

Stuck at home, these Boston artists are doing great things on Instagram

By **Cate McQuaid** Globe Correspondent, Updated April 2, 2020, 12:00 a.m.



William Van Beckum created an original work of art inspired by Canada's Cascade Mountain. COURTESY WILLIAM VAN BECKUM

Artist William Van Beckum seized being homebound as an opportunity to boost people's spirits on Instagram.

"Send me a DM with a particular landscape view that is memorable or important to you, and I'll make art out of it!" wrote Van Beckum, who makes work about the intersection of landscape

photography and social media. “We might not be able to get on a plane and visit these stunning places, but photography has the ability to transport us!”

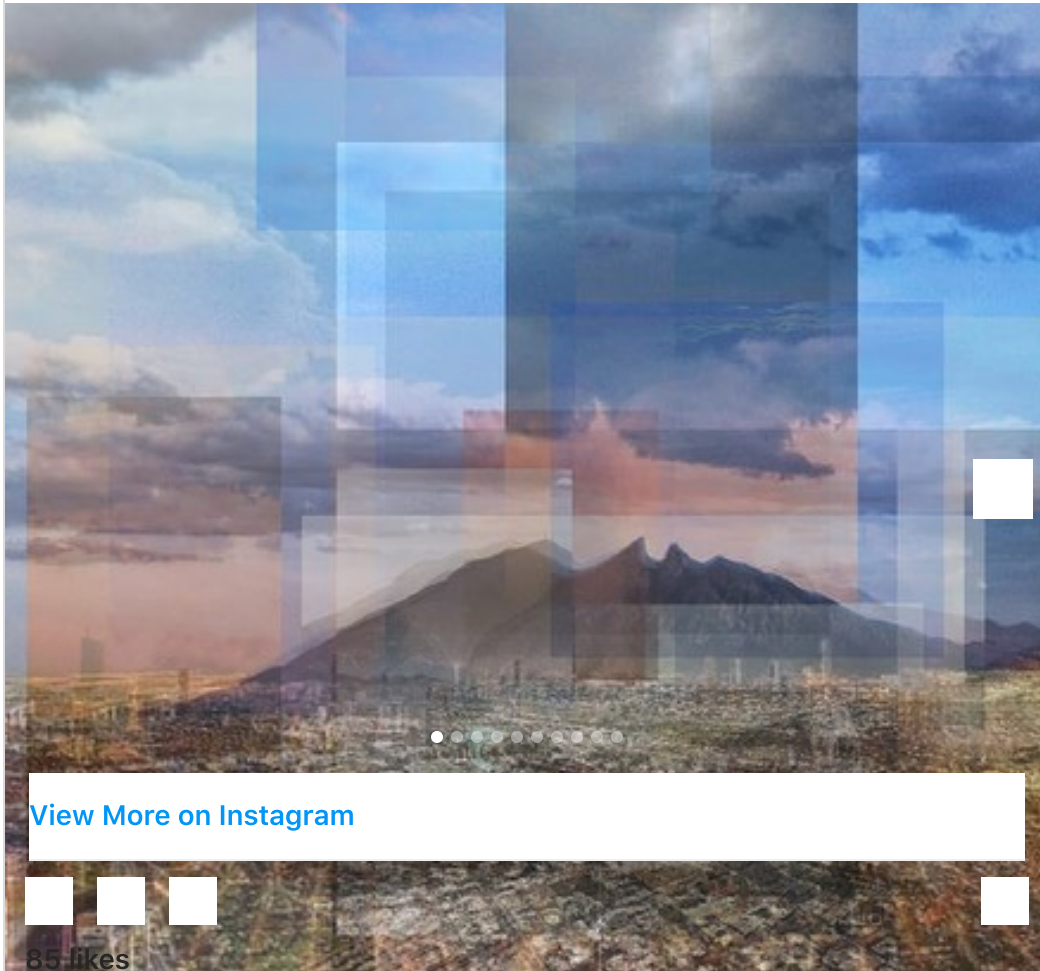
Van Beckum digitally builds familiar vistas out of several sources, from amateurs to Ansel Adams, compiling many visions into one and examining the community consciousness that defines landscape. In person, his prints are vast, and dissolve into pixels close up.

The first one he made after that Instagram post, a shimmering image of Cascade Mountain in Alberta, Canada, was posted recently to his feed ([@williamvanbeckum](#)). He also shares his own photographic experiments and proposed projects for his students at Wellesley College.



williamvanbeckum
The Great Outdoors

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85 likes

williamvanbeckum

Help me make some art in this strange time! Send me a DM with a particular landscape view that is memorable or important to you and I'll make art out of it! Make sure it's a place that has been frequently photographed so I have source material to work with (all of the source imagery for these compositions comes from social media and google image searches). We might not be able to get on a plane and visit these stunning places, but photography has the ability to transport us! [#scenicviewpoint](#)

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For visual artists, Instagram provides community, encouragement, and career advancement. For viewers, Instagram furnishes access to art and a personal connection to artists.

Six years ago, when another artist told Lavaughan Jenkins he should get on social media, he balked.

“Then, I imagined everything I wanted to get out of seeing an artist or their work,” said Jenkins, one of last year’s James and Audrey Foster Prize winners at the Institute of Contemporary Art.

He took to Instagram ([@lavaughanjenkins_studio](#)) to share his process as he builds sculptural figures purely out of paint. “It was a way to give people a window into my thoughts and show the experience,” he said.



lavaughanjenkins_studio
Boston, Massachusetts

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188 likes

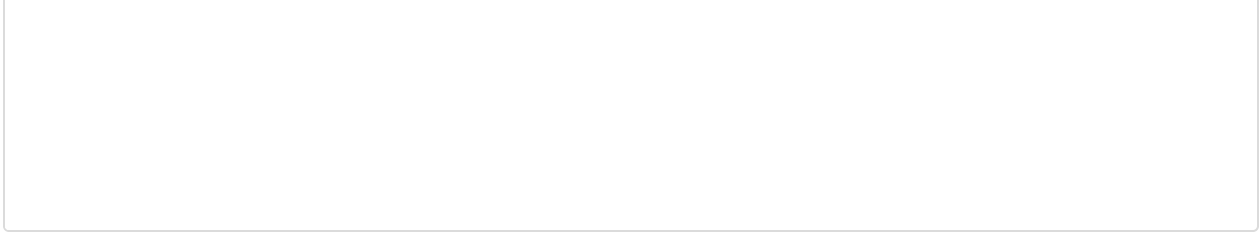
lavaughanjenkins_studio

Excited about these new paintings!! Dropping soon!!!!

🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥 #newwork #wip #oilpainting #sculpture #color
#contemporaryart #ss20 or #fw20 can't decide #staytuned #nycart
#bostonart #miamiart #laart #detroitart #chicagoart #montrealart

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Jenkins's warm, enthusiastic feed has propelled his career. Outside of Abigail Ogilvy Gallery, his Boston dealer, he said, "every show I've had over the last five years, galleries have reached out to me over Instagram. ... Which is crazy."

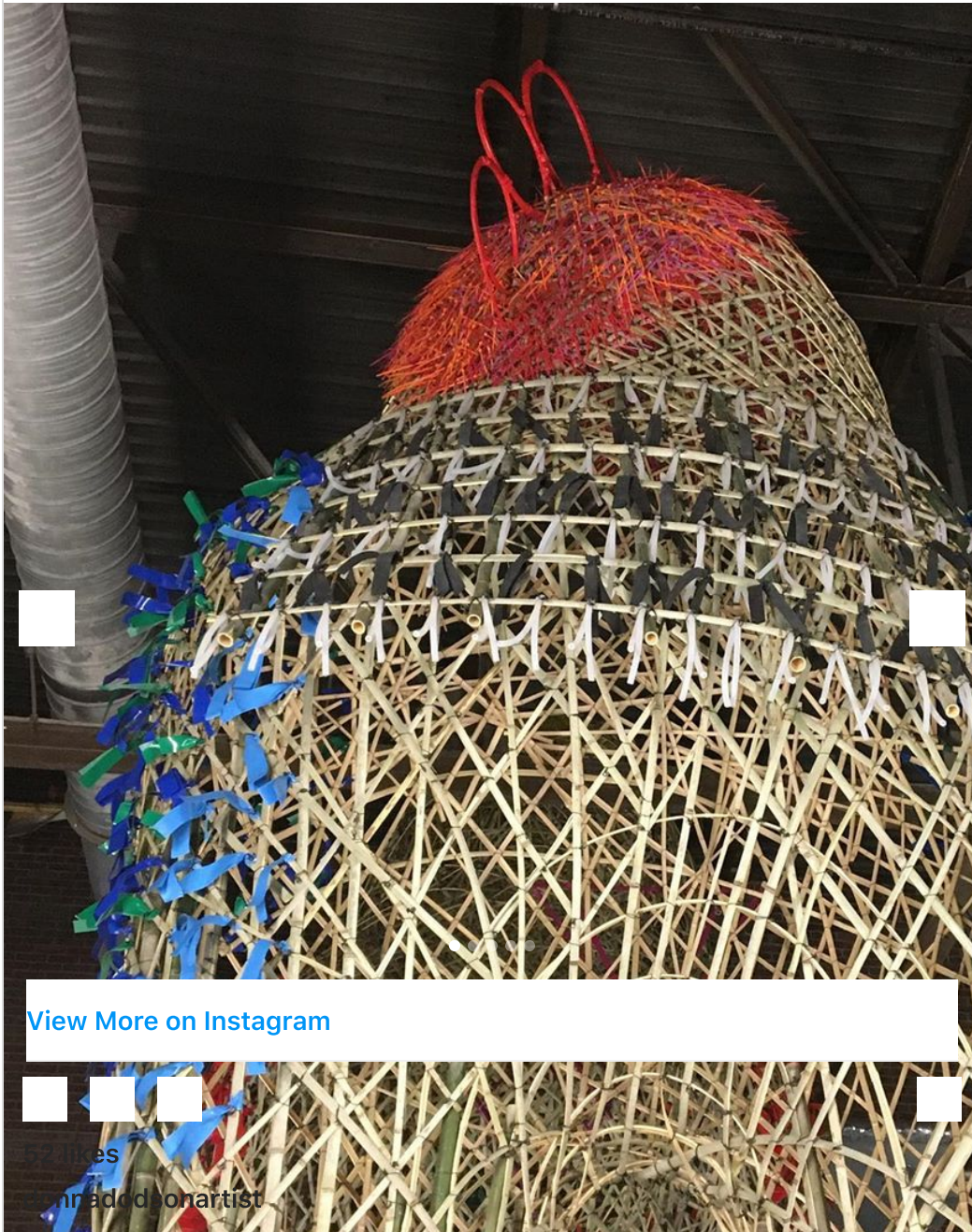
Sculptor Donna Dodson ([@DonnaDodsonArtist](#)) also brings followers into the studio to watch. She has been sharing photos of the pair of monumental pheasants she's working on with husband and collaborator Andy Moerlein. The project is a finalist for the Bloomberg Philanthropies Public Art Challenge in Camden, N.J.



donnadodsonartist

1,255 followers

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likes
@donnadodsonartist

The Phoenix Festival is done and ready to fly to Camden NJ. Stay tuned for opening day news... @anewviewcamden @chandlercoopersferry @cityofcamdengovernment @bloombergdotorg @andymoerlein @themythmakersblog

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While some artists focus on their own work, others mix it up. Painter Josh Jefferson ([@chicojefferson](#)) curates for Juxtapoz art magazine with the hashtag #juxsaturdayschool, and also posts images of his nervy collages and swoopy, gestural paintings to his feed. The combination has grown his platform to 143,000 followers.

“I post something I’m working on, then a cartoon or vintage TV,” Jefferson said. “I think people follow for the weird videos, and some for my work.”



chicojefferson
143.1k followers

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2,460 likes

chicojefferson

Portrait of my son 4x 5 feet cut and painted canvas on canvas. I can't help but oscillate between wanting to be a painter making big brush moves and then falling back on what is my normal M.O. collage making...

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Then there are artists, such as Katelyn Ledford ([@kedford](#)), whose work springs directly from social media. Ledford's buzzy, bendy, portrait-inspired paintings are all about online identity. Specifically, how women portray themselves and how their selfies are disseminated.

"I'm thinking about what is a portrait now in the 21st century," Ledford said.

She raids Instagram for source material and recycles images. "The work has absurdity and a bit of cynicism," Ledford said. "Am I complicit, or helping?"



kedford
3,982 followers

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304 likes

kedford



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Instagram works best for Internet-ready art — dynamic, eye-catching paintings that look sleek flattened on a backlit screen. But Ledford counsels against believing what you see.

“Seeing art in person is so necessary, and unfortunately social media has hurt that. People make work that looks great on a phone or in a thumbnail,” she said, “and you see it in person and it kind of falls apart.”

Brett Angell diaristically shares ([@bangell](#)) his surrealist dioramas in cigarette packages and paintings mounted inside recycled boxes. Not everything translates well on a screen; there’s no sense of the small scale, for instance. What you do get is the fey, fantastical tone of his work. For Angell, Instagram is a way to get his work seen. “I’m not great at self-promotion,” he said. “I’m somewhat of a loner, as some artists are. This is an opportunity to get my stuff out there.”



bangell
710 followers

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[View More on Instagram](#)

39 likes

bangell

New one. "Thin Air" 2020 #gouachepainting #ufo #atlanticsalmon
#handmade #boxframe #painting #seascape #maine #contemporaryart

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These days, some artists are playing catch-up with canceled or postponed exhibitions. Painter Conley Harris ([@conley_harris](#)), who has put off his April show at Laconia Gallery, has posted lyrical garden paintings from that exhibition. Photographer Mary Kocol ([@marykocol](#)) has shared the stark yet lush floral still lifes from her March (through March 28) show at Gallery NAGA, (which is open by appointment) alongside shots of spring blossoms.

Others use Instagram to vent about the strange circumstance we're in. Illustrator Karl Stevens ([@karlstevensart](#)), who has drawn cartoons for the New Yorker, posts dark cartoons about COVID-19. Conceptual and mixed-media artist Marlon Forrester ([@marlonforrester](#)) has been recording his anxiety-laden dreams as drawings and sharing them on Instagram.

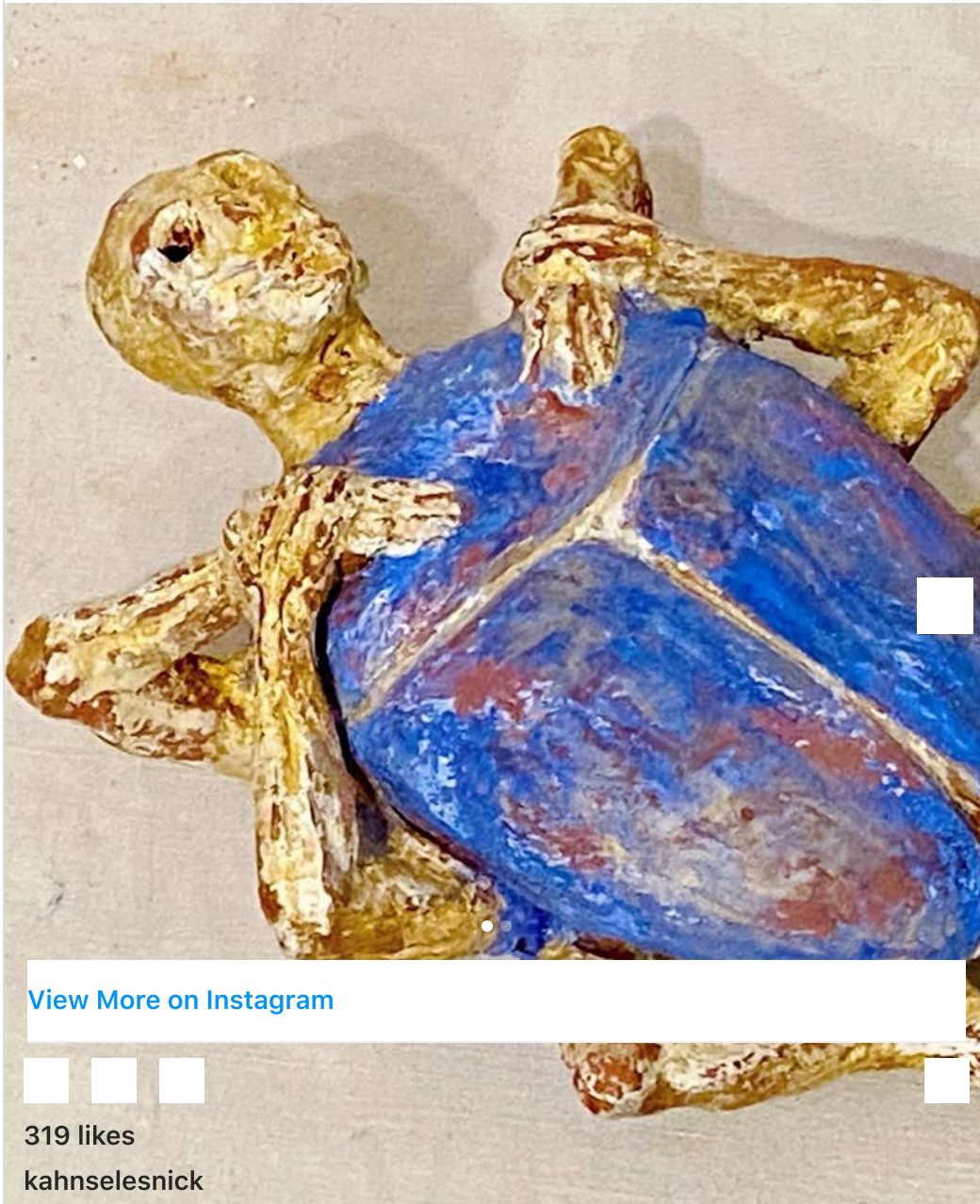
The team known as Kahn & Selesnick ([@kahnselesnick](#)) who divide their time between Truro and New York and stage theatrical photographic series in the dunes of Provincetown, are preparing several exhibitions. Their elaborate photographic narratives depicting post-apocalyptic worlds seem eerily prescient. In one, plague is spread by bats and pangolins.

Their retrospective at the Provincetown Art Association and Museum is still scheduled to open in May. Earlier shows on their calendar have gone virtual. On Instagram, they share images of some of the handmade sculptural objects that appear in their work.



kahnseslesnick
8,884 followers

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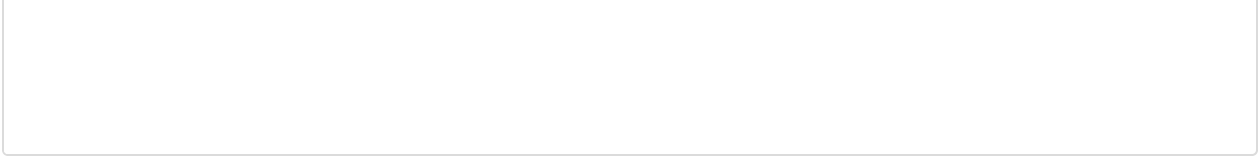
319 likes

kahnseslesnick

"The Death Beetle" , when I started this 3 months ago inspired by an ancient Egyptian stone carving of a Humanoid scarab Beetle , I didn't realize that my changing the ball of dung to a virus molecule held by death , it would be so apt for today. The original scarab beetle god is all about transformations in the cycle of life from the sun to the earth to death and back again to fertility. So I take it a sign of hope we will rise up again transmuting the loss into newfound fertility for the planet. At least at this point the Chinese are taking seriously the eating of wild bats and pangolins and everything else beautiful will only bring them suffering so there's some progress at last. Less emissions everywhere is giving the planet some time to heal. But I was a bit frightened looking at my beetle drawing today realizing it was the corona virus I had drawn , and the dung ball is the sun in the ancient myth so the name corona is indeed spot on. #scarab #dungbeetle #ceramic #drawing #terracotta. All for our upcoming show at Robischon Gallery in Denver. Opening April 2nd if the Gods are willing.

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“Our careers and livelihood will take a huge hit from this unless we can mobilize our international fan base via platforms like Instagram so ... we will be posting a lot of content and hoping to engage people everywhere,” wrote Nicholas Kahn in an e-mail.

For artists, Instagram has long been a connector. These days, it may be a lifeline.



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