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## (Con)Artistic Strategies for How to Succeed in the Art Market. Orson Welles' *F for Fake* and Banksy's *Exit through the Gift shop*

### ABSTRACT

In today's fast-paced art market environment, uncertainty is rampant as to whether works of art are of lasting value, especially contemporary ones. In popular imagination, this gives rise to the fear that so many an artist could be nothing more than an impostor who is primarily interested in enriching himself. Within cultural representation, the artist's authenticity and originality thus become the most important resources for building trust. The examination of Orson Welles' *F for Fake* and Banksy's *Exit through the Gift Shop* shows how artists articulate their own authenticity, originality, credibility, and thus their trustworthiness – and how they distinguish themselves from counterfeiters, impostors, and fraudsters. Furthermore, it

becomes obvious that both artists and impostors – at least as they are represented – (must) use similar strategies in order to be successful. Both films also reveal tectonic changes in the art market from the 1970s until today: whereas in the past, market access used to be obtained exclusively via experts and specialists, who had to be convinced or deceived by means of outstanding craftsmanship, their influence on today's contemporary art market appears to have diminished. Instead, the purposeful generation of attention through spectacle, the intelligent utilization of social relationships to key figures and the skilful manipulation of the media have become indispensable. This results in the fact that art forgers now can sell their own "original" and "authentic" forgeries at notable prices.



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*Art is a lie that makes us realize truth*  
Pablo Picasso

*Even the real Mirós look like fakes*  
Elmyr de Hory

On occasion, the art market executes almost incomprehensible twists and turns. It is difficult to understand the pricing at times, e.g. when the painting *Salvator Mundi* (around 1500) is sold for 450 million dollars, although it is not even clarified whether it was actually created by Leonardo da Vinci.<sup>1</sup> In the realm of contemporary art, the market's game is even more lunatic when, for example, a banana that has been affixed with duct tape to a wall at Art Basel, Miami, immediately scores around 120,000 US dollars (Maurizio Cattelan, *Comedian*, 2019). Sociologist Franz Schultheis, who undertook "ethnographic field work"<sup>2</sup> with regard to pricing in the art market, also speaks of "highly volatile ups and downs in the contemporary art market",<sup>3</sup> a "naturally manifested uncertainty of the pricing",<sup>4</sup> moreover, an "ambivalent relationship between art and

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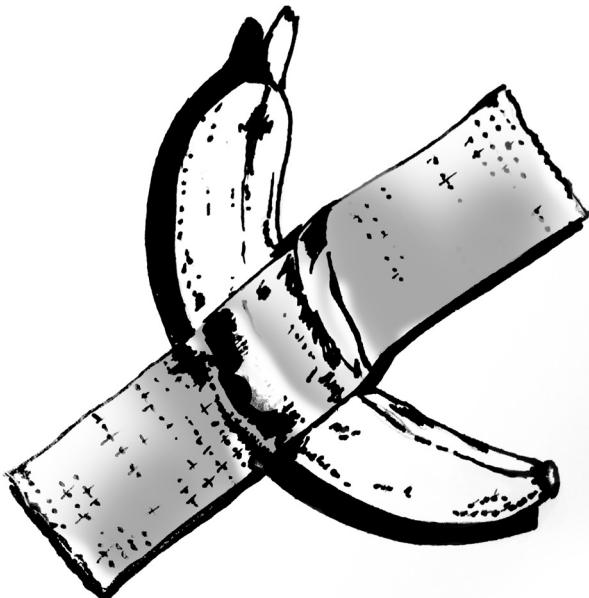
1 Professor Dr. Frank Zöllner, a leading expert in the field of Renaissance paintings, maintains that there is virtually no evidence for Leonardo da Vinci having painted the painting in question depicting *Salvator Mundi*. Cf. Franz Zöllner, "Salvator Mundi": Der teuerste Flop der Welt?, in *Die Zeit*, 3/1 (2019), no. 02/2019. (URL: <https://www.zeit.de/2019/02/salvator-mundi-leonardo-da-vinci-gemaelde-verkauf>).

2 Franz Schultheis, On the price of priceless goods. Sociological observations on and around Art Basel, in *Journal for Art Market Studies*, no. 01/2017, 68. (URL: <https://fokum-jams.org/index.php/jams/article/view/7/22>).

3 Ibid., 80.

4 Ibid., 72.

money".<sup>5</sup> Due to the volatility of the art market, the fast turnover of art trends as well as a rapid cascade of art coups, uncertainty arises on the part of museums, art dealers and collectors: are the premium-priced works of lasting value?



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Within popular imagination, the outlined constellation gives rise to the fear that artists could finally turn out to be conmen who follow the fraudulent calculation to make as much money as possible, as quickly as they can. Thus *The New York Times* considered it necessary to publish "A (Grudging) Defense of the \$120,000 banana",<sup>6</sup> not only because it was "the perfect weapon to those who think that contemporary art is one big prank."<sup>7</sup> According to the Times article, nowadays existed "a dismaying common belief that all artists are con artists, and that museums, collectors and critics are either dupes or hustlers."<sup>8</sup> Regarding the *Salvator Mundi*, Franz Zöllner explains the dissent between experts and the auction house by pointing out that it is simply a matter of a great amount of money

– an estimated 20 million US dollars could be demanded for a painting elaborated by Da Vinci's employees, but perhaps 200 million for a painting by Leonardo as sole author.<sup>9</sup> It has the appearance of fraud, should a collective workshop work have subsequently been turned into an individual artwork to inflate the price. The premium-priced banana seems outrageous because no one other than an established artist could offer this *assemblage* at such a cost – not that the idea of elevating a fruit to art is particularly novel, as the *New York Times* article points to Yoko Ono's *Apple* (1966). So it is quite obviously

5 Ibid., 71.

6 Jason Farago, A (Grudging) Defense of the \$120,000 Banana, in *The New York Times*, 6/12 (2019). (URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/08/arts/design/a-critics-defense-of-cattelan-banana-.html>).

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Cf. Interview with Frank Zöllner: Das Rätsel um Leonardo da Vincis "Salvator Mundi", in *Monopol Magazin*, 14/11 (2017). (URL: <https://www.monopol-magazin.de/das-raetsel-um-leonardo-da-vincis-salvator-mundi>).

an artist's reputation that determines his or her market value. Sociologist Schultheis confirms by quoting a study that states "reputation as a mechanism for reducing uncertainty in the art market"<sup>10</sup> and he agrees that the "pricing requires a social construction of plausible consensus based on trustworthy and apparently credible references, even though the consensus is often only a fiction".<sup>11</sup> If there is indeed a prevailing opinion that so many an artist could turn out to be an impostor, as the *New York Times* wrote, an artist's reputation is a very fragile foundation to rely on. In the situation described, artist authenticity and originality become all-important resources for building trust.

Within the unwritten contract of trust with collectors, gallery owners and museums, artists reflect on their own role by trying to distinguish themselves from fraudsters, forgers and swindlers. Not infrequently, however, they themselves also flirt with imposture.

The suspenseful relation between artist and impostor is revealingly negotiated within two (mock-)documentaries that are (self-)portraits of artists at the same time: Orson Welles' *F for Fake* (*Verités et Mensonges*, 1973) and Banksy's *Exit through the Gift Shop* (2010).

Guiding questions for the following examination of both films will be: how does practice and (self-)representation of artists differ from that of fraudsters, forgers and impostors? How do artists, in contrast to the latter, articulate their own authenticity and originality? Are there parallels in how artists as well as conmen succeed in accessing art market, do they use similar strategies? And, why do artists often like to flirt with imposture, fraud and swindle?

## Orson Welles' *F for Fake* (1973)

Right at the beginning of the film, Orson Welles himself appears as a mysterious figure at a train station,<sup>12</sup> dressed in a cape, wearing a wide-brimmed hat and gloves. Before the eyes of an astonished boy, Welles makes a coin disappear and magically turns it into a key. Welles then mentions, according to Jean Eugène Robert-Houdin, the "greatest magician of all time",<sup>13</sup> saying that a magician is only an actor, an actor playing the role of a

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10 Franz Schultheis: On the price of priceless goods. Sociological observations on and around Art Basel, in *Journal for Art Market Studies* 01/2017, 69. (URL: <https://fokum-jams.org/index.php/jams/article/view/7/22>)  
Cf. Jens Beckert/Jörg Rössel, Kunst und Preise. Reputation als Mechanismus der Reduktion von Ungewissheit am Kunstmarkt, in *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, (2004), no. 56, 32-50.

11 Franz Schultheis: On the price of priceless goods. Sociological observations on and around Art Basel, in *Journal for Art Market Studies*, vol. 1, no.1, 2017, 72. (URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.23690/jams.v1i1.7>).

12 This happens at a train station, of all places: Welles hereby refers to the illusionist power of cinema, since the spectators of *L'arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat* (directed by Auguste and Louis Lumière), who had gathered at the Grand Café in Paris on 28 December 1895, were said to have jumped out of their seats in panic at the sight of the locomotive apparently approaching them. Cf. Vicky Lebeau, *Psychoanalysis and Cinema. The Play of Shadows* (London: Columbia Univ. Press, 2006), 1.

13 Quoted from the film, as all further quotes without separate references.

magician. With this, Welles has drawn more than just one parallel between magic and film art.

His essay film is a portrait of forgers, but at the same time a self-portrait of Welles himself and, last but not least, an unreliable first-person narrative.<sup>14</sup> Right at the beginning, Welles' (narrative) voice calls on the viewer from offstage to be careful not to be deceived. The director, however, will not only verbally lie to the viewer, but also by means of the supposedly "objective" cinematic apparatus. He will expose these lies again, comment on them, play a confusing game with his viewers. Thus, he places himself in front of a canvas brought by assistants, only to find himself surprisingly in a studio, by means of a filmic editing manoeuvre. Afterwards he openly admits that this is a movie about magic tricks and deception. Now, at the latest, it becomes obvious which subject Welles has chosen: the tension between art and deceit – and the difficulty of distinguishing between the two of them.

Welles asserts that almost all stories are lies in one way or another, with which he highlights the special nature of fiction.<sup>15</sup> But this story here, Welles affirms, is not a lie. Everything the viewer will encounter in the next hour will be the absolute truth. The fact that Welles had just described himself as a charlatan casts doubt on this.

## Elmyr de Hory – brilliant forger and a victim of circumstances?

Then Welles switches over to his first main protagonist: Elmyr de Hory. The writer Clifford Irving, who wrote his biography (*Fake!*, 1969), calls de Hory the "greatest art forger of our time".

*F for Fake* suggests that it was the difficult circumstances of his life that made Elmyr de Hory a counterfeiter. The film lets the swindler himself explain that he was interned in Europe as a Hungarian Jew, and that fortunately he managed to escape. Afterwards, he lived illegally in the United States for twelve years. His work as a forger remained undiscovered for more than two decades. According to the film, a highly respected museum accommodates numerous neo-Impressionist paintings, all of which are by de Hory.<sup>16</sup> But how could this have happened?

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14 Film scholar Monika Fludernik considers the presence of first-person narrators to be a prerequisite for so-called "unreliable narration" (cf. Monika Fludernik, *Towards a Natural Narratology* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 213). Here, first-person narrators give a subjectively distorted, even dishonest view of things. In feature films, their "unreliable narrative" is then usually confronted with an objective viewpoint that invalidates their lies – not so in *F for Fake*.

15 Swiss philosopher and writer Peter Bieri designates as a "paradox of fiction" the fact that fiction can combine internal experiences, the real and the imagined into a consistent whole (cf. Peter Bieri, *Eine Erzählung schreiben und verstehen* (Basel: Schwabe, 2012), 17).

16 It may seem surprising that museums should lack the expertise to distinguish an original from a forgery. But if we believe the art historian Hubertus Butin, every major museum has forgeries in its collection,

According to de Hory, museum directors, collectors and art dealers cannot differentiate between real and fake. Welles points out that there have always been conmen. What is new, however, is the emergence of a global art market, and with it comes expertise. If we believe Welles, experts are the oracles of modern times, the value of a work of art depends on their reports. Because of their powerful position within the market system, ingenious counterfeiters like de Hory, who are able to deceive them, turn into heroes who we secretly admire for their audacity and skills.<sup>17</sup>



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Elmyr de Hory explains then that he believes art dealers are actually crooks. The forger, it is said, earned only little from his copies. The dealers, conversely, made profits of “100 percent and more”. As long as experts and collectors only believe in the authenticity of the pieces and buy, so the attitude of art dealers, everything is just fine.<sup>18</sup>

De Hory tells us that he initially wanted to paint his own pictures, but it proved completely impossible for him to sell one of his paintings.<sup>19</sup> If he was broke, he states succinctly, he just painted a Modigliani. Media Scientist Heinz B. Heller summarizes approvingly how de Hory's unsigned “Modiglianis” became “real”: through the regime of the art market, whose laws of value are determined by experts and the demand of buyers.<sup>20</sup>

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they are offered to every auction house, to some of them even daily. Butin is certain: never have so many fake paintings been produced as today. Cf. Hubertus Butin, Ich sehe jede Woche eine neue Fälschung, Interview by U. Knöfel, in *Der Spiegel*, no. 11, 7/3 (2020), 122. Cf. also: Hubertus Butin, *Kunstfälschung. Das betrügliche Objekt der Begierde* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2020).

- 17 The special ability to deceive and embarrass experts also provides them with an audience. And, once their fraud has been unveiled, they also find buyers. Thus forgers like de Hory and Wolfgang Beltracchi can sell their works at considerable prices. Butin complains that counterfeits are trivialized. This also happened to Beltracchi, who was eventually convicted. Talkmasters invited him to their shows and thus offered him platforms that some artists would love to have. Cf. ibid.
- 18 Linus Reichlin formulates it as follows in his “Instructions for counterfeiters”: in the art world, no one has any interest in buying a forged painting. But if it happens anyway – and everyone would take this risk – the buyers are absolutely not interested in the forgery becoming public. Cf. Linus Reichlin, Anleitung für Fälscher. Wenn Händler, Sammler und Kunstmäzene kooperieren, gelingt der Coup, in *Reportagen*, no. 8 (Bern, 2013), 83.
- 19 By the way, *F for Fake* is revealingly inconsistent in this respect: elsewhere in the film de Hory says he sold his own works for ten to fifteen dollars.
- 20 Cf. Heinz B. Heller, Orson Welles und/oder Vérités et mensonges/F for Fake, in: Michael Lommel et al. (ed.), *Surrealismus und Film* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2008), 81.

An anecdote about Marcel Vertés, which Welles recounts, underlines that talented painters who lack originality are virtually forced to forge: when Vertés offered his own paintings, one of them reminded the gallery owner stylistically of Toulouse-Lautrec's brushwork. The prospective buyer then urged Vertés to pass the painting off as a genuine Lautrec. In *F for Fake*, the overall impression created is that de Hory was downright exploited – a surprising change of perspective.

## What is “authenticity” in art?

In depicting Elmyr de Hory's controversial “career”, Welles stylizes the art forger as a genius, claiming that when one of his falsifications was presented to Kees van Dongen, the Fauvist swore that he had painted it himself. De Hory prides himself on having a more confident brushstroke than Henri Matisse. Hereby he implicitly poses the question of what constitutes the specific quality of a “true” painting, suggesting that his imitations are superior to the originals in terms of craftsmanship. With this, he rearticulates Welles' central question of what distinguishes the forger from the artist.

Elmyr de Hory claims as well that if a painting only hangs in a museum long enough, it becomes a real work of art. But if counterfeits are exhibited in an art context and they move us, is our feeling then also “wrong”? The questioning is becoming ever more complex. For then Elmyr de Hory paints a portrait of Michelangelo in oil, signs the painting with the signature of Orson Welles, and unceremoniously tosses the painting into a fireplace. Welles names Michelangelo an art forger and mentions that his counterfeiting was (and is) considered a work of art, explaining that the Renaissance artist used smoke to make his works appear more aged. Again, Welles questions the dividing line between artwork and forgery. And he suggests that artists have been deceiving us ever since.

## Does only fraud lead to success?

De Hory was denied success in the art market as long as he tried to sell his own works. Only when he started to forge, could he sell paintings at a reasonable price. The career of Elmyr de Hory's biographer Clifford Irving followed a very similar course. Irving had first written several unsuccessful novels, then wrote the life story of the art forger de Hory, but achieved his greatest triumph when he became a counterfeiter himself – by claiming that the media tycoon Howard Hughes, who was completely reclusive at the time, had given him intimate insights into his private life.<sup>21</sup>

Welles then compares the criminal careers of de Hory and Irving with his own artist's biography: when he came to Dublin at the age of sixteen, he claimed that he was already a famous actor – to get employed at the Gate Theatre. According to Welles, his radio

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21 Heller explains that Irving's *Autobiography of Howard Hughes* (1971), based on self-invented sources and falsified documents, caused one of the most spectacular literary scandals and trials of the twentieth century. Cf. Heinz-B. Heller, Orson Welles und/oder Vérités et mensonges/F for Fake, in Michael Lommel et al. (ed.), *Surrealismus und Film*, 80.

success *War of the Worlds* (1938) was based on the deception of the audience, who took the described events at face value. But instead of ending up in prison, Welles would go to Hollywood and play his famous *Citizen Kane* (1940/41).

As if to prove that he is also a fraud, Welles then skilfully tricks the viewer: Allegedly the actress Oja Kodar<sup>22</sup> was Picasso's model for twenty-two portraits. The artist subsequently gave them to her as a gift. A little later, however, Picasso heard that a small art gallery in Paris was offering paintings by him. He believed that his former model frivolously sold his gifts. Arriving in the French capital, an enraged Picasso was amazed to discover that he had not painted any of the exhibited works. They were all fake copies by Oja Kodar's grandfather, a "da Vinci among the forgers", who then in turn accused Picasso of fraud: like a forger, an actor, he changed his seasons, his faces.

In a surprising twist, Welles then uncovers the hoax he has just set up: Oja Kodar's grandfather never painted any pictures; Welles' tricky editing faked the encounter of Picasso and the actress. Welles had merely promised the viewer to tell the truth for an hour. He frankly admits: no sooner had this time passed, he began to lie blatantly. Professional liars, Welles continues, have a duty to serve the truth. The demanding word for this is art.

Welles may have flirted with being a forger. But at the same time he by no means failed to point out his artistic originality and authenticity. When the film was made, Welles had already become one of the key figures in film history, which he acknowledges with a reference to his masterpiece *Citizen Kane*. With his virtuoso handling of cinematic devices, the collision of film material of very different aesthetics, his appearance as a knowledgeable narrator and travel guide, Welles proves his artistic originality and independence. It is also no mere coincidence that he describes artists as professional liars whose responsibility is to tell the truth. By admitting that the artist uses tricks to manipulate his audience, he tells the truth bluntly. Which actual swindler would openly admit that he deceives? Welles' statement that a great artist like Michelangelo is himself an impostor allows him to place himself in a group of artists of outstanding artistic craftsmanship. By asserting that artists have always deceived, while at the same time openly admitting that he also deceives us, the viewer has to conclude, that Welles must be an artist.

But after watching Welles' puzzling play with the spectator, a central question appears still unresolved: What distinguishes, what unites artists and impostors, art and fraud on a more abstract, general level?

## Differences between art and fraud: originality, innovation, creation of value

*F for Fake* suggests that Elmyr de Hory did not succeed in developing his "own vision", an original style. Because of this deficiency, the impoverished Hungarian refugee could

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22 Oja Kodar was Welles' partner from 1962 until his death in 1985.

not resist the temptation to falsify paintings. In *F for Fake*, “originality” becomes the paramount criterion that separates the artist from the fraud. The Vertés anecdote told by Welles emphasizes that talented painters who are only capable of imitation, not innovation, cannot compete successfully in the art market, indeed, they aren’t even capable of earning a living – unless they become counterfeiters.

In a kind of demiurgical *creatio ex nihilo*, art has always been able to create value, even from material that at first seemed useless or even worthless. This requires a “Begeisterungsgemeinschaft”<sup>23</sup> (“community of enthusiasm”), as Bazon Brock states, a community which confirms the artistic added value and makes it sustainable. So, artistic value creation is inseparably linked to the favour – and trust – of an audience. This value creation has some similarities with money creation: it requires consensus and trust to give value to symbolic material. Art historian Thomas Zaunschirm wrote:

“The value of money is not guaranteed by the national bank that issues the money, it is the borrower himself, who receives no money without security. He is the final link in the chain of those who give up the property premium. The money that the national bank has not yet issued remains worthless. Should it come to a robbery of this unissued money however, there would be no difference from money which has been regularly issued. The argument that this money that is in circulation is in reality no better than counterfeit money is one restricted to the realms of theory. In the field of art too, everything which is produced only attains value through the recognition and acceptance of both the art world and the market. The uncritical belief in a priori value prevents understanding. The value of both money and art has nothing to do with their origins; it results from the trust and confidence of their users.”<sup>24</sup>

It is therefore a successful history of impact, it is the trust accumulated over time by those who have given the work (or banknote) value and continue to give it validity, which guarantees its exchange value. So the forgery of art is not that different from counterfeiting money. In contrast to the “real artist”, the counterfeiter claims that the value creation process mentioned above took place a long time ago. The impostor makes his audience believe that he is trustworthy elsewhere and that his works are already considered valuable, so that this should also be the case here and now. So while the artist creates value where there was none before, the impostor claims value where there is none.

Inflation and deflation reflect the declining and growing trust in a particular currency. The same applies to the appreciation or depreciation of certain works of art. The only supposed added value of both the counterfeiter of money and the counterfeiter of art

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23 Bazon Brook, Festspiele als Agenturen für Weltzivilisierung, in Michael Fischer (ed.), *Die Festspiele. Wirklichkeit, Deutung, Zukunft* (St. Pölten: Residenz, 2012), 98.

24 Thomas Zaunschirm, The Art of Making Money, in Harald Szeeman (et al., ed.), *Money and Value: The Last Taboo* (Zurich: Edition Oehrli, 2002).

is far more fragile, since the underlying basis of trust is not based on consensus but on appearance, and can therefore be eroded much more quickly and lastingly.

It is certainly part of the life of an artist to articulate and emphasize his or her own importance and trustworthiness. Perhaps perfectionist artists sometimes doubt the legitimacy of their value creation, so that they are plagued by a kind of “impostor syndrome” and feel that they do not deserve their success. This may be the reason why they sometimes feel akin to those who only pretend to have created value. This is apparently the cause of some artists’ flirtation with imposture, fraud and deception.

Welles is right that the central quality of art – that it moves us – cannot be measured in the categories “real” and “false”. Nevertheless, it cannot be called anything than fraud to steal ideas and adopt the style of someone else in order to enrich oneself under another name. Welles is indeed correct in saying that art is always a deception. On closer scrutiny, however, art is both, deception and revelation at the same time.

## Art: Deception and revelation at the same time

Even the strokes of paint on the cave walls of Lascaux pretend to be more than just strokes by referring, semiotically speaking, to animals and humans as iconic signs. At the same time, however, they also simply remain drawn lines on a cave wall. From here, a connection can be identified from the mentioned earliest works of art to the *trompe-l’oeil* painting of Antiquity, the Renaissance and the Baroque, the *quodlibet* of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the (hyper-)realism of contemporary art and, e.g., the illusionistic 3D sidewalk chalk paintings by Edgar Mueller or Julian Beever.

The self-conception of illusionist art can be traced back to a dictum of the Roman poet Tibull – *ars est celare artem* – which means that art consists precisely in the fact that it makes us forget its own artificiality. Henry Keazor, however, quite rightly refers to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who already in 1817 stated that a “willing suspension of disbelief” is necessary for the illusion to take place.<sup>25</sup> Minimalists and the avant-gardes, with their emphasis on the found object as “real”,<sup>26</sup> undertook a remarkable reversal: these movements showed that art can also be a specific way of perception, that it often depends on context what is considered art, that art should emphasize its own artificiality and, that we are subject to a deception when we think that objects of daily life could never be seen as artworks – as exemplified by *objét trouvés*.

In accordance with the abovementioned double nature of art – that it deceives the viewer, but at the same time reveals that it requires his or her consent to do so – Martin Seel

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25 Cf. Henry Keazor, “Kunst ist eine Lüge, die uns die Wahrheit begreifen lässt.” *Manipulation und Fälschung in der Kunst* (URL: <https://heiup.uni-heidelberg.de/journals/index.php/generale/article/view/23780/17521>).

26 Cf. Peter Bürger, *Theorie der Avantgarde* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1982), 104-105.

also states for cinema that there is always a need for a “double attention” to approach art, one that allows oneself to be deceived and one that questions the deception.<sup>27</sup>

This is probably one of the reasons why *F for Fake*, although it is basically a documentary, makes an unusual use of cinematic devices, interchanging between illusionism and deconstruction. Welles undertakes downright stylistic collisions, lets documentary material encounter photographs and paintings and mixes it with excerpts from fictional films. The result are deliberately artificial-looking montages – and ultimately a veritable deception of the public, which Welles then in turn exposes again.

In *F for Fake*, Orson Welles finally makes Oja Kodar's grandfather mysteriously disappear like a stage magician. He tears away the sheet that covers him and reveals just thin air.

Welles repeatedly uncovers how he, as master of filmic devices, (supposedly) lied and cheated. Hereby, however, he proves himself to be completely different from the actual forgers who do their work in secrecy. By exposing himself as a charlatan, liar and cheat, Welles only emphasizes his own artistic originality – which he proved once again with this unique film.

## Banksy's *Exit through the Gift Shop* (2010)

*Banksy's Exit through the Gift Shop* initially seems far more conventional in its use of cinematic means – like a reportage. There is no first person narrator who guarantees credibility and at the same time undermines it, as in Welles' late work. Here, it is the film style that suggests credibility. But soon it will become doubtful if what is shown is actually true.

It is quite debatable whether the film has to be seen actually as the portrait of a fraud or as that of an artist. In any case, it seems rewarding to compare the methods of Thierry Guetta – alias “Mr. Brainwash” – with those of an impostor.<sup>28</sup>

Guetta had accompanied the protagonists of “street art” with his camera, recorded how they applied illegal graffiti and were finally honoured as artists. When he failed in editing a compelling documentary about the scene, Banksy – Guetta had meanwhile met the “phantom” of the secret community – took on Guetta's tapes and completed the film *Exit through the Gift Shop*. Meanwhile, Guetta unexpectedly achieves surprising success as an artist, using exactly the strategies he had learned from the former underground rebels.

That Guetta could be more interested in monetary success than in following an artistic inspiration becomes clear right from the beginning: Guetta is introduced as the owner of

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27 Cf. Martin Seel, *Die Künste des Kinos* (Frankfurt/Main: S.Fischer, 2013), 187, 218.

28 Cf. David Maurer, *The American Confidence Man* (Springfield: Thomas 1974) respectively Maria Konnikova, *The Confidence Game* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2017).

a well-located “Vintage Clothing Store” in Los Angeles. He candidly explains that he had been looking for unusual individual pieces (“old Adidas stuff”), labeled them as designer clothes and sold them at an immense profit. Guetta boasts: “From fifty dollars I could make five thousand.”<sup>29</sup> Even if he doesn’t appear so externally, Guetta must have been a relatively successful businessman back then already. At least he had the financial freedom to neglect his business and instead film street artists in action, even though he had a family to support.

Later, we’ll see that Guetta recognised the commercial potential of street art early on: in view of works by the street artists “Space Invader”, “Monsieur André”, and “Zeus”, he will state that he has seen “an art gallery” out there. But a gallery is, however, an institutionalized saleroom. While the street artists define themselves by opposition to commercialization, Guetta shows a straight Capitalist attitude from the very beginning.

## A private space invader

Guetta explains that it was his obsession to capture every moment of his life on video tape. In *Exit through the Gift Shop* the viewer witnesses him following people to the toilet with his camera and harassing celebrities such as the Gallagher brothers of the pop band *Oasis*.

In 1999, Thierry Guetta’s life takes a surprising turn when he discoveres that his cousin is “Space Invader”, “a major player in a movement that was soon to be known as street art”, which the narrator’s voice apostrophizes as “biggest countercultural movement since punk”.

## “The put up” and “the rope” - the victim is targeted, then en-snared

Due to his casual, informal manner, Guetta quickly succeeds in earning the trust of the group surrounding “Space Invader”. He is not perceived as a threat, even though he is filming potentially incriminating material all along. In an interview situation Banksy<sup>30</sup> argues that Guetta was in the right place at the right time: since street art is a transitory art form, the artists needed someone to document the works for posterity.

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29 The fact that Banksy depicts Guetta’s work as a used clothing dealer in such detail allows another insightful reading: “Mr Brainwash” could be a vehicle for Banksy to criticise the commercial aberrations of the formerly subversive street art. A number of earlier street artists later devoted themselves to fashion as a lucrative side business, such as Shepard Fairy, Iriedaily and KAWS. Since the beginning of the 2000s, a variety of co-operations between fashion designers and contemporary artists have taken place, manifesting an emerging “collab culture”. The joint exhibitions of “off-white” designer Virgil Abloh and Japanese artist Takashi Murakami are exemplary.

30 Grissemann is quite right to doubt that the man giving the answers, who is unrecognisable because of the lighting, is Banksy himself. Cf. Stefan Grissemann, Wenn Kulturschaffende ihre Identität verwischen. 20 May 2021, in: Profil.at. (URL: <https://www.profil.at/kultur/banksy-bis-thomas-pynchon-wenn-kulturschaffende-ihre-identitaet-verwischen/401386254>.)

Here the suspicion arises that Guetta has already deceived and won over Banksy, because in 1999, easily portable video cameras were already affordable. Later in the film, Guetta will frankly admit that the claim to be working on a documentary film was his door-opener into this sworn community. In the interview mentioned, Banksy appears as if he was still so taken with Guetta that even in retrospect he does not realize that Guetta lied right from the outset. It is probably anything but coincidental that Guetta will later call himself "Mr Brainwash".

## Obey! – Guetta takes Shepard Fairey by surprise

When "Space Invader" visits his cousin in Los Angeles in 2000, Guetta scores his next coup: instead of his cousin, he shows up at a meeting with Shephard Fairey – the "most prolific street artist" at the time. Guetta claims his cousin didn't make it to the meeting – and films Fairey without asking permission. Guetta's strategy is the same from the beginning: the more naturally a camera is in place, the more the people filmed forget its presence – and its captiousness.

Once again, Guetta succeeds in winning the trust of his "target". From now on he will accompany Fairey when he applies his graffiti and stickers. From Fairey, Guetta learns the concept that real power grows from perceived power: the more Fairey's "Obey" stickers with the abstracted portrait of the wrestler "André the giant" are encountered, the more the enigmatic phenomenon seemed to be relevant.

Through his collaboration with Fairey, Guetta makes the acquaintance of other protagonists of the scene: "Seizer", "Neckface", "Sweet Toof & Cyclops", "Dotmasters", "Swoon", "Borf", "Buffmonster" and Ron English. Guetta proudly explains that he even got those people in front of his lens who did not intend to be filmed. He simply ignored their reluctance or found a way to get them to agree after all.

## The enigma of the scene and a worthwhile victim - Banksy

Banksy had already achieved a status as an artist beyond the street art scene at the time. As if he had adhered to the credo of Elmyr de Hory – "if a painting only hangs in a museum long enough, it becomes authentic" – Banksy had smuggled his painting *Woman in a Gas Mask*, among others, into an exhibition in 2005.<sup>31</sup> And as if he had followed the dictum of Orson Welles – that only his withdrawal from the public had made Howard Hughes known to the world – Banksy kept his identity top secret.

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31 The British newspaper *The Independent* reported that *Woman in a gas mask* was "[o]ne of four works smuggled into New York's top museums in one day [...]. The small gold framed portrait hung in the Metropolitan Museum was discovered after a few hours." (Louise Jury, Banksy: A guerrilla in our midst, in [www.independent.co.uk](http://www.independent.co.uk), 6/8 (2005). (URL: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/this-britain/banksy-a-guerilla-in-our-midst-501660.html>).

Thierry Guetta absolutely wanted to interview the “great unknown” of the street art movement. Was Guetta just curious? Or did his instinct drive him to where he could make easy money? For Banksy was already a “phenomenon beyond the boundaries of the street art scene” by the time. In *Exit through the Gift Shop* a graffiti can be seen: “Banksy is a fucking sell-out” – at that time, he was already considered the commercial renegade of a scene that saw itself as an anti-Capitalist counterculture.

After Banksy put up graffiti in the West Bank in 2005, his “hit and run vandalism” received global attention. In 2006 he wanted to place works in the US, but Banksy’s accomplice was refused entry. Now the preparations of Guetta paid off: Shepard Fairey arranges Banksy’s contact with Guetta, who is immediately eager to serve him, he was “the perfect host”, he “made himself indispensable” by leading the artist to the best painting spots in Los Angeles, showed himself courageous, even took the risk of being caught as Banksy’s henchman.

That Guetta is a true master of building trust is made clear by the fact that Banksy lets himself be filmed by him. Although Guetta is only allowed to show him from behind, and his hands, Banksy had never permitted this before. A little later Banksy invited Guetta to London, even allowing him to enter his studio and document his work on tape.

Banksy himself speculates insecurely, “I guess he became a friend”, and explains that it was a release to confide in someone: “I needed to trust somebody.” It seems like a justification for letting Guetta get so close to him that quickly. Banksy’s closest associates show themselves horrified. Steve Lazarides, Banksy’s former spokesman, protests in an interview: “Nobody was allowed to do this!”

What can be seen here are typical reactions of the social environment of a victim of fraud: relatives, long-time friends and fellow campaigners are alarmed, while the deceived person ignores all their warnings. Banksy justifies his trust in Guetta by claiming that he has contributed something: documenting the work and the reactions of the audience. The question here is whether Guetta was really as indispensable as it appears to Banksy. Since Banksy already worked with a team, it seems that it would have been quite possible to observe the responses to his works, even to film them by himself. *Exit through the Gift Shop* provides some indications of how Guetta managed to make Banksy forget all caution. Guetta presents himself as an admirer, compliments the artist, gives him the feeling of being someone special. In an interview Guetta calls Banksy a legend, a kind of “Robin Hood”. Guetta also understands how to make himself indispensable through supposedly selfless willingness to help. Guetta acts casual and harmless, even haphazardly, as if he had no ulterior motives. When Banksy shows him counterfeit money, on which instead of the Queen Lady Di can be seen, Guetta asks emphatically naive if Banksy has found it. Contrary to this display of his own harmlessness, Thierry Guetta will admit later in the film: “Life is a chess game for me.”

Guetta is also willing to take risks and becomes an accomplice and confidant. A few months after Guetta’s visit to London, Banksy gets ready to realize his first “Major U.S.

Exhibition". Before that, however, he has a plan to place an inflatable doll in prisoner's clothing at the Disney Resort to denounce the "detention of terror suspects" to Guantánamo. Guetta films the campaign and the subsequent reactions, but is caught by Disney's security service and questioned for hours. Here – as well as in similar situations portrayed in the film – Guetta shows himself proud about how skilfully and brazenly he is capable of lying. According to Guetta, he erased his recordings right in front of the security staff.

The less attentive viewer may have missed the inherent inconsistency: the footage of Banksy's controversial action had been shown before. How is this possible, since Guetta claims to have deleted it? Guetta, however, wins Banksy's complete trust through the sacrifice made and his reliable discretion. According to the narrator's voice, Guetta was hereafter "Banksy's guy".

## "Barely legal" – the commercial breakthrough of street art

Banksy's "Major U.S. exhibition" named "Barely Legal" becomes an event thanks to the "magical combination of controversy, celebrities and a painted elephant". The self-organized exhibition, which lasts three days, attracts a lot of people, even though it takes place in a run-down neighbourhood. Banksy shows himself impressed by the overwhelming success of the show: "'Barely Legal' marked the point where the Art Establishment became interested in Street Art."

When art collector Wendy Asher has her say, it seems that from the 2000s onwards, experts still matter for selling art. Asher explains: everyone she has told that she thinks Banksy is a genius has bought – people with serious collections who usually have Picasso's, Mondrians or Paul Klees.

At this point, a shift in the art market becomes apparent. What has changed is the perception of art as a capital investment and with it the role played by experts in the art market: unlike the connoisseurs fooled by de Hory, whose expertise was based on the examination of historical records and technical details for authentication purposes, the contemporary art advisor's – or investor-collector's – expertise is based on the anticipation of future trends. Like forged art, street art is a contemporary creation, but while forged art's value is drawn from a fictional past, street art's (commercial) value is drawn from a speculative future. Therefore, Asher does not produce expert opinions like classical connoisseurs, but simply follows her intuition for art trends. Since she is a collector herself, she is by no means impartial here, as academic art historical research should be. For if demand for Banksy's works grows on the basis of her recommendation, the value of her own collection will also increase. This reveals another shift depicted within the representation of the art market: whereas classical expertise aimed at cultivating taste for appreciation (as a knowledge of the past coupled with aesthetic sensibility), expertise nowadays tries to generate buzz for investment, to grow desire that guides purchasing behaviour in the advisor's interest.

It seems that Asher's suggestions paid off: since Banksy's U.S. exhibition, prices have risen, and the famous auction houses are suddenly selling street art, which is becoming a "hot commodity". No collection of contemporary art can now do without a "Banksy".

## Banksy - not interested in profit?

Banksy complains that it was suddenly all about making a profit and reaffirms: "It was never about the money."

Banksy's statement shows that not only originality and authenticity, but also credibility are key concerns for street artists. While art collectors/investment advisors try to be credible in regard to future market participation that secures the work's investment potential, street artist's credibility is based on market opposition. An artist like Banksy has to remain "street-credible" to stay "authentic". Banksy does so by seemingly rejecting art market's embrace, by not letting himself be instrumentalized and by articulating that his art is not about the money but and end in itself.

But Banksy does so in a film in which it was previously noted that he was considered "commercial" compared to the rest of the scene – in this very film. So it could well be assumed that his assertion is intended to increase his credibility – and that the simultaneous reference to his growing market value in the same film is secretly intended to raise his profile and sales. Banksy thus becomes an ambivalent spokesman for artist credibility, on the one hand declaring his independence of the art market, on the other hand pointing out that his works are worth investing in.

*Exit through the Gift Shop* suggests that it was ultimately the street art hype that made Banksy urge Thierry Guetta to release his documentary. As Banksy would have us believe, a clarification of what was important to the artists of the scene was needed.

Yet the result was anything but satisfactory. Banksy calls the 90-minute film *Life Remote Control*, which Guetta edited, an "unwatchable never-ending trailer". Banksy explains that "he realized that Thierry wasn't a filmmaker but someone with mental problems who had a camera."

Once again there are contradictions. While Banksy says about Guetta's experimental film that "everything about it was shit", Guetta explains that Banksy told him the film was good. Did Banksy actually do this out of consideration for Guetta's "mental problems"? Because he didn't want to hurt his feelings? Or is Guetta lying? Was Guetta's experimental film perhaps not to the taste of the enigma of street artists because it did not fulfil the functions mentioned above: to portray Banksy as "Robin Hood" who is not interested in monetary success and, at the same time, to point out the immense increase in value of his works? And what exactly might Guetta's "mental problems" be?

## "The tale" - Guetta's emotional childhood story

When Guetta is confronted with the fact that even though he had been filming for years, he is incapable of making a meaningful documentary, he justifies his obsessive filming with a childhood trauma. As the youngest of the family, then eleven years old, he was the last to learn that his mother had suffered from a serious illness and had died. For this reason he felt a compulsive need to record everything with his camera, especially people close to him, for fear of losing them unexpectedly.



© Bernd Friedrich Schon

Certainly, one should not light-heartedly throw doubt on Guetta's tragic story, nevertheless some circumstances seem contradictory – and it is well known that impostors use or even invent precisely such emotionally moving experiences for their own purposes.<sup>32</sup> It initially seems conspicuous that Guetta does not respect the privacy of his "protagonists" in his obsessive filming and that he harasses celebrities – of whom, one would think, enough footage has already been shot. Furthermore, it becomes clear within the film that Guetta's wife was often worried, and it is explicitly stated that his family had to cope with his absence for five years. How does this correlate with his fear that he might lose close relatives? And although Guetta initially portrays filming as an irresistible compulsion to himself, Banksy's verdict on his film and his suggestion that he should rather make some art himself, lets him surprisingly quickly put down his camera.

## "The convincer" – Guetta leaves Banksy to direct, Guetta becomes "Mr. Brainwash"

It seems as if Guetta was just waiting for this "absolution" and begins to copy the strategies of the street artists. But he may have reluctantly given the material to Banksy, presenting it as a sacrifice on his part, in a move that could be the strategy of "the convincer" of the con-artist: he lets his victim make a profit, only to rip him off all the more later.

Following a pattern he picked up from Shepard Fairey, Guetta makes stickers with a self-portrait and affixes them everywhere. Then Guetta even covers one of Fairey's large

32 For example, *Der Spiegel* reporter Claas Relotius, who was convicted of fraud in 2019, invented a sister with cancer whom he supposedly nursed. Cf. Juan Moreno, *Tausend Zeilen Lüge. Das System Relotius und der deutsche Journalismus* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 2019), 30-31.

“Obey” murals with one of his own. Such a “covering” or “going over” – as it is depicted in *Style Wars* (USA 1983) – is a sacrilege frowned upon by graffiti artists. This action emphasizes Thierry Guetta’s desire to outdo his role models and mentors by any means necessary.

From Banksy, Guetta learned the principle of do-it-yourself exhibitions away from established galleries and museums: “his plan was to emulate Banksy’s L.A. art exhibition”, the narrator’s voice explains. Mr Brainwash’s next intensive work phase should now result in exactly such a “solo show” – above all: a sales-boosting one. According to Schultheis, as a general rule, in the art market “[t]he return on sales is fairly divided between the artist and the gallerist on a 50:50 basis”.<sup>33</sup> It is therefore more lucrative for artists to organize exhibitions on their own, to become gallerists themselves.

## “Life is beautiful”

“Mr. Brainwash’s” exhibition is to take place in a former CBS studio complex in the middle of Hollywood of all places, on Sunset Boulevard. “MBW” compares the concept with an “amusement park”, it is supposed to be a “street art spectacular filled with pictures, sculptures and installations”. Guetta takes a high risk again, mortgages his shop and house, sells whatever he can to invest in a large studio, buys screen-printing machines, and hires full-time staff to produce “Mr. Brainwash” works on an assembly line on a commercial scale. In Los Angeles he finds many professionals from the film industry (“props builders”) and hires them on a daily basis.

MBW’s outsourcing of the production of the works to professionals is a clever manoeuvre, because the value of an artwork, especially in the case of as yet unknown artists, is measured by how much effort the production required and what the material value is.<sup>34</sup> So with this manoeuvre, Guetta is able to multiply his outcome, which will look professional and genuine made.

In his megalomaniacal way Guetta compares himself to Damien Hirst, “one of today’s most expensive artists”, as the quasi-head of a company for which a hundred people work. It seems notable that Guetta argues on pricing, not on aesthetics or an artistic agenda. But at the same time he also speaks frankly, because Schultheis confirms, for Hirst and also for Jeff Koons: “the realisation of an artwork is increasingly outsourced from the artist’s studio to art workshops run by invisible art service providers.”<sup>35</sup> The sociologist compares this kind of “business model” of “Artists as Creativity Entrepreneurs”

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33 Franz Schultheis, On the price of priceless goods, in *Journal for Art Market Studies*, vol. 1, no. 01/2017, 74. (URL: <https://fokum-jams.org/index.php/jams/article/view/7/22>).

34 Cf. ibid., 75.

35 Franz Schultheis: The artist is absent: the Artist as Creativity Entrepreneur and Changes in Representations and Practices of “Art”, in *Journal for Art Market Studies*, vol. 1, no. 04/2018. (URL: <https://fokum-jams.org/index.php/jams/article/view/47/144>).

with “the field of Haute Couture, where a similar division of ‘head and hand’ emerged in producing high-priced consumer goods during the course of the nineteenth century.”<sup>36</sup>

With this approach, Guetta distances himself from the street art scene in two respects: firstly, he once again rates financial success higher than aesthetic achievement, and secondly, from now on he works in a completely different way from the graffiti lone fighters who create transient unique pieces in arduous manual labor.

The stylistic diversity of MBW’s works is also an indication that Guetta’s primary focus is on sales. Gastman explains that Guetta’s employees had worked diligently for him in several styles – so there would be something to suit every taste.<sup>37</sup> MBW’s works, with their allusions and quotations from pop culture, create an eclectic and serial effect. In rows, for example, he has his graphic designer David Healy mount an abstracted Monroe quiff on celebrity heads, for example on Michael Jackson’s or “Mr. Spock’s”.

That Guetta is primarily concerned with selling is also evident from the sheer volume of works he presents. Promoter Roger Gastman will later explain that he has never seen anyone display so many works, even compared to group exhibitions.

With his assembly line art production, Guetta appears as a counter-model to Banksy: he shows himself openly interested in making money, not in aesthetics or even political clout; he does not see himself as a craftsman who works with a love for detail and a longing for perfection. With this, Guetta occurs as a caricature of the mainstream, which uses original art as a stimulus to produce easily consumable designer goods and sell as many of them possible.

## A catastrophe at the right time

In the midst of preparing for the exhibition, Guetta breaks his metatarsal bone. The film presents this calamity in such a way that “Mr. Brainwash” now experiences a reality shock: he had no noteworthy resumé, had not exhibited work anywhere until now – but should he not have included that in his calculations at the outset, when he mortgaged his shop and his house? The accident befalls Guetta at a time when – in accordance with the principle of reciprocity – he could obtain a high level of commitment from Banksy: MBW has been the “perfect host” in L.A., an accomplice, was questioned by Disney’s security and had not grassed up. Guetta phones Banksy, who says it sounded like Guetta needed some support, so he would ask a few people to help, including the already mentioned professional promoter Roger Gastman.

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36 Ibid.

37 This “stylistic diversity” is certainly a reason why art fairs play a central role in the art market. Schultheis explains that “the art trade already achieves more than a third of its returns at art fairs. No other form of distribution offers better opportunities to its clientele with an interest in art to see and buy a broad range of works of art with an efficient expenditure of time and money.” (Ibid., 70.)

## Pushing the media hype – businessman Guetta shows his true self

It is said that an artist must be concerned that the right works are presented in the right light. Not so with “Mr. Brainwash”. Instead of being concerned with a selection in the first place, he devotes himself instead to the media frenzy: he asks Shepard Fairey to share a positive reference to MBW’s show on his homepage and mailing list. He also asks Banksy for a quote “to promote the show”. Banksy complies with Guetta’s request and formulates: “Mr. Brainwash is a force of nature, he’s a phenomenon. And I don’t mean that in a good way” – which Guetta immediately puts up a large poster. The media gratefully takes up the “endorsements” of Fairey and Banksy. L.A. Weekly interviews Guetta, he succeeds in turning “Mr. Brainwash” into “front page news”.

As a cunning businessman, Guetta creates an additional incentive: The first 200 visitors will each receive an exclusive screen print free of charge. Without further ado, he turns identical silkscreens into collectable originals by staining them with spills from a spray can. Even before the exhibition, he phones private collectors, sells paintings for 24,000 and 30,000 dollars, and states with satisfaction: “That’s like gold.”

When the day of the exhibition opening arrives, about 2,000 visitors are already queuing outside. At first Guetta had presented himself pitiful and overburdened. Suddenly he trumps, gives orders: “I’m running the show! You listen to me!” But instead of organizing the display of his pictures, Guetta basks in glory, enjoys the attention – as if this had been what he had been striving for all along. MBW’s unnerved crew hangs up his pictures at some point by themselves.

A little later, an informed visitor presents himself who explains that “Mr. Brainwash” explores interesting aspects of popular and celebrity culture. Guetta proudly states that guests compared him to Banksy and said he was just as good. The “grand debut of Mr. Brainwash” becomes a complete success, his exhibition attracts 4,000 visitors. The film reports: “a major new star is born before their very eyes.” By the end of the first week, Guetta had earned more than a million dollars. A little later, MBW’s works appeared in galleries in Miami, New York, Paris and Beijing.

In contrast to the 1970s, when artists aimed to convince or even deceive experts, it now seems as if the objective is to create a media fuss, to appear more than to be. If there is only enough attention, so the lesson goes, there will also be buyers, and even the experts will eventually find artistic quality where it may arguably be present. What Guetta is cleverly exploiting here is, according to Schultheis, a joint (self-)deception of the art market. The sociologist argues that there is a “collective illusion of the field: ‘quality’. Interviewees kept affirming that ‘true art’ always wins through in the end, that ‘genuine

artists' are recognized and acknowledged and that the chaff is sifted from the wheat as if by an invisible hand.”<sup>38</sup>

## The “genuine”, “authentic” artists take a position on MBW

Even though the art market seems by now to have accepted MBW’s works, Shepard Fairey and Banksy express their doubts. Fairey says Thierry Guetta had the best intentions, but even then, things could go wrong. When Fairey explains that Guetta’s success was anthropologically and sociologically fascinating, he implies that it is not, aesthetically speaking.

Banksy makes it clear that Guetta’s debut as an artist was overhasty. He said he acted like a “mature artist”, although he was not. Most would spend years perfecting their art, finding their style – through which Banksy also emphasizes his own artistic originality.

The consensus seems to be: Guetta’s focus on speed, success and sales value has produced meaningless, empty works. When Banksy argues that there’s probably no such person as “Mr. Brainwash”, even if his art looks like everyone else’s, it means that Thierry Guetta may have been “original” in personality, but that his art is not unique, but eclectic.

Intoxicated by his success, Guetta replies bluntly that it is unimportant whether he copies Banksy or Shepard Fairey. Because: You can’t tell from only one exhibition whether someone is an artist. In time, we’ll see who he is. Is he suggesting that he’s the enigma Banksy himself? If so, surely with the intention to give himself a competitive edge by it.

## Conclusions

The examination of the representation of the relationship between impostor and artist in *F for Fake* and *Exit through the Gift Shop* has shown that artistic authenticity, credibility and originality are the central features that constitute artistic value. The representations of “real” artists make believe that for them their work is reward enough, they manufacture their works by hand, sometimes laboriously. Monetary interest is secondary for them, resistance to market appropriation is considered a virtue. It is part of the magic of art that these “real” artists do not always grasp their success, sometimes feel like cheats, although, even if they seem to deceive us, they follow the imperative to tell the truth. If a talented artisan does not succeed in being original, the art market will reject him – unless he forges or deceives.

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38 Franz Schultheis, On the price of priceless goods. Sociological observations on and around Art Basel, in *Journal for Art Market Studies* (2017), vol. 1, no. 1, 2017, 80. (URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.23690/jams.v1i1.7>).

By comparing both films it becomes apparent that the art market has also changed from the 1970s until today. The influence of the experts diminished, especially of those who used historical research to examine details for authenticity. Instead, it has become essential to anticipate future trends in order to advise customers on their investment choices. But as the future has always been uncertain, however, it is essential to generate sufficient attention for the recommended artworks. Currently spectacle and media hypes are indispensable to sell works of art successfully.

Moreover, it seems as if the art market, at least in the short term, is no longer capable of recognising artistic quality as such. Whereas in the 1970s it still required outstanding craftsmanship to deceive the experts, today the noise of staged media hypes drowns out any doubts about aesthetic quality. The “real” artists complain that the era of “authentic”, virtuoso, artisan artists seems to be over, that they live in an environment where only scandal, provocation and hype guaranteed attention, that a debate about aesthetic quality nowadays appears outdated, that the only criterion for the artistic “quality” of a work has become: that it sells. Even if the market no longer understands aesthetic quality, at least the “real” artists consider “true” works to be unique, handcrafted with attention to detail, and with an original “aura”. The production of artistic works on an assembly line with the aim of maximizing profits sabotages the idea of the “real” artist as a solitary, idealistic figure, to which both films seem to be committed.

Orson Welles appears as a cinematic auteur, in control of his artistic work and diverse stylistic means, as an oracle proclaiming truth through a veil of deception. In contrast, Banksy presents himself humbly as an all-too-trusting victim of a swindler: he was fooled by a supposed reporter who should have documented the true ambitions of the “real” artists, who should have restored trust in a subcultural scene corrupted by the art market. The conman unscrupulously exploited his guilelessness and became a plagiarist, but at the same time a symbolic figure for an art market that is solely focused on profit. More than ever, this art market nowadays seem to advise the less idealistic, innovative and original: *vult mundus decipi, ergo decipiatur*.

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