

Introduction

Art History, Art Market Studies and the Question of Theory

In recent years, art market research has gained momentum across Germany and internationally. This applies to its thematic scope but also institutional structures. In addition to exploring topics from the (early) modern era and classic modernism, there is now also an increasing emphasis on contemporary study. This is coupled with a geographical expansion: Besides the traditional art markets – of Europe and North America in particular – there is a growing shift towards global structures and processes. At the institutional level, the complexity and dynamics of art market research are echoed by the growing number of conferences, research networks and academic structures.¹

In view of these quantitative and qualitative changes, one can therefore speak of the emergence of a separate branch of research, for which the umbrella term ‘Art Market Studies’ has become established. While it may still be too early for any historical analysis of these Art Market Studies, there are already a number of pressing methodological questions:

Is this a discipline in its own right, or rather a research focus area? And if it is a research focus area, then which discipline does it belong to? Art history? Economic or social history? Sociology? Economics of culture? Researchers involved in Art Market Studies come from these and other disciplines and thus combine a range of research approaches.

This transfer and the transformation of theoretical approaches is intensified by the increasingly interdisciplinary approach of current research. The art historian Nicholas

1 Consider for example the following list, which is by no means exhaustive: Artl@s, CREATE (Creative Amsterdam), Collecting & Provenance Research at the Getty Research Institute, DALMI (Duke Art, Law & Markets Initiative), Focus Art Market at the University of Cologne, GREMA (Groupe de recherche sur le marché de l’art), The International Association Art Market Studies Association, Labex “Le surréalisme au regard des galeries, des collectionneurs et des médiateurs, 1924–1959” (Arts H2H, Paris), Seminar on Collecting and Display (London). In 2012 Forum Kunst und Markt/Centre for Art Market Studies (fokum.org) was founded at TU Berlin. Through workshops, conferences and evening lectures, a network of young scholars and – as of this year – this journal, it devises and presents various formats for the analysis, dissemination and discussion of current studies.

Green once described his art market research from the perspective of cultural history as a movement towards a “more interdisciplinary approach, raiding, though with caution, the methods of sociology, economics, anthropology to stretch and toughen art history’s epistemological hide.”² While this meant he was still clearly a pioneer back in around 1990, this methodological interdisciplinarity is now also becoming increasingly widespread among art historians focusing on art market research. This leads to a kind of “building block system” which incorporates different perspectives on art market research. What theories are such approaches based on, for example, if art history is supplemented with network perspectives on the art market or with economic evaluations of prices? Does this make art market research genuinely interdisciplinary? How might it then be possible to establish a closer relationship than previously between artworks and their material and iconic history on the one hand and their economic contexts on the other?

In this second issue of the *Journal for Art Market Studies* we ask about the theories of art market research and their different approaches, methods and objectives. It is not a question of a universal theoretical record of the object. The question which concerns us is rather how art history employs certain theories in order to develop methods for the analysis of the art market. We ask from an art history perspective which is quite open to transdisciplinary approaches. The aim of this edition is therefore to pick out a number of dominant approaches, and in doing so to present an annotated introduction to methodologies of contemporary art market research. This does not imply some fixed, clear methodological apparatus and nor, of course, does it serve to replace other disciplinary approaches.

This issue does not, therefore, claim to be an exhaustive manual; this is not only because just a few aspects from law and politics, are touched upon. Rather, the articles in this edition shed light on research constellations, in which objects, data, networks and questions of value are considered in the wider context of the interplay between art history and the art market. The selected essays exemplify how transdisciplinary methods can enhance classical art history approaches. Traditional questions of aesthetics and historical contextualisations continue to play a role, but are supplemented with current perspectives involving cultural policy, media theory and global approaches. The articles presented here focus on data analysis and its cultural, media, as well as historical and political dimensions.

In her essay “The Vicissitudes of Taste. The Market for Pop”, art historian Titia Hulst (New York) applies Pierre Bourdieu’s sociological perspective to the category of art taste. Based on the business records of a number of New York galleries and the correspondence of Leo Castelli, she analyses the interrelationship between economic dynamics

2 Nicholas Green, *Circuits of Production, Circuits of Consumption: The Case of Mid-Nineteenth-Century French Art Dealing*, in *Art Journal*, vol. 48, no. 1 (1989), 29-34, 29.

and the development of collection specialisations. Using the example of pop art, Hulst analyses the relevance of historical gender-specific differences, in turn emphasising the significance of transdisciplinary approaches for studying the dynamics of art economics.

Historian Johannes Gramlich (Munich) explores in “Reflections on Provenance Research: Values – Politics – Art Markets” the analytical potentials of provenance research for art history, and in particular for art market studies. The author is part of this field, which has become highly professionalised over the last two decades. In his contribution, he is interested in questions that go beyond clarifying the specific legal situation when works of art change hands. To this end, he traces the context of current provenance research from a science history perspective and shows its significance for the aesthetic, artistic and economic determination of the cultural assets’ values. With his remarks on provenance research, which has been morally and politically reweighted since the 1990s, he emphasises the special significance and potential of art market analyses from the view of cultural policy.

In her essay, the art historian Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel (Paris), founder and director of the Paris-based research project *Artl@s*, underlines in “Circulation and the Art Market” the importance and complexity of the contexts with which works of art come into contact. Instead of reducing circulation to the striking of price balances, she stresses the “fluctuating and circumstantial nature of value” in the art world. Joyeux-Prunel highlights the importance of dynamics based on desire, which decisively shape the circulation of art, and thus stresses the relevance of context-sensitive adaptations and transformations of seemingly universal ideals. In so doing, she underscores the importance of multiple value hierarchies in the art markets’ collective structures

Also of considerable importance for art market research – especially, but not exclusively, for research involving economic data – are the digital humanities. In his essay “Anamorphosis of Unexpected Results. On the Epistemological Culture of Art Market Visualizations”, literary scholar Thomas Skowronek (Berlin) considers the epistemological foundations and (art) historical references of big data. His theoretical reflections are not so much centred around the visualisation potential of these technical programs. Skowronek is more concerned with the semantics and rhetoric of the visualisations’ promises, which also need to be considered, particularly in their (cultural) political contexts.

Many of the authors in this edition were recruited from the international network for young scholars of the Forum Kunst und Markt/Centre for Art Market Studies. Barbara Pezzini (London) and Léa Saint-Raymond (Paris) are also members of this research platform. In the “Shortcuts” section, which we have introduced for the journal’s second edition, they discuss new publications by Bert De Munck/Dries Lyna,³ Luc Boltanski/

3 Bert De Munck and Dries Lyna, eds., *Concepts of Value in European Material Culture, 1500–1900* (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2015).

Arnaud Esquerre⁴ and Michael Hutter⁵ on the value-based and socio-economic study of art markets.

The idea for this issue goes back to a meeting of that same international network in June 2016. It aims to present approaches to art market research which are decidedly art historical in their perspective and yet benefit from interdisciplinary exchange – approaches which have been discussed in recent years (not only) at the Forum Kunst und Markt/Centre for Art Market Studies. We look forward to further suggestions, discussions and reflections in the international research community on theoretical and methodological foundations of art market research.

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Translation: Matthew Rockey

4 Luc Boltanski and Arnaud Esquerre, *Enrichissement. Une Critique de la Marchandise* (Paris: Gallimard, 2017).

5 Michael Hutter, *The Rise of the Joyful Economy: Artistic Invention and Economic Growth from Brunelleschi to Murakami* (London/New York: Routledge, 2015).