



Once again: Art as Investment

In the Fall of 2021, the Art Fairs in New York, Basel, London and Paris are opening again

If you peruse Andy Warhol's 800-page diary, which is not an exciting read on every page, you will be startled by at least one of his remarks: How can an artist consider himself a major talent if he is unsuccessful? **Artistic significance and commercial success were pretty much separate topics in the discussion of art until the early 1980s.** The former was what mattered, the latter was at times almost shameful. Who among the younger artists wanted to be a Botero or a Chagall? As so often, Warhol picked up on something that was a whim, a crazy notion in the minds of particularly creative people. Since then, over the past forty years, the assessment of success has flipped by almost 180 degrees. "How to Become a Successful Artist" is the title of a recent book by Magnus Resch, in which the author begins by announcing how successful he himself has become. Before writing it, he interviewed more than 1,000 art market professionals. Not surprisingly, the book cites New York as the "Holy Land" where an artist must seek his or her fortune. Out of a total of 300,000 aspiring artists, only 240 attained substantial success, and they found it primarily in that city. Moreover, the vast majority of this final selection made it by managing to establish contact with one of the few top galleries that were successful worldwide. Their headquarters are still in New York. **Most of the successful artists become known through New York exhibitions, and an apparently large number of art advisors recommend acquisitions from these venues.** By this route, works that are initially not crowned with success are adopted into the collections of around 6,000 personalities around the world who more or less consistently spend \$100,000 or more per year. In this sense, the art market remains small; in our view, the whole of it almost resembles a community. For the scarcely increasing total of all sales has only reached around \$60 billion since 2015, which corresponds to the annual turnover of a single large company. So is visual art ultimately not an investment? Is it neither significant nor a success? **No art deserving of the name aspires to be money, or wants to exist for no other purpose than to make money, no matter how often the idea of a business plan for artists is raised.** An analogy with sex is pertinent: No matter how frequent it is or how rare, no matter how strongly the media are involved, there is still love — a subject that receives a dangerous amount of attention in the tabloid press.

The same is true of “female choice” or “LGBTQ+”: In giving the burning topics of the day our dedicated attention, and in personally seeing to it that women and so-called marginal groups receive respect and compensation, we easily forget a matter called spirituality, which can hardly be appreciated in numerical terms. Art, understood in this way, is an investment that defies calculation, a highly emotional asset. Alongside the monetary aspect, which has come to dominate the discussion, art offers a value that is almost sacred. It still functions as the soul of a culture and the conscience of a nation. Here criticism is still possible, for not everyone wants to see Dürer’s praying hands or Mao’s head. Over the centuries, art, in league with a museum culture dedicated to collecting, preserving and disseminating cultural values, had the primary purpose of conveying to living generations memories of their predecessors, no matter how challenging these memories might have been, as well as informing them of their own history. **Art is money, but it is also, above all, cultural heritage; it is participation and happiness, and also protest, indictment and melancholy.** It comes into being when money, food, procreation as pleasure or cheap diversion are no longer a driving force. Art may end up embracing or comforting or accusing us. In a world that continues to be riven by so-called class differences, steep social chasms between high and low, rich and poor, and that is marked as well by a multitude of conflicting cultures, art must now prove itself more than ever. In the view of the dogma of “diversity,” works of art can now be mistakes, politically or morally wrong. Restitution claims, on the other hand, often arise from serious flaws in the process of acquisition. The most important number in the book about the success of art producers — let us assume that the figure is correct — has nothing to do with complex ideas, but only with the percentage of genuine art lovers and art investors compared to the much larger number of occasional art buyers: they each amount to only 0.25%. **We consider both passionate enjoyment and serious investment, preferably in tandem, to be highly future-oriented activities.** No investment is more beautiful than investment in art.

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