



## MY WEEK

# Alvin Hall



## Putting faith in friends for an art movement

I'm about to do something radical. Something that will be a decidedly visual and aesthetic challenge in my daily life. This is a spontaneous, from-the-gut decision. I know that if I don't do it now, I probably never will. I am thinking of this as my New Year's gift to myself as well as my New Year's prod to keep looking forward, thereby preventing myself from lapsing into a woulda, coulda, shoulda nostalgia.

During the recent holidays, friends who live in London called and I gave them a tour, using my iPad, of the art hanging in my New York apartment. After we had hung up from our lively conversation, I realised the art had not changed in at least a year. Work, travel, and the pandemic intervened.

Normally, I reinstall it every six months, sometimes every four. I've done this for as long as I've collected contemporary art. The reinstallations

inform and expand my mind and my eyes. I often see individual works in fresh or new contexts, in different dialogues with other works, and of equal usefulness, in ways that indicate I'm no longer interested in the work, that I've learned all I can from it. I've always said that when artwork becomes the equivalent of nice wallpaper, it is time to let it go.

I like a sparse installation and want each work to have 'enough space to breathe', as people say in the art world, but this year I'm jettisoning my aesthetic. I am doing a salon-style hanging on the longest wall in my apartment – an expanse 15.5 feet long by 10 feet high. Even as I type the words 'salon-style', I can feel the anxious, resistant knot forming in my stomach. While I'm not a minimalist, I have never liked having many different colours, forms, or textures in the same room. That aesthetic, which I do find visually fascinating, often feels a bit chaotic and claustrophobic to me.

I want the salon-style wall to be an elegant, fascinating, occasionally surprising combination of many of the abstract and figurative artworks I love, some pieces tucked in closets that I've not seen in years, and two fabric wall sculptures I recently acquired. I know what I want to achieve, but I also know that I'm definitely not the person who should

select and arrange the works or fix them on the wall. I would find the process deeply frustrating.

To get around this emotional barrier, I decided to ask two close friends who work in a gallery if they would do the installation for me. I half-jokingly said they could consider it an early birthday present. Luckily, they said yes – immediately and enthusiastically. I felt the knot in my stomach dissipate. When I told other friends about my plan, almost all made one of two statements, phrased as questions: 'How can you give up control and let other people organise your house, especially your artwork?' and 'What if you hate what they do?'

Neither of these issues are concerns. My friends' taste is quite similar to my own. Over the years I have admired the exhibitions and the way they were installed at the gallery where they work. And we've long joked about 'shaking up' my collection, just for the fun of it. I know they will see the artworks I've collected and their relationships to each other differently. It will be fascinating to see what they select and how they organise it.

I plan to have little involvement with the process and really look forward to the surprise. For me, the benefit will be seeing part of my collection through someone else's eyes. Just walking around my apartment will be a new and different journey every day. Given how 2021 has started, this feels like another type of self-care for these times.

### REAL-LIFE SUPERHERO

A friend who buys books for his store asked me if I had read *Superheroes Are Everywhere*, by Kamala Harris. He thought I would like the children's book and its message – and perhaps buy a stack of them as presents for friends. I decided to peruse the illustrations and then read the book. Her inspirational story is about young Kamala's search for and discovery of superheroes, people "who always make the world better, no matter what goes wrong... ready to do good at a moment's notice."

Her superheroes are the kind, thoughtful, helpful people she interacts with daily – her mother, sister, relatives, neighbours and teachers. But they are also people who serve as role models throughout her life – professors, lawyers, justices. It made me think of the healthcare workers who are putting themselves at risk to protect and care for people during this pandemic, and of Stacey Abrams and her campaign in Georgia that has brought political change in the US, when it is so sorely needed.

I also thought about the many young people who will see Kamala Harris become the first woman, the first person of colour, sworn in as Vice President of the United States and be inspired to see superhero possibilities in themselves. My friends, my family and I talk frequently about Harris, her life story, and what the 20 January inauguration will mean.

For all of them, for myself, and many people worldwide it will be a deeply gratifying manifestation of her book's core superhero message: "I promise to be the very best I can be."