivers than in 2020. 'YOU ARE BEAUTIFUL' is about never forgetting how beautiful you are, and not being afraid to let



Kenny Scharf



Michael Angelo



Tatyana Murray

your true colors show. When we celebrate the intrinsic beauty in ourselves and in each other, the world is a better place. I can't think of a better mantra to meditate on while puzzling!" - Michael Angelo

May 'Tree of Life' shine 'light' on these 'dark', challenging times and create a sense of hope and connectedness as the puzzle is assembled. United, we will get through these stormy times, like the defiant trunk anchoring itself as the branches and leaves dance in the wind and at times are thrown around by gale forces. At the heart of this movement lies a calming, meditative space where the puzzler can breath and catch their breath - Tatyana Murray

Rachel D. Vancelette
Vancelette Global Art Acquisitions
Instagram: @rvancelette
www.vanglobalart.com

ARTXPUZZLES: PUZZLES WITH PURPOSE
Instagram: @artxpuzzles
www.artxpuzzles.com