

## Photography in the Time of Covid

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Five years after the Covid-19 pandemic started, a rotation of photographs at the Getty Museum reflects on a time when the world shut down, but new ways of seeing emerged

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*Untitled* from the series *The Way We Live Now*, 2020-21, Judy Fiskin.  
Inkjet print. Getty Museum. © Judy Fiskin

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**Editor's Note**

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The global health crisis that began in early 2020 disrupted every aspect of our lives, changing how we worked, learned, traveled, shopped, socialized, and relaxed.

This selection from the Museum's Photographs Collection presents just nine works made during the COVID-19 pandemic by four artists, all with ties to Los Angeles. I wanted to see how lockdown may have encouraged these artists to find different ways to work.

The stillness of each of the photographs, coupled with the spare hang of this installation, is intended to create a space for contemplation—inviting viewers to reflect on the pandemic as a universally shared experience. Discover how these artists were inspired through a few of the images featured in this rotation, which will be on view in the Museum West Pavilion, Gallery W006, until September 22, 2025.



*Untitled* from the series *The Way We Live Now*, 2020-21, Judy Fiskin.  
Inkjet print. Getty Museum. © Judy Fiskin

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## ***Untitled*, 2020-21, Judy Fiskin**

Unable to travel during the pandemic, Judy Fiskin began viewing real estate websites, taking screen shots of staged interiors that she subsequently altered digitally to improve what she perceived to be some of the less successful efforts to appeal to buyers. About these six photographs from the series *The Way We Live Now*, Fiskin recalled: “A few months into the pandemic, I was trying to figure out how to make work without leaving the house. I came across a real estate website that consisted mostly of images of interiors. Suddenly I had thousands of photos of rooms, furniture, and decor at my disposal. Since they were captured digitally, I could change them however I liked. I made the rooms emptier, stranger, more uncanny or off-kilter—all qualities that I’ve explored in my earlier work.”



*(The grainy sound of water)* from the series *Aria*, 2023, Soo Kim. Hand-cut inkjet print. Getty Museum. © Soo Kim

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### ***(The grainy sound of water)*, 2023, Soo Kim**

Moved by the terminal diagnosis of a friend, Soo Kim created images of a pair of female hands (her own) arranging a bouquet of flowers to memorialize the acts of touching and comforting that were radically reduced during the pandemic due to our fear of infection. She shared the following thoughts: “Flowers are used to celebrate, mourn, and commemorate things in between. Their beauty reminds us of the cyclical qualities of nature and the impermanence of life. This work is from a series of photographs in which I arrange and rearrange, cut out and leave whole, a bouquet of real and artificial flowers in primary colors. It was inspired by Bas Jan Ader’s 1974 film *Primary Time*, the pandemic, and an earned understanding that our time is finite.”



Built in 1915. Renovated in 1966 from the series *On Being Here*, 2021, printed 2022, Amir Zaki. Inkjet print. Getty Museum. Purchased with funds provided by the Photographs Council. © Amir Zaki

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## ***Built in 1915. Renovated in 1966, 2021, Amir Zaki***

Finding solace in early morning drives to dozens of piers along the coast of California at dawn, Amir Zaki merged separately photographed views of the structure atop each pier and the water below to introduce an element of dysfunction. The artist shared the following reflection about his series *On Being Here*: “During the pandemic, I wanted to escape. I found myself drawn to piers. They represent the furthest point one can go by foot without leaving the continental land mass. Piers are periodically damaged by weather. My photographs depict piers in an unconventional way. They show a compression of time and an expansion of space. They are not momentary captures. They are layered recordings of visual information that unfold over a substantial period of time.”



*Sunseeker*, 2021, Jeff Wall. Inkjet print. Getty Museum. © Jeff Wall

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## ***Sunseeker*, 2021, Jeff Wall**

A part-time resident of Los Angeles, Jeff Wall captured the isolation and emptiness that many experienced during the early months of lockdown and social distancing in this image of a figure seated atop an automobile. Although not made in direct response to the pandemic, the image is striking for the zenlike pose of the elegantly dressed, somewhat androgynous figure with face tilted upward toward the sun; for the cropping and stark white background that transform the car into an island; and for its oblique reference to car culture as a defining aspect of Los Angeles. ■

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