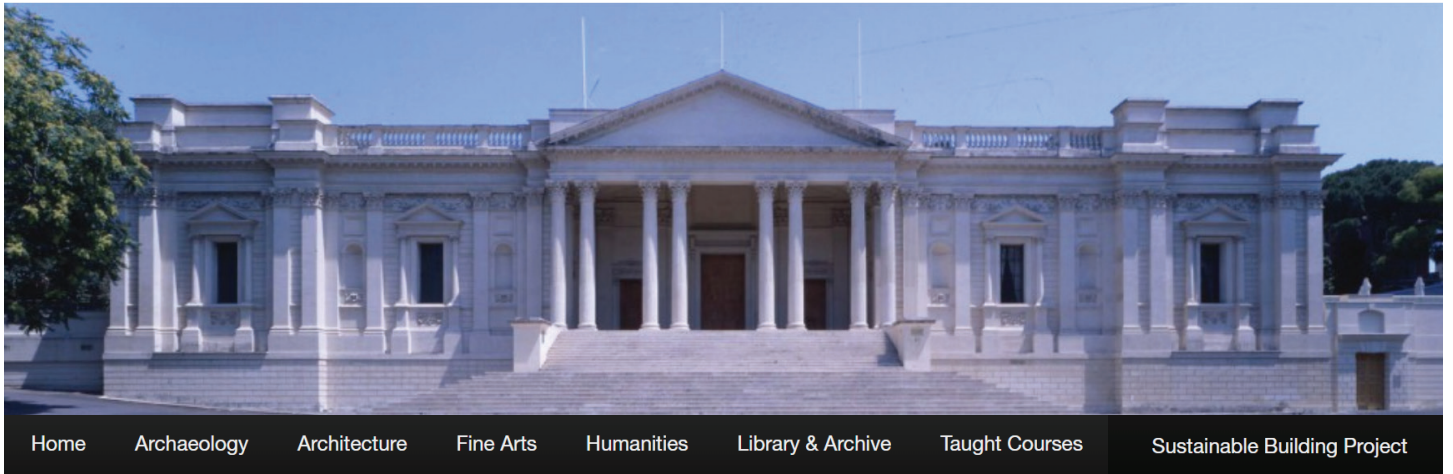


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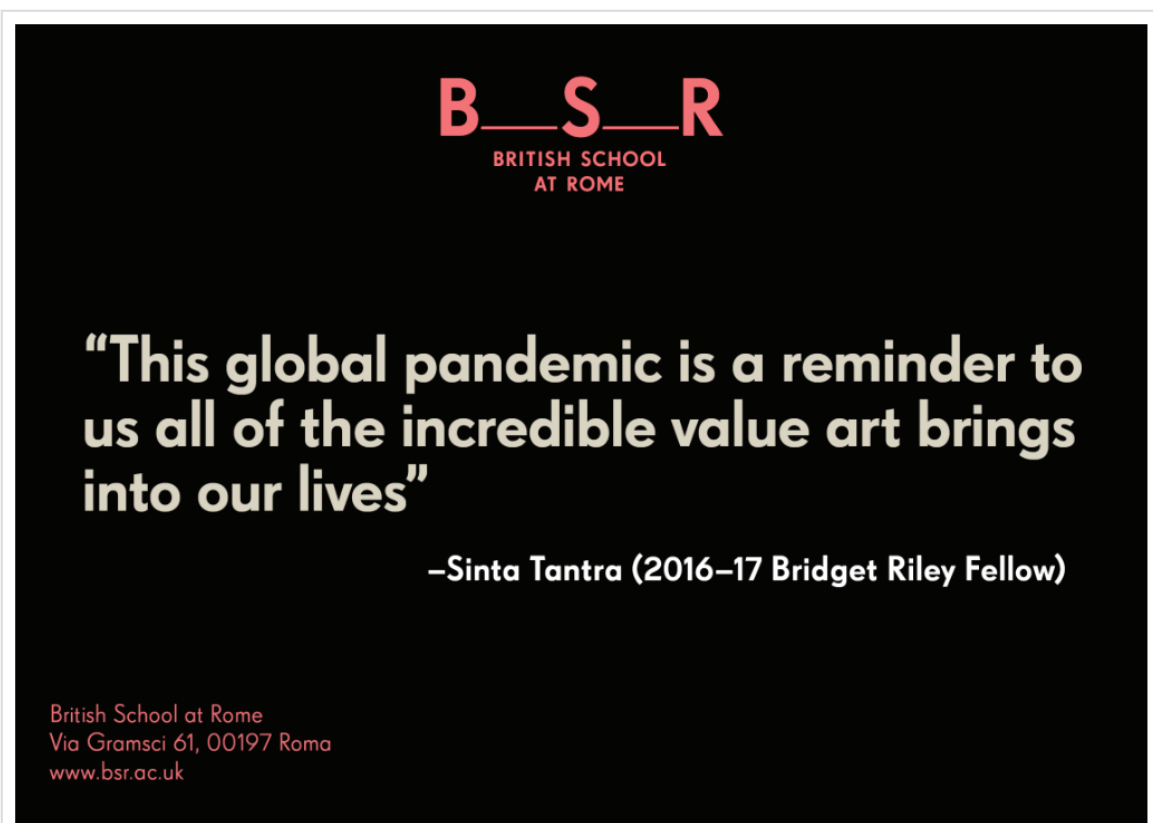
The blog of the British School at Rome



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Letters Post Covid-19: Sinta Tantra

Our Visual Art Residency and Programme Curator, Marta Pellerini, asked a series of artists to imagine and explore new ways of sharing and thinking about art in the aftermath of Covid-19. The following text is by artist Sinta Tantra (2016–17 Bridget Riley Fellow).



Just as the lockdown began, I was about to open a new solo exhibition, [Modern Times](#), curated by Guillaume Vandame at Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery in London. It felt chaotic in the week leading up to the opening in mid-March. However, I believed we had to push on, make the most of things and install the show as originally planned. What made it challenging was the significant amount of site-specific works we had to install — a pink vinyl on the glass roof; a live birdsong projected from a speaker on top of a tree; archival film footage; a painted mural on the staircase; a sculpture garden on the terrace.

As other London galleries were cancelling their private views that week, Kristin, my gallerist, decided that we would have an online opening using Instagram Live. We held an informal dinner with the team, and that evening, I cooked a Balinese dinner for all. The next day the reality of lockdown was finally sinking in, and without an end in sight, I felt the urgent need to document the show with more than just photography. I thought of an online video in the format of a [virtual walk-through tour](#) which would give viewers from home a more intimate experience. Once uploaded, the video gradually gained momentum online and was featured in several digital publications including [Wallpaper](#) and [Elle Decoration](#). Sadly the exhibition never opened to the public, but it did curiously seem to have self-generated a virtual life of its own.

Although friends have suggested that I should present virtual tours for future exhibitions, I think we can all agree that there is nothing quite like being face to face with an artwork — for me, it's all about materiality. In particular, there is a shade of blue that I use in my paintings that just cannot be picked up by the camera. When the focus of the art is colour, perception, and its relationship to space and architecture, it's essential to see the artwork with your own eyes rather than through a screen.

I am lucky that my studio is at home in my flat in North London. Since lockdown, I've been able to work consistently with my core team, producing paintings and developing new ideas for public artworks. I've started daily routines such as yoga and running, staying in touch with friends and family, and have even begun a little herb garden on my balcony which has inspired me to try new recipes and become friendlier with neighbours.



— Photograph: courtesy by the artist

Like other artists, many of my upcoming projects have been either postponed or cancelled. In some cases, the impact of COVID has forced me to change the work entirely. One example is with my public art commission in Treviso, Italy, where I was to create an interactive installation in the courtyard of the [Gallerie delle Prigioni](#). Unfortunately today, audience participation is now seen as a contagion rather than an act of communion or togetherness. As an alternative, I designed a [Love Seat](#), so that two participants can sit precisely at one metre apart — the exact measurement of social distancing in Italy. Has COVID somehow transformed this work into something more or less exciting? As artists, do we purposefully include the realities of COVID within our practice or seek to avoid them?

This global pandemic is a reminder to us all of the incredible value art brings into our lives, especially in these trying times. And as the world shifts with the additional impact of Black Lives Matter, I foresee the dramatic and unsettling transformations that lie ahead of us. Undoubtedly the world will never be the same, but we as artists and individuals have the power to be part of a positive change should we wish. I am scared, but at the same time hopeful — in fact, more hopeful than I have ever been.

Sinta Tantra (2016 –17 Bridget Riley Fellow).

The text is part of the project [Letters post Covid-19](#) by BSR Visual Art Residency Residency and Programme Curator Marta Pellerini. Read Marta's introduction to the project [here](#).