

Barcelona Symposium 2022

TALKING GALLERIES

THE THINK TANK FOR GALLERIES

TALKING GALLERIES 09

Talking Galleries is the first international think tank dedicated to generating debate and knowledge in the field of art galleries and the art market. Since its foundation in 2011, it has provided a space for reflection that the art market was lacking. It has grown into an established platform for industry professionals, focusing on disseminating relevant issues to the sector and encouraging its professionalisation.

This book collects the complete talks that made up the programme of the 2022 edition of the Barcelona Symposium. Celebrated on the 3rd and 4th of October 2022 at the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA), the ninth iteration marked the return of this flagship event to its hometown after a two-year disruption caused by the pandemic, gathering once more leading experts and a varied audience of art professionals in a specialised context for discussing the latest trends in gallery management and the wider art market.

This year's meeting addressed the pressing issues and new concerns that had arisen in the previous two years in the art industry. Particularly, the two-day programme dedicated special attention to the spread of new digital policies. From the rise of NFTs to the advent of leading crypto art platforms, some of the sessions explored how these changes in technology affect the habits of sellers and buyers and, so, reconfiguring the art market. The conversations also looked at gallery practices in the secondary market as well as at the ever-debated relationship between fairs and biennials. While some space was devoted to review the reasons behind the booming Parisian art scene, this edition also claimed for a more inclusive environment for the art world.

While the market keeps adapting to global economic and geopolitical challenges, this publication packed with inspiring thoughts and relevant data aims at providing some keys to interpreting today's art gallery sector.

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Director



Paco Barragán
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Ellen de Bruijne
Anna Carreras
Marc Domènech
Elvira Dyangani Ose
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Guillaume Piens
Alain Quemin
Giusy Ragosa
Andrés Reisinger
Miguel Ángel Sánchez
Jérôme Sans
Kate Vass
Pau Waelder

Barcelona Symposium 2022
9th Edition

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Sessions

Julia Peyton-Jones

is a British curator and gallery director, currently Senior Global Director at Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac in London, Paris, and Salzburg. She formerly worked as Co-Director of the Serpentine Gallery in London for 25 years. In 2000, she initiated the Serpentine's innovative architecture programme by commissioning a renowned architect to design a pavilion, constructed next to the Gallery each summer. Currently, as Senior Global Director of Special Projects at Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, Dame Julia specializes in International Contemporary Art focusing on the creative development of the Gallery. Awarded an OBE in 2003 for services to art, she is currently Visiting Professor in the School of Arts and Humanities at the Royal College of Art in London, teaching across all departments as well as a consultant and creative advisor to the Triennale Di Milano. Dame Julia serves on several boards, including The Courtauld Institute of Art, UK, and many more.

Farah Nayeri

is an arts and culture writer for the *New York Times* and the author of *Takedown: Art and Power in the Digital Age* (Astra House, 2022). She also hosts the *Culture Blast* podcast. Originally from Iran, she lives and works in London. Nayeri began her journalism career in Paris as a reporter for *Time* magazine and a contributor to *The Wall Street Journal*. She later became a correspondent of Bloomberg in Paris, Rome, and London, covering politics and economics, then culture. Nayeri is a public speaker and panel moderator, regularly chairing conferences for the *New York Times* and for institutions around the world.

The Challenges Facing the Art World Today

SPEAKER

Julia Peyton-Jones

IN CONVERSATION WITH
Farah Nayeri



The Challenges Facing the Art World Today

Farah Nayeri (F. N.) I would like to welcome Julia Peyton-Jones. It's a great pleasure for me to be on a podium with Julia, and of course, I think I can speak for Julia in saying that we're both extremely happy to find ourselves in the spectacular city of Barcelona. No complaints there.

My guest, Julia Peyton-Jones, requires no introduction. In fact, her full name is Dame Julia Peyton-Jones. She led the Serpentine Galleries for 25 years and during that time she and her co-director, Hans-Ulrich Obrist, transformed it into one of the very closely watched museums and cultural institutions of the Western world. And of course, one of the high points of Julia's extended time at the Serpentine were the summer pavilions that every summer she and Hans-Ulrich commissioned from a different artist or architect, and these were temporary and they were up for a few months and then they were taken apart and sometimes found new homes. And so, of course, I'm sure you've heard of the Serpentine Pavilion. This is one of the many legacies of Julia when she was at the Serpentine. Of course, now Julia is in a very different place. She is Senior Global Director at the Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac in London, Paris and Salzburg. So she has moved from the museum world to the world of the commercial gallery, and in a moment, we're going to find out from her how she experienced that transition. But first, a very, very brief little anecdote from me.

When Julia was at the Serpentine, she was one of the very few women at the top of the British art and museum world. It was a pretty lonely landscape at the time for women, and the other woman in the landscape, of course, was the late, great architect Zaha Hadid, who was a dear friend of Julia's, and, dare I say, someone I grew to know and appreciate as well. One afternoon in August 2013, I joined Julia on the lawn outside the Serpentine. It was August, so it wasn't raining, we could actually congregate in the outdoors, and I asked her about the shortage of women at the top and she said it was because the UK workplace, which had been shaped by generations of men, was ill equipped to accommodate women, who do things differently and see things differently. Julia said the glass ceiling exists because there isn't a way to enmesh women

in the professional world. She said: “We don’t know how to do it, and we also don’t know how to support women so they can do it.” Now, of course, things have changed for the better since then, thanks to the MeToo movement and the march of history. Tate, the Vatican Museums and the Louvre Museum all now have the first female directors in their history. And, of course, there are examples being set by men such as Prime Minister Justin Trudeau of Canada, who, of course, as you know, has a cabinet that is half male and half female. And somebody once came up to him and said: “Prime Minister, why didn’t you appoint a cabinet on merit instead of putting half women, half men in your cabinet?” And his answer was: “If I were to appoint my cabinet on merit, more than half of it would be female.” So, Julia, a little introduction to our conversation.

I wanted to ask you how you felt the picture had changed since that conversation we had roughly a decade ago. And, of course, I want you to please talk about the gender balance in the commercial art world as well as in the museum world. Are women being exhibited, collected, recruited in high positions more than ever before?

Julia Peyton-Jones (J. P.-J.) Thank you very much for inviting me. I’m very, very excited to be here in Barcelona and to be in Spain. I was in Madrid yesterday. I haven’t been here for far too long. And it’s just an incredible pleasure, and to be on this panel with Farah. Thank you for your kind introduction.

So, have things changed? Yes, they have. But I always feel it’s a sort of unequal truth, if I can put it like that, about how far women have come and also how far we can go, because there is no limit to what we can do or indeed we want to do. But there are more women artists being exhibited, there are more museums showing women artists. And indeed, it’s an exciting time when almost everything seems up for grabs. I should add that this morning, and I didn’t know whether to start with this or to bring it up further down our discussion, but the world is in this incredibly precarious position. I need hardly tell any of you, and in the *Times* today, it said, President Putin may not be bluffing with his threats to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine. So, it is in that context that we have this discussion today, when actually we all might be having to rethink what we do, how we do it, when we do it, and who we do it with, over and above the rethinking that has already gone on because of the war in Ukraine. And I certainly don’t want to turn this into any kind of political discussion, but I think context is, after all, what informs the art world. It’s what informs artists. It’s what strives them to make art. And for all of us who are involved in exhibiting it, either in the commercial world or in the not-for-profit world, these are really major considerations of our time.

F. N. Yeah. So, I mean, the context so far has been extremely complicated with the pandemic. Two years, two and a half years of quasi-shutdown, and now we have this new spanner in the works, as you say...

J. P.-J. Big spanner [laughs]. Yes, indeed. But I mean, the beginning, the middle and the end is for artists to flourish and to make great work. And that doesn’t matter whether you’re in the commercial sector or whether you’re in the not-for-profit sector. That is really what certainly makes me get up in the morning and always has done. And to see great art, which I believe you can see in any context, including art fairs. People say it’s difficult to see art in art fairs, I don’t actually believe that. I think you just have to look differently and make more effort. But this is an extraordinarily exciting time in which we live.

“THE BEGINNING, THE MIDDLE AND THE END IS FOR ARTISTS TO FLOURISH AND TO MAKE GREAT WORK. AND THAT DOESN’T MATTER WHETHER YOU’RE IN THE COMMERCIAL SECTOR OR IN THE NOT-FOR-PROFIT SECTOR.”

F. N. So let’s put Vladimir Putin to one side, because that really is the kind of loose cannon, as it were. We don’t know what he’s going to be doing, and so we need to concentrate on factors that we control. I did want to ask you about this gender balance that we were talking about. How do you feel as a prominent woman in the art world before and now? How does it look? Is the landscape still deserted or are you finding many more women in your world?

J. P.-J. There are many more women, but I’ve always thought there were women, women to engage with, women who make very important contributions. There are more women now, colleagues, artists, curators, directors, and what can I say? It’s wonderful to have colleagues who can share things in a context that might be more difficult otherwise.

F. N. So you have seen progress definitely in the last decade.

J. P.-J. I have seen progress, but I’m cautious about progress. This is ongoing, this is not done by any means. And if you look at the City, there are still not enough women in really senior positions in the financial district. When I was growing up as a young curator, or as a baby curator, as Gilbert & George would say, Joanna Drew was my mentor. She was my art world mother, and she was in a position of incredible power. She was Director of the Hayward Gallery,

Director of the Serpentine Galleries, director of all arts funding in England. I have five sisters, it's a completely matriarchal family. So for me, women rule, they always have done. I appreciate that not everybody has my experience, but I think I'm more forgiving of a world that does not privilege women, because I was brought up in a situation which did.

“I HAVE SEEN PROGRESS, BUT I’M CAUTIOUS. THIS IS ONGOING, THIS IS NOT DONE BY ANY MEANS. IF YOU LOOK AT THE CITY, THERE ARE STILL NOT ENOUGH WOMEN IN REALLY SENIOR POSITIONS IN THE FINANCIAL DISTRICT.”

F. N. I see. So I guess you are optimistic and you're seeing progress around you and that's good. I would like to open this up to questions sooner rather than later, so if some of the women in the room and some of the great female professionals we have here have their testimony to bring, we'd be happy to hear it.

I also wanted to talk about this pandemic, which we touched on, which is such a big part of the story. The art world is pretty much emerging from two and a half years of this scourge, which has killed many millions of human beings. And I just wondered how you view the situation now, as a senior director at Ropac, I was wondering how you saw where we are now. In other words, are we in a better place or are we still catching up?

J. P-J. I think we are still catching up, although a lot of the catching up has been done. But the one positive thing that came out of the pandemic was that people use technology. Collectors who had never really engaged with it, I mean, there were always people who were extremely well versed in technology and used it to not only keep informed but also to buy art, but there were an enormous number who didn't, and that has made a massive change, and also how galleries use technology. So, in terms of an opening up and an opportunity, fantastic. But of course, the impact has been severe, and certainly in the not-for-profit world. In the gallery world, less so.

Insofar as coming out of the pandemic, not only did people buy during the pandemic, not as much, but coming out of it, people have had a sort of liberating moment of: “Let's engage. We've been cooped up for all this time, now we want to go out and we want to engage and we want to buy art.” And art operates in many different ways, as we all know. One of them is to reaffirm

the life enhancing qualities of being alive in this extraordinary world in which we live. But it is also about if you are in a privileged position in which you can collect it, being able to choose wonderful works with which to live, and people are doing that. There's great discussion, certainly in the UK, about the Paris-London axis, which, maybe you're avoiding here.

F. N. No, we're not, actually. I'm going to be doing a panel on that.

J. P-J. Okay, well, maybe we could touch on that, because I've got a few figures... But the thing about the art world is that everybody crazes. So what's absolutely of the moment now, this minute, may not be at the moment in the next year, next six months or next five years. And in a way, that is because the world changes, particularly now at such an incredibly fast rate. If the art world wasn't reflecting that, then there would be something wrong, in my view. I was lucky enough to be around and starting at the Serpentine when the YBAs, (Young British Artists), came to prominence. That changed the UK art scene overnight, really, and made London from being in the backwater to being a focus.

“I WAS LUCKY ENOUGH TO BE AROUND AND STARTING AT THE SERPENTINE WHEN THE YBAS CAME TO PROMINENCE. THAT CHANGED THE UK ART SCENE OVERNIGHT, REALLY, AND MADE LONDON FROM BEING IN THE BACKWATER TO BEING A FOCUS.”

It was a marvellous moment and it took ten years for London to reach cruising altitude, but once it got there, thank God, it has stayed there for a long time, and if we need to fight hard to keep it there, all to the good. I mean, it's a competitive world we live in, whichever sector you're involved in, and I think that's really where we are now. Although in financial terms my figures tell me, ladies and gentlemen, that the UK art market was 9.9 billion in 2020 compared to 3.1 billion in France. So, London as a financial centre, quite apart from art, is a recognised thing. They're figures from two years ago, so it would be interesting to see what they are now. But of course, what has been incredibly difficult is Brexit and that has thrown a curveball, absolutely, in a very difficult way.

F. N. You were touching on technology and I think it's a theme that interests many people in the room, because we've had this whole NFT phenomenon, of

course. I don't know how involved the Ropac gallery has been in NFTs at all. Have you been engaging with that?

J. P-J. No. One of our artists, Tom Sachs, is very engaged and he's making work about it, and it was part of his Christmas gift last year, so we are engaged with it. But you were talking about the incredible sale price in your introduction, not at that level, we're not.

F. N. Okay, so do you know why not? Do you know why Thaddaeus and yourself and others haven't really decided to take the plunge into this thing that was making a lot of money for a while?

J. P-J. Well, I can't speak for Thaddaeus. I need to speak personally and invite an answer from anybody here about who has seen good art as an NFT, and that's really it. Tom Sachs is a brilliant artist, and I'm in no way relating my remarks to him, but I think it's difficult. It's another economy, certainly, in a financial market globally, which is extremely buoyant. I don't think there have ever been so many billionaires, so the opportunity is there.

“EVEN THOUGH I SHIFTED FROM THE NOT-FOR-PROFIT SECTOR TO THE COMMERCIAL SECTOR, IT'S STILL ABOUT ENCOURAGING AND SUPPORTING ARTISTS WHO ARE MAKING GREAT WORK.”

But for all of us, I feel, even though I shifted from the not-for-profit sector to the commercial sector, it's still about encouraging and supporting artists who are making great work. And I think I feel personally that that is really the most important thing, because then there's always a market, there are always audiences, there's always something to write about, and it's something to be treasured. However, NFTs are a phenomenon, and I would be mistaken if I didn't take them seriously and be engaged with them.

F. N. You were saying the gallery has engaged with technology. Do you mean that you've developed your online tools, that there's more online transacting going on?

J. P-J. Yes, but also there's a comfort level which I think didn't exist before, and I'm talking about everyone. There was always a sense of: “If you don't see it in person, then is that okay?” There are, of course, many examples of

collectors who never saw their art until they actually arrived on their front doorstep, or indeed in their storage unit, and maybe then they didn't see it. But nevertheless, the idea of art is that you engage with it in person. That's often, obviously not always possible, but that is the kind of principle, an old fashioned idea, possibly.

“NFTS ARE A PHENOMENON, AND I WOULD BE MISTAKEN IF I DIDN'T TAKE THEM SERIOUSLY AND BE ENGAGED WITH THEM.”

F. N. And so, what other lessons have we learned? Because we have been through a planetary cataclysm. This is not a blip, this is not a financial crisis, it's a real cataclysm that we're still in, in some ways. And I wondered how you felt the art world and the art market should be behaving differently. What should we be doing differently from what we did before?

J. P-J. I think that life dictates that rather than us saying: “Let's have a list and go through it and tick them all off.” I think so many things have changed. The effect of the pandemic is really incredibly serious still, the war in Ukraine certainly has a very serious impact on economies all over the world and is making people more cautious. And also possibly the idea that in these uncertain times, those collectors who can buy at a very high level, the theory is always that at the highest level those works of art are protected. What becomes more difficult is middle tier and lower tier, and what we can do about that. These are the things way beyond our control, but I think that idea that still, at any point in time, anything is possible is something that I believe in, either commercially or in the not-for-profit sector, and this is as true now as it ever was.

In terms of the digital offering, that's incredibly important; in terms of making the work available and engaging ever wider publics. And it's interesting that the art world still has a lesser share of the arts industry than film, particularly, we're still relatively young in that sense. You know, the arts industry is a global phenomenon, and it's solid as a rock. Therefore, how do we enhance our place on the rock? I know that's what you're asking me, and I'm not entirely answering it because I think it's really difficult at this point to see clearly where we might go, because the landscape is changing at such an incredible rate. So the trick, if you like, or the solution is to be inventive about how you engage with your clients, how you can communicate what you do, and also with art fairs. I think there are 36, somebody tell me if that's wrong, but there are huge

numbers of art fairs and coupled with bienales, so the opportunity to see art has never been greater.

F. N. Let's go back to you, Julia. Can you explain the transition from museum director to commercial art world, going from a completely non-selling, non-profit institution to a completely selling, for-profit institution?

J. P-J. Thank you for that question. I thought I was an incredibly good salesperson at a certain time.

F. N. You absolutely were, there's no question. But you weren't pocketing any money for it.

**“WHAT MAKES MY JOB SO INCREDIBLY
FORTUNATE AT THE GALLERY IS THAT I'VE BEEN
ABLE TO CURATE EXHIBITIONS.”**

J. P-J. No, that's true. I hope that I could go and work for Goldman Sachs, no problem. The reality is that I am immensely admiring of my colleagues, because they are both extremely knowledgeable but also very good at sales, and I think the combination to be a good salesperson is an art. To be knowledgeable is a necessity and, as they say, I'm in transition, I've been transitioning for the last five and a half years. And what makes my job so incredibly fortunate at the gallery is that I've been able to curate exhibitions. I work with four artists very closely, both in their careers—my job is to support them in whatever way I can, and also to encourage them to expand their practice, obviously, not that they need that at all—and also to sell art and work on special projects. And soon after I got to the gallery, I realised that “Senior Global Director” was a bit of a grand title, so I immediately got them to change my business card by putting “colon: Special Projects” [laughs], because I thought that would give me a little ease in my immersion into the commercial sector. But it is fascinating and I feel incredibly fortunate because the art world is a virtuous circle, it has always been a virtuous circle, and I've seen another perspective.

F. N. What do you mean the art world is a virtuous circle?

J. P-J. It's a virtuous circle because in order for it to function, in my view, it needs collectors, it needs museums, it needs philanthropists—which may or may not be different to collectors—it needs academics, it needs, obviously, artists at the very centre of everything, it needs writers. But if any one of that

piece of the cake should be missing, it suffers. And when I started in the art world, there were no collectors, there really were no collectors.

F. N. How can that be? Or do you mean there were no collectors of contemporary art?

J. P-J. Yes, that's more accurate, there were no collectors of contemporary art, there were only about five commercial galleries. And when you think of London today, it's this incredible stretch from East to West and North to South, there's a commercial gallery wherever you look, it's an incredibly dynamic scene. But when I started, that was absolutely not the case, and so it has grown in a way that you can't imagine. The UK looked backwards, not forwards, and it was really a revolution without bloodshed. The YBAs have an enormous amount to do with that because the press followed them, and once the press followed, then everyone thought that was rather cool, the Princess of Wales got involved, she was a patron for a certain time, and so on and so on. But it built steadily over the years and in the same way as collectors have become more and more immersed, amazingly in the UK, just as much as anywhere else, I wouldn't say more so, but there certainly is an incredible level of engagement and appetite and desire, not only to know about art, but also to own it.

**“WHEN I STARTED IN THE ART WORLD, THERE
WERE NO COLLECTORS OF CONTEMPORARY
ART, THERE WERE ONLY ABOUT FIVE
COMMERCIAL GALLERIES.”**

F. N. How are sales going at the gallery now? I know Thaddaeus represents people like Anselm Kiefer, I don't imagine he's having any problem marketing those paintings, but he also has many other artists in the stable, emerging ones, younger ones. How are they doing? Because the problem with the art market, I don't need to tell you, is that it's very top heavy. I mean, at least that's where the money and the attention and the auction attention are, at the top. But what's going on otherwise, especially post pandemic?

J. P-J. Well, I'm pleased and proud to say—which I would have to anyway but actually it's true—that the younger generation are hugely desired. The interest list for the artists that I work with: Megan Rooney, Alvaro Barrington, Mandy El-Sayegh, Bjarne Melgaard, is extraordinary. I mean, it's not unusual to have 150 people on the waiting list.

F. N. How do you explain that?

J. P-J. Because they're doing wonderful work.

F. N. But there's also the opportunity, people think, of investing in this artist when they're still young and then, perhaps, there's the whole flipping thing that they might end up doing, which is an ugly word, I know...

“I’M PLEASED AND PROUD TO SAY THAT THE YOUNGER GENERATION ARE HUGELY DESIRED. IT’S NOT UNUSUAL TO HAVE 150 PEOPLE ON THE WAITING LIST.”

J. P-J. Well, it's part of the commercial world. I'm learning, I come from the outside, so I'm very fascinated about how everything works. We spend an enormous amount of time deciding who is going to get what work, not as a way to torment people, but to ensure that the work does not change hands. And so it's actually a reasonably lengthy process and, touch wood, they don't come back on the market. And it's really important they don't because it's not helpful.

F. N. So, 150 on the list of people who want to buy Alvaro Barrington, who I interviewed for *The New York Times*, absolutely fascinating, wonderful artist, or Mandy El-Sayegh and some of these other names. How do you pick which one gets the work? It's a nice problem to have.

J. P-J. Well, it is a nice problem to have. These are lengthy discussions amongst my colleagues about their collection, their support of artists, and that's really what it comes down to. And also, if somebody doesn't get a work of art who has been maybe connecting with us for a long time, who is absolutely eligible to buy work, then there are also other shows coming up, so it's not as though it's a once only, if they don't get it this time they'll never get it again. So, you're thinking about the long term.

F. N. That's true... I'm going to ask a couple of more things, which are of great interest, I'm sure, to our audience. But I also really want you to start thinking of some questions, because we want to make the session more interactive. Julia isn't here every day and I'm sure there are many questions that you would like to ask...

You were mentioning Brexit and everything and just briefly, if you could say how Brexit has been harmful, as you said, to London and its status in the art market.

J. P-J. Well, I mean, it just escalated beyond. I didn't support Brexit, some people that I know did, but I didn't. And it's a nightmare because we're part of Europe, we're a tiny little island. Why would we cast ourselves adrift? I don't get it. Anyway, we did, and the costs now to transport work are three times higher and, if you're a small gallery, this is crippling. And the danger is that it might change what is seen, because you can't send things around the world, you can't bring in art that my artists are working on outside the UK, paperwork is just logistically much more complicated and it doesn't make sense. However, in moments of difficulty, you know, necessity is the mother of invention. But we've also got a gallery career and it's interesting that Asia has taken over from the UK and is now second place after the US in terms of market and market share, which is, of course, telling. I didn't go to Frieze in Korea but I heard it was absolutely fantastic. But coming back to Brexit, I think it's challenging and it's going to take time for that to settle down, for the UK to find its feet again.

“WE SPEND AN ENORMOUS AMOUNT OF TIME DECIDING WHO IS GOING TO GET WHAT WORK TO ENSURE THAT THE WORK DOES NOT CHANGE HANDS.”

F. N. My final question before the audience intervenes: We just lost Queen Elizabeth II after her 70-year reign. I wondered, did she make you Dame Commander of the British Empire? Was she the person from whom you received your honour?

J. P-J. No, she wasn't.

F. N. But I imagine you must have met her over the years and had exchanges with her?

J. P-J. Exchanges, no, but I did meet her, yes. The Princess of Wales was patron of the Serpentine so that positions you in a certain camp. However, I have met the King previously, and the involvement of the royal family and the Princess of Wales, in my view, changed the view about art in England 100%, because nobody liked it. When I joined Serpentine nobody liked contemporary art, however, because she was involved it changed. People didn't like it any

better, but they engaged with it. And, of course, the royal family, we don't have President Truss, who is our new Prime Minister, we have King Charles, and I need you to make up your mind who you would prefer in a revolving doors of prime ministers, that seems to be what's happening in England at the moment. But as a role model for women to work, you hear women working up until the point they have a baby. I've never heard of anybody working up until two days before their death, it's a remarkable achievement.

**“THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE ROYAL FAMILY
AND THE PRINCESS OF WALES, IN MY VIEW,
CHANGED THE VIEW ABOUT ART IN ENGLAND
100%, BECAUSE NOBODY LIKED IT.”**

I think the outpouring of respect and affection after her death was an extraordinary thing for the country, and we talked about women, that was your first question. She is the ultimate role model, being a longstanding figurehead who navigated all the different twists and turns in the road and, as I say, as a working woman, was exemplary, certainly to me.

Contributions and questions (c/q) from the audience

Q1: I'm Marek Claassen, I'm from ArtFacts. Julia, we went in the same car to the Hayward festival a long time ago... I have one question because you mentioned Zaha Hadid, and you spoke about women, what about Persia and Iran? Do you think that what's happening there is a good thing? This revolution that's coming up, and also for the case of women. How would you or do you engage with artists from outside of continental Europe, America? How do you find artists there, and do you think that these artists are represented enough, especially female artists? And also I would like to relate to what's happening there and the cost for female artists.

J. P-J. It's a very good question, and of course, you look around the world and there are pockets of atrocities almost wherever you look. And it's a tragedy that in 2022 your very good question should be addressed, because how is it that after all these centuries we're still facing war and famine, terrible disasters on a regular basis? And also we've talked about climate change, ecology, which is a very pressing issue today, and from the commercial world just as much as from any other world, it is something we need to address because we

have a collective responsibility.

I'm not active personally in supporting the women of Iran or the women of Afghanistan, or any of the other women who actually need our support at any one time. And I think what's interesting about the art world is that it's a global phenomenon and I feel quite unequal, personally, quite unequal to the task of being well informed about art across the planet. So, the answer to your question is no, of course. I personally am not doing enough. I can't speak for the gallery, I don't think that's quite appropriate. But it is time, I think, that all of us really paid more attention to see what is possible. But there are obviously very many restrictions in many places that make it very difficult.

Q2: Thank you for this wonderful conversation. My name is Anja Obradovic, I come from Serbia, owner of Hestia Gallery, I live between Paris and Belgrade. We're participating in Paris Photo with the gallery this year and as you know, they have a special section that's called "Elles x Paris Photo". I think that's a great opportunity to showcase women photographers and empower them or put a focus on them. My question would be: do you think that even though these kind of things are putting a highlight on women, are they also shadowing, in this case, male photographers? Or how could we achieve a balance? Because there's also been a little bit of debate about the recent Venice Biennale, that there were too many women, so what's a good way, then, to achieve a balance? Or what's your opinion on this?

F. N. Like, we're excluding men now by paying too much attention to women?

J. P-J. No, it's a focus. Personally, I don't see that. And even if it was true that men are being excluded, which I don't think is the case, but for the Venice Biennale the proposition was that it should be a Biennale focused principally on women. So obviously they were excluded. And I think it would be very difficult for a curator to propose a Venice Biennale focusing only on men [laughs], I think that probably won't happen.

F. N. Actually, it did happen, and there's stories on this. In 1995 I think there was a Venice Biennale that was 90 % men. Well, we almost got to 100 %.

J. P-J. Anyway, that's another story. But we are where we are now, and I'm less worried about that because I think the recalibration will come quite naturally. And also, if we're all informed by the work that's being made, then there is

a balance in that. I think it's appropriate that women are privileged until the balance in general, naturally, gets realigned. In curating a show, one of the challenges as always is not to create a balanced view exactly, but to create a nuanced view, and I think nuance is so important to the art world now. We haven't talked about technology, but there's so much of what you read online that's black and white, it's a black and white response, but I'm not so worried. I went to Belgrade recently to see the Erwin Wurm exhibition, he's an artist that we represent, and it is a fantastic city with wonderful galleries and museums.

F. N. If I may add something to what Julia just said, I was recently at The Armory Show and Cecilia Alemani, curator of the Biennale, was on my panel, and she basically turned around and said: "We actually need more exhibitions resembling mine because there are still too many women who've been overlooked, underrepresented, invisible, erased, etc. There's still a lot of work to be done." So, she actually called for more exhibitions of her type.

Q3: Hello, I'm Paco Barragán. I'm a curator, sometimes, and more things. Wonderful panel. My question is: how was the reaction of your colleagues from the museum world when you shifted to the commercial art world? Was it positive, negative, whatever?

J. P-J. I think they were surprised, but I'm not sure. Were you surprised?

F. N. Yes, very! [laughs]

J. P-J. Well, I think it also coincided with, as you may know, I had a child, and that meant that I couldn't work in the museum world in the way that I had been doing. So I needed to find a job that I could still be a professional woman, because that's part of my DNA, to be in the art world, which is my passion, but also have a lifestyle which was more manageable. I think Thaddaeus has the most wonderful artists that he shows, but that's true of many commercial galleries. So I feel it's an enormous privilege, and it's an enormous privilege to look at the art world from a different perspective, because, as I said earlier, we all need each other. You can't take one section out and think it's all going to sustain itself, it won't. And when I was at the Serpentine, we worked very closely with our colleagues in the commercial sector, and we wanted to show their artists. So the relationship was positive and strong and collegial.

F. N. What does Pia, your daughter, think of you being in the art world? Does she care about art?

J. P-J. Well [laughs], she's very funny because I made a book last year which was my daily visual diary of our life together, of drawings, my drawings. And so she says: "Mama, you're an artist and you're a builder!" Because I was working on the Pavilion and have a hard hat with JPJ on it. And then she says, because I'm a visiting professor at the Royal College of Art, I'm a teacher, so she finds it an absolutely wonderful concoction and threatens to bring me into her school to teach her and her classmates, which I think won't be a good idea. [laughs]

F. N. Well, you are a wonderful concoction and it's been absolutely delightful to have you. Thank you so much, Julia, for accepting our invitation to Barcelona.

J. P-J. Thank you very much.

Elvira Dyangani Ose

is Director of the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona. Previously, she was Director of The Showroom, London. She is affiliated to the Thought Council at the Fondazione Prada. She has previously been Curator of the Göteborg International Biennial of Contemporary Art; Curator of International Art at Tate Modern, London; Artistic Director of Rencontres Picha - Lubumbashi Biennial, Democratic Republic of the Congo; Curator of Contemporary Art at the Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo (CAAC), Seville; Senior Curator at Creative Time in New York; and Curator of Contemporary Art at the Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno (CAAM) in Las Palmas, Gran Canaria. She recently joined Tate Modern Advisory Council. Her curatorial projects are of a multidisciplinary nature aimed at observing the telling of history as a collective experience, intervention in public space, and the recovery of non-Western narratives and epistemologies, including *A Story Within A Story...* (2015), *Ibrahim El-Salahi: A Visionary Modernist* (2013), *Across the Board* (2012–2014), *Carrie Mae Weems: Social Studies* (2010), *Arte Invisible* (2009, 2010), and *Olvida Quien Soy/Erase Me From Who I Am* (2006). She recently joined Tate Modern Advisory Council.

Carles Guerra

is an artist, art critic and independent curator. He holds a PhD from Universitat de Barcelona. He studied at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Universitat de Barcelona and the Media Studies Department, The New School for Social Research. His most recent profile has been associated with outstanding positions in the field of cultural management, cultural policies and curatorial activities. He has been Director of Primavera Fotogràfica de Catalunya, Director of the Virreina Centre de la Imatge, Chief curator at Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona MACBA and, from 2015 through 2020, Executive director at Fundació Antoni Tàpies. On top of a vast number of monographic exhibitions devoted to individual artists such as Ahlam Shibli, Art & Language, Allan Sekula, Susan Meiselas, Harun Farocki, Oriol Vilanova and Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, he has curated projects like *1979. A Monument to Radical Instants* and *Antoni Tàpies. Political Biography*.

Can We Make the Gallery World More Inclusive?

SPEAKER

Elvira Dyangani Ose

**IN CONVERSATION WITH
Carles Guerra**

Talking Galleries Barcelona Symposium



Can We Make the Gallery World More Inclusive?

Carles Guerra (C. G.) Welcome everybody here in the room as well. I'm very much honoured to be in conversation with friend and colleague Elvira Dyangani Ose, currently director of this institution, MACBA, the Museum of Contemporary Art of Barcelona.

As a brief introduction to Elvira, I would just say she's always been and she always came across to me as a powerful person, a person who was full of desire, full of strong ideas. Her actual position is quite something to celebrate for everyone. When she was appointed director, there was no doubt that this is what we were all looking for. What were we looking for? We were looking for a person able to convey all the demands we project on institutions like this, like a museum of contemporary art. She represents a long-term, long-standing career, a long-term sort of accumulation of ideas that are waiting to transform the museum into a place where reparation is conducted. In this sense, she's in the best of positions to accomplish that.

Elvira comes from an Equatorial Guinean family, even though she's always been living in Spain, except for the past few years of her life, when she's been working in London, most recently as the Director of The Showroom Gallery and also when she was Senior Curator at Creative Time. But most importantly for this conversation we're going to have is when she was Curator of International Art at Tate Modern and she was also responsible for bringing the art of the African diaspora to the collections of Tate.

I could go on and actually speak about her works, her exhibitions... She recently wrote an extraordinary piece for a conference at the Mapfre Foundation in which she was basically laying down and showing her cards in terms of what is going to be director of a public institution like this, and she was referring to a book by Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture beyond the Colour Line*, a book that is kind of a reference to understand what inclusiveness is in the art world, and I guess for Elvira this is a reference. In this sense she has created exhibitions like *Contra la raza*, which was presented in Photo España

in 2020, or before that, another exhibition, *Erase Who I Am*, at the Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria where she worked as a curator.

I think that the debate we have to really deal with here this morning is a debate that may look like it's only pertaining to the art world, to public institutions, but indeed it's also a matter of interest for the art world and the art market. Not long ago, we were basically concerned about the balance between local and international, and this museum was quite an example of this very provincial debate, let me put it that way. I mean, if you look at the structure in London, Tate and Tate Modern, what is the difference? I mean, one is for the national, the local, and the other is for more cosmopolitan or international debates, names and artists. But more recently, gender, race, colour, opened the gates abroad, the quotas, not to mention the importance of collectives we've seen...The Venice Biennale has been mentioned, but what about documenta last summer? It's been quite a challenge for the art market in as much as it represented a plethora of collectives being framed in the art world yet being very elusive for the economies of the art world, so this is another challenge to what inclusiveness can be.

“IS THE ART MARKET READY TO PERFORM WITH AS MUCH FLEXIBILITY AS PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS ARE SOMEHOW OBLIGED TO NOWADAYS?”

What I would like to say during my preliminary remarks, before we can plunge into the conversation, is that this process of inclusivity, as someone said, by polarising this exclusivity, it's an ever-expanding process that makes inclusiveness an endless task. In the little introduction I wrote for this I said: “And what about the non-human entities?” So basically the question is: is the art market ready to perform with as much flexibility as the range of public institutions are somehow obliged to nowadays? Is the art market able to perform with this sort of agility? I think, of course it can. The question is: why is it not happening as often as we wish? Elvira, if you would like to start with this first question?

Elvira Dyangani Ose (E. D. O.) It's a pleasure for me also to share this platform with you and to welcome everybody here, and welcome everybody in their homes, for later in the future, when you watch this on the platform's video channel.

I think that you have talked about many things, I was taking notes and there's a lot that I'd love to say, but one is a start and I think that it's a great question. It can be applied to what we are dealing with today, which is how the gallery world can be more inclusive, and one of the things that happens to me when you grow up, let's say, as a post-colonial figure, without knowing that that is who you are or who you are being framed by, is to question the framework: what makes necessary that sense of inclusiveness? What is normativity? What is the element of normalisation of normativisation that a structure has to go through in order to be able to include others that are not considered the norm? I think that's perhaps a question for all of you in the art world, a question for Llucà and the team, others who've been considering this platform to reflect on that.

“WHAT MAKES NECESSARY THAT SENSE OF INCLUSIVENESS? WHAT IS NORMATIVITY?”

There are several issues here. One is that there is a sense of interdependency that is obviously connected. One of the critical things, like if we go to look at my CV, and I'll use this as a case study and then perhaps we can take it from there to something more abstract, which would be the time when I joined Tate and Tate Modern. As you say, funnily enough Tate Britain, Tate Modern, Tate Liverpool, all the Tates, including the website that was considered for a while another institution, right? There are all these elements that constitute that, but also the fact that Tate was collecting, and in relation to many people in this room, for a national collection. So in a way, the institutions are vehicles for something larger, and that larger thing I think is what needs to be questioned, because if you are to be the national collection of the UK, you'll be the one to also perform what being a part of the United Kingdom means: what that nation is, and what nation-ness says about history, and how much diversity you need to bring in in order to be able to tell that story.

I think the key issue, and the reason why I put this example has to do with the moment that I arrived at Tate, when Tate was considering—as much as it has been doing with Latin America and other parts of Europe and the rest of the world—to include modern and contemporary African art in its collection. But it didn't have a strategy, and hadn't considered at that point what it means to include within that notion of African-ness, the black art that was produced by the African diaspora both in the Americas and in the rest of the world, and particularly in Britain, how that history of that particular moment had a space.

It was interesting, and I say this because for me the search for inclusiveness has to do with a higher state that we haven't been able to arrive at yet, We're progressing towards a place where there's no need to be inclusive. I don't know if you agree with me, but I think that's the point, you know? What I mean is that the normativity, how to go beyond the moment and place that we are in now...

**“FOR ME THE SEARCH FOR
INCLUSIVENESS HAS TO DO WITH A
HIGHER STATE THAT WE HAVEN'T BEEN
ABLE TO ARRIVE AT YET.”**

What happened in that moment at Tate is that we started working on this strategy, we had an Acquisitions Committee, but also we started defining African-ness in order to be included in the collection. And as you said, this is a major public institution that had to imagine what it's doing in order to bring this to the collection and to bring this to the national narrative, together with other institutions such as Victoria and Albert Museum or the National Galleries. So, that moment was very interesting. What happened at the time is that 1-54, the Contemporary African Art Fair, also started and many artists from the continent had a platform that was approved by the gallery world in order to be on display in London.

I think that kind of configuration made possible, perhaps, the work of many pioneers in the gallery world that were trying to be inclusive in relation to race, because race is one of the aspects that can be included, but there are obviously others: gender, diversity in terms of neurology or ableism, etc., all these things that have to be considered. But also the fact that in all of these things what we are looking for, more than people... I mean, those categories that determine inclusiveness are not aesthetic categories, you need good artworks. And you need people that look critically at the art world, but you also need brave people that are capable of challenging those normative frameworks.

C. G. As we were chatting over the phone for this conversation yesterday you mentioned, while you were at the Acquisitions Committee at Tate, how positive the reaction was to the Calgary system, how receptive they were to these policies. How could you describe this collaboration between the art world and the public institution sector in these terms?

E. D. O. I think that's a great question. What happened at that moment was that all of a sudden, the local expertise in the African continent and the African

diaspora started to flourish, to find colleagues, not only the galleries that have been working there, and I'm not going to name some, but maybe most of you know now that I'm working, for instance, in South Africa, or in other areas like the north of Africa, Marrakech and other places. Many independent places started to think about what it would be to immerse themselves in the gallery world. But what is interesting at the time is that there was a configuration of Western galleries and Western platforms to support colleagues in the field in other places in the world, and particularly in that case in the African continent. So, that conversation also opened up a debate of what was happening in the continent and fairs like in Johannesburg or Cape Town started to open up as well.

**“WE'RE PROGRESSING TOWARDS A
PLACE WHERE THERE'S NO NEED TO
BE INCLUSIVE.”**

What I mean is that perhaps we carry the steam, let's say, as a public institution, and I'm talking now about MACBA, but without the equal support from public to private and from private to public, this will never happen, right? What I think is important is to be brave. I think institutions are brave but we are also legitimised by a world that then follows that same bravery, the same argument, and without the acknowledgment of that interdependence, we have a problem. You talked about documenta, and I'm very much a follower of structures that are para-institutional, that happen perhaps before the institutions are set up, or inspire the cultural institutions that exist in those particular contexts. That is a work that I share, but also I think in the most fruitful backgrounds or contexts the work that these institutions have done is also followed or supported by private enterprises, and I think there are some of these examples in Africa that maybe we could look at.

C. G. Let's stop for a second on this issue because I think it's quite important, because we always think of inclusiveness in terms of gender, race, colour, neurodiversity, etc., but then when it comes to collectives we realise that in the art market, and especially this summer, there was kind of a harsh reaction to that massive reality. So, what is to be done in this sense?

E. D. O. I think documenta poses to us all, particularly you guys in the room, a crisis and a moment of self-reflection. I remember particularly, and I'm not going to say names again... keeping all these secrets you see [laughs]... before documenta started there was already this scepticism, and I was saying that

the fact that this happened in documenta, the only place in the world, by the way, that something like that can happen, doesn't erase everything else that is happening in the gallery world. For instance, the art market could benefit from some of these initiatives and the fact that it happens doesn't mean that everything else is erased, you mentioned earlier, and we have a talk later today or tomorrow about Venice, which in a way many people have been criticising or establishing how different it is and how the marketplace is so present in the exhibition. I think we have to understand that this interdependence, this economic intertwinedness that exists in all this world makes things possible, right? If you agree with me, without the Harald Szeemann edition of documenta many of us wouldn't be here, many of the art movements wouldn't have happened, right? I think we are close to seeing how projects like documenta 15 can also bring about some change, not only in the gallery world but also in the art world per se, because I think they create the dynamics that also challenge institutions like a museum.

“YOU NEED PEOPLE THAT LOOK CRITICALLY AT THE ART WORLD, BUT YOU ALSO NEED BRAVE PEOPLE THAT ARE CAPABLE OF CHALLENGING THOSE NORMATIVE FRAMEWORKS.”

C. G. Now that you mention Harald Szeemann, I think we should also mention the pioneering work of the late Okwui Enwezor, who actually opened up the gates for Africa and many other continents in the wider representation of the art world. And by the way, his term to actually force or invite or focus attention on continents like Africa was co-evenness, meaning that it's not just a matter of inclusiveness, it's something existing next to us at the same moment, so why isn't it represented?

E. D. O. Yes, and in that sense co-evenness has to do with what I was saying before, right? I think what Okwui managed to do in both documenta and Venice was to keep a balance and reflect the real art world, in all its essences and in all its problematics. And I think perhaps people would have felt that documentary was focused on specific issues, but I also think that was necessary for the curators of documenta at the time, that they decided they wanted to do that. That doesn't erase everything else that is happening, and that doesn't erase that you can go as a gallery or as people in the same private enterprises linked to art, because there are many others, to go to documenta and discover something that you were interested in, and there were many, many talented individuals as well. I think we need to go through that process

of understanding, all of you who lived through that specific experience, it was one that needed to be lived, and then we'll see what happens. I think we need distance to engage with it.

C. G. I have to brush on that inclusiveness is a way too shy idea or term for what we are facing now, and I would propose to rather think that we are living in the age of restitution, reparation and return, especially after Macron's report, which actually brought to attention the idea and the demand to repair, to pay back.

“PROJECTS LIKE DOCUMENTA 15 CAN ALSO BRING ABOUT SOME CHANGE, NOT ONLY IN THE GALLERY WORLD BUT ALSO IN THE ART WORLD PER SE. THEY CREATE THE DYNAMICS THAT ALSO CHALLENGE INSTITUTIONS LIKE A MUSEUM.”

E. D. O. Absolutely, and I was thinking about co-evenness again, like what it means to live with certain words for a long time, and what it means to repair and retribute, which are two different things, right? I think one of the issues is that, politically speaking, restitution means material, cultural material, to be returned, but also in economic terms. But to repair is something else that we can all engage with, that has to do with where we position ourselves to start working towards the sense in which the normal is a larger spectrum of things and the normal is no longer just a Western category. And I think that's one of the things that we need to do: to look at the terms and definitions, and the institutions behind those definitions, in a way that will help us to open up the meanings, to bring nuance to what it means, and here I can say that in a very strong way, but you know and I know and you guys know, that this has a root and has a way of being very pragmatic and put it into terms, right? I can talk about the way that I could do that in a space like MACBA, but then we're here to hear you talking about how you do that in a space in the gallery world.

But what I think we are talking about, and Lluçia should tell us, why this particular question is looking for opportunities for good work, good artwork, artwork that inspires and motivates us to be at the table, to have a platform, and I think that's the key. How do we do that without also forgetting, and I think this is very important, that we need to know what are the contexts in which a work is produced and then also support the context, support what is

happening somewhere else. Another person that I'm not going to name now [laughs] was telling an audience that we still need encyclopaedic museums, and I was saying: "Woah! I have no problem with encyclopaedic museums as long as there is the need for restitution, the need for definition, but also if they support encyclopaedic museums in other places." So perhaps the key thing here for a more inclusive gallery world is to start supporting what's happening elsewhere.

“WE NEED TO LOOK AT THE TERMS AND DEFINITIONS, AND THE INSTITUTIONS BEHIND THOSE DEFINITIONS, IN A WAY THAT WILL HELP US TO OPEN UP THE MEANINGS.”

C. G. That's a great question: how can we picture a gallery performing a politics of restitution. Often when we think of the art world it is an economy that takes something from somewhere to sell it all over the world, and this is pretty much an extractivist principle. So if we turn things around and we say that galleries have to also perform in the age of restitution, what is the economy?

E. D. O. But the thing is how then can we claim, let's say, social justice but at the same time being in business, right? You and I are like the worst people to talk about this, because we didn't want a gallery, so I feel like it's a very unfair question for us to ask. But what I think is important is to understand the circular economy, and this is something that affects both the gallery world as much as the museum. I remember working with Kathrin Böhm at The Showroom and she had this notion of the "icebergian" economy. What is interesting is that there are some people that operate above the surface and we are very few and we're very privileged, but there's a structure under me that I think needs to be taken care of and I think if we offer a space for that structure to surface, perhaps to transform into a volcano for all we know, to help us to transform the art world, then we will be doing a favour, we will be doing this inclusiveness a favour, but I also think we need to look at the history.

I remember, Llucà, you were here introducing us in a beautiful way to Joan de Muga, an incredible pioneer of the gallery world in Barcelona, who in the 70s was doing what you guys are doing right now, with the difficulties of living in the Franco era, with the difficulties of trying to create, as you said, a balance between the local and the international, with the difficulties of opening a multi-sized space, and imagined something beyond his private venture when he made Espai Poble Nou and set up exhibitions with Mario

Merz, Bruce Nauman, Rebecca Horn... it's incredible. That happened here in Barcelona, and sometimes we don't look at those things because they were a private venture, but for me the enterprise that Joan de Muga did, as much as the *canalla* movement and all these naughty other scenes that were multi-transformative and transdisciplinary—that existed in Barcelona since the 60s, 70s and early 80s—is important and it's all of that which to me constitutes the condition of possibility for institutions to emerge. And without that we wouldn't have MACBA. I think there is something about the context and the way that the context has to apprehend what has happened in the past in order to move forward. We need to start cultivating that also, as well as public programmes and exhibitions, and I think that's also what it takes now, and I think that's the reason why you gather together every now and then as people from the gallery world, to consider what has happened in your field in order to move forward, in order to consider what is possible, what you have left behind in order to make your gallery.

“PERHAPS THE KEY THING HERE FOR A MORE INCLUSIVE GALLERY WORLD IS TO START SUPPORTING WHAT'S HAPPENING ELSEWHERE.”

I have to say I've met incredible people in my life who have these private ventures and they understand the risks, they understand the sometimes volatile economy that we are all involved in, the socio-political issues, and they are persisting and some of them are not rich people that are coming from wealthy backgrounds, they are just brave people who thought about supporting artists over a period of time where they can push a certain agenda and find fulfilment, and I think that's what I consider will open things up to a more inclusive world. For me what happened at Tate at the time was a step forward, something that transformed the normal framework, that's the key, right? And for that you need brave people.

C. G. Thank you for mentioning Joan de Muga, because he is indeed quite a remarkable figure that grew out of very local conditions in Barcelona, linking the past of Joan Miró, Joan Prats, then opening a gallery in 1979 which was a legendary gallery in the city, the Galeria Joan Prats. His daughters and the actual directors, Patricia de Muga and Marta de Muga, are sitting among us. And then as Elvira also mentioned, opening in 1989 an incredible space that functioned almost like a *Kunsthalle* in the city of Barcelona, bringing Kounellis, Mario Merz, Richard Long, Lawrence Wiener, Rodney Graham... a range of

projects and exhibitions we no longer speak of that put Barcelona on the map of European institutions. So, we understand that the art world, the art market and public institutions are really encroached, they really form an encroached system that can no longer be disentangled. That is to say: if one makes a step forward the other has to go behind and make that sort of progress in advance. So, after all your experience, and now getting more focused, what are you planning to do here at MACBA in that sense?

E. D. O. That's a great question and it will be unveiled over time...

C. G. We want an answer now! [laughs]

E. D. O. Well, there are many things. One of the issues that affects the museum is proximity. I think it was philosopher Marina Garcés who said that we need to think about what is the right distance and the right proximity in order to do the art of implication, as she calls it. But I think there is something very important which is to take stock of that history. I was saying for instance that by acknowledging what we all know as a museum to those spheres that are, perhaps, counterculture or belong to the gallery sector, etc., we also acknowledge that those are conditions of possibility for the museum to emerge in the late 80s as an idea for the foundation of MACBA, with Leopoldo Rodés and the then mayor of Barcelona, Pasqual Maragall. But then we also have to acknowledge the fact that if we give that a space and a platform in the museum, that means that the relationship we establish with galleries today and the relationship we establish with counterculture today are going to be significant for the growth of the museum.

**“THE COMMUNITY IS NOT ONLY THE
ART SCENE, IT’S NOT ONLY THE PEOPLE
IN THE FIELD, IT’S ALSO THE PEOPLE
THAT DON’T FEEL INTERPOLATED BY
THE MUSEUM.”**

There is also something that is very important for me which is the lean in the team, of course, and I wouldn't do this without my team, is to connect the museum, to connect us with the neighbourhood. The community is not only the art scene, it's not only the people in the field, it's also the people that don't feel interpolated by the museum. We need to reconnect with that sphere, with people that feel that we have grown and left them behind, or we have gone in a direction and maybe never grew and left them behind while they were growing somewhere else. So

that sense of creating a space, a platform for those voices, for those institutions, para-institutions, artist collectives, but also individuals, is important.

I would love, and I have had conversations with younger galleries that are devoting their practice to support young artists in the field, particularly here in Barcelona, that we need to do things together. We might not know what that means, but I want to work with the galleries that are here. I've spent a year working with the team to create a structure that will help us and give us tools in order to do that, and I feel lighter now to engage in this relationship with the field here and the rest of the world. So it's very exciting that maybe in a few months or weeks or so we have conversations with people in the room about projects that we could do in a year or two or maybe more. For me it's critical to open up the space to create space. We were saying we need the *plaza* to come into the museum, right? We really need Barcelona city to be inside MACBA and offer those spaces for the communities here and the incoming communities is also very important.

C. G. Very much looking forward to this, Elvira... Maybe it's the right time to open up the floor to questions among the audience, and we already have one here.

Contributions and questions (c/q) from the audience

Q1. When I was listening to you when you were appointed as new director of MACBA it was a real change: a woman of African descent being a director in a prominent European institution. It was quite exceptional and immediately I wondered if it could impact the programming, both being a woman and being of non-white ethnic origin, and I'm sorry because all the time we have to underscore this when we address you, because I think change can really be moved by people like you. And so I was wondering, when you applied for the position and when you were interviewed, did you make statistics about how the programming of MACBA, did you calculate the proportion of women who had been exhibited in solo exhibitions in the last few years and of artists of colour, and do you have aims to promote especially these two groups, or do you think that this is not an issue? I think I know the answer but I would like you to develop it a bit and underscore if this is really important to you and if we really have to face this issue today in the 21st century. Before you arrived, MACBA was a very good institution but it was very deeply rooted in the 20th century and I think with your appointment it can really shift from a

20th-century museum to the 21st-century museum. Do you agree? And what are your plans regarding diversity in terms of offering opportunities to women artists and artists who are of non-white origin? Thank you.

E. D. O. Thank you so much. That's what we call "abrir el melón", open the melon [laughs]. It's a very exciting question. I didn't make statistics, but yes, of course I realised that there were very few women—something that has been changing very timidly in the past years—and also very few people of colour obviously, people from different areas of the world, non-western areas, but there is so much I can do in five years and then if I'm promoted to five more years then yes, there will be some things that I can do. But still, I've always said that I'm not working for the museum that is now but for the museum that will come, and I need to make structural changes because what you're talking about are structural changes. How we can bring the museum to the 21st century, that's the key question.

**“I'M NOT WORKING FOR THE MUSEUM
THAT IS NOW BUT FOR THE MUSEUM THAT
WILL COME.”**

I'm Black and I'm a woman, yes, you see it, you can touch it, yes, yes of course. I mean, it's as you say, I remember I was here in the 90s and that was the issue: "Oh, I'm going to do things with African artists," and I thought: "What about all the other things that I'm interested in?" I had other appetites that didn't necessarily happen to go through the geography that I come from. I was born in Spain, so maybe I'll do something about flamenco because I was born in Cordoba, who knows? What I mean is that we need to accept a certain freedom in order to do things, but be aware of the context that I'm working in. These two main things that I mentioned before are awareness of the context, city, neighbourhood, artistic community, gallery sector and other sectors, counterculture, etc. that we haven't taken into consideration.

As you know I've been working since 2019–2020 on a Pan-African show with the Art Institute of Chicago. I was working on it as a guest curator and now I'm going to bring it to Barcelona, so that's one of the things I'm doing. And this year and next year there are many women in the programme, but when we were doing that I didn't say: "Oh, let's have 90% women in the programme." In fact, I always mention that we are a 90% or 95% women on the team. I think that we need to also change the way that it's framed, how gender is treated as an exchange currency, we have to change that and

start working on how we present projects also to help us to challenge the dramaturgy of the space.

In November we're going to launch the new presentation of the collection and I realised we put the wave in certain installations that are mainly women. Again, it's nothing that I prepared, but of course I'm here and I have a position from where I think and from where I work, and that is exposed. One of the things that is very important for me—and I used it before in terms of when I was invited to an institution, or I did it in The Showroom—is to consider that a project or an exhibition is not something that happens in the museum, it happens to the museum. And this sense of intervening, of finding a space that is going to challenge... My appointment already challenged some of the status quo in which MACBA was set. But it's like the Obama thing, I mean just to be president, you cannot forget the Nobel Prize, you need to do the work [laughs]. And I'm here doing the work with my team, and I'm here doing the work with the community, and I'm here doing the work with some of these absences that you mentioned, and absence is a very important question for me. We will build up on those absences as well.

**“A PROJECT OR AN EXHIBITION IS NOT
SOMETHING THAT HAPPENS IN THE MUSEUM,
IT HAPPENS TO THE MUSEUM.”**

Q2. Hi, my name is Farah, I'm a journalist and also author of a book that came out this year, *Take Down: Art and Power in the Digital Age*. The book looks exactly at what Alain was just asking you on the theme of this, which is how women and artists who are non-white are suddenly being foregrounded probably because of movements like MeToo and Black Lives Matter, these movements have had a big role. So, we've talked about that already, I just wanted to know because many artists who are women artists or who are not white males tell me: "Yeah, but we've seen this before." Like for instance the Guerilla Girls, they did what they did, and then all those campaigns, and then we went right back to where we started. So, I just wondered whether you think we are now on a trajectory that is kind of permanent or is this going to be snapping back again.

E. D. O. I mean, the cycles of history do exist, and you were right to mention that, but that's what I always say: "Let me focus on what is yet to come, because I need to create the structure for it to happen with the team". I think the problem would be to say: "Okay, I'm going to be here and it's my five

years, what do I do? I need to have this authoritarian figure,” which I’m totally against. The museum is not autonomous, it’s connected to a moment in time, it’s connected to a context. How do we engage from this particular juncture towards the future? And I think we risk that, but people like us that were always against the bigger power have always known that the rights that we establish are never guaranteed. So I think the powerful image that you have of me is because I’m ready to jump over everything [laughs], because that’s the only way we operate, there’s nothing guaranteed. The fact that I’m a director doesn’t mean that I’m gonna change everything, and doesn’t mean that there’s gonna be more women directors after me, but I have to make sure that I do the work that is needed in order for it to happen. So I think that doesn’t prevent me from working, the pragmatism of knowing that this could be one stage, I’m going to work as if there’s no tomorrow for it to continue.

C. G. And we live in an era where new rights are constantly emerging and I don’t think we can stop that, you know, so the only thing we can do is keep acknowledging those rights and fight for those rights to be represented in institutions like this and also in the wider art world...

“I’M AT THIS PARTICULAR JUNCTURE: I’M BOTH THE NORMAL, LET’S SAY, AND I’M ALSO THE OUTSIDE THAT THEY’RE TRYING TO BREAK AND RETURN AND REDEFINE.”

E. D. O. But also in relation to that interdependence we mentioned before. It’s also the acknowledgement of the normal side of things, quote-unquote, that needs to change. That’s what I was saying about documenta. You have a project in which so much energy, so much power is presented because it’s alive. Leave that to happen and then see what happens. What is the fear? The world that you think cannot change has already changed. That world doesn’t exist, we’re in a different moment. So I think that’s the key. What was happening, and here I agree with you, when moments like the Guerilla Girls or others... Somebody was telling me: “We should do something about feminism... feminism is not in MACBA,” or something else. But feminism is a word in dispute already. If you don’t acknowledge that then you are erasing years of history of people that have thought about womanism or other ways to address what womanhood means. So what I mean is that it’s on us, because we’re always working, but it’s also on the other side, and now I’m both. I’m at this particular juncture: I’m both the normal, let’s say, and I’m also the outside that they’re trying to break and return and redefine. But I think that’s the key here.

Q3. I was at documenta and I was really encouraged by seeing so many young people there. Besides the critique, I thought it was a great show, maybe I’m the only one. But I was thinking, when I look at the title “Can We Make the Gallery World More Inclusive?” I also think about the inclusivity of the audience, how can we get more people in? And of course more genders, more people from outside Europe, etc., but also how can we make it more open? And I think documenta was maybe in the right direction. Do you have any attempts in this direction?

E. D. O. Yes, I mean, of course for me... and thank you for that, I also think it was a great show... For me that means to change the dramaturgy of the museum and other spaces. Many people will not enter a gallery, there’s something about the way we establish the “white cube” that somehow makes people feel they don’t belong. And I think what we need to do is to start listening to what younger people are asking for, but also what is there, because we know each other, we know the context, but we don’t know those that don’t feel interpolated by the museum.

“MANY PEOPLE WILL NOT ENTER A GALLERY, THERE’S SOMETHING ABOUT THE WAY WE ESTABLISH THE ‘WHITE CUBE’ THAT SOMEHOW MAKES PEOPLE FEEL THEY DON’T BELONG.”

I think what documenta 15 did was to bring people that are already doing that work in their context and successfully manage to transform, if not anybody else outside Kassel, many people in Kassel, and people that went twice or three times to engage there, and I think that’s already something else. So I would say: transform the paradigm where the museum or the gallery is placed in order to make it successful. One of the things that we are hoping to do, for instance, is to create a Youth Council, a council that is organised with young, entrepreneurial, fascinating, but also hopefully introverted people that want to be part of this, that have responsibilities beyond the art world, and that want to tell us how they see the world and how they see an institution like MACBA participating in the world. What are the ideas, but also what are the notions of governance that we should consider in order to be more inclusive in that sense?

Q4. I want to really thank you that you look more at intersectional issues, because a white man asking: “Are you going to show more black women now?”

is a little bit boring to me [laughs]. And there's so many more issues like, for example, I recently had a small art fair with an artist, a so-called "outsider artist", and it went really well, we sold out, but what happens is that they don't get the benefit because the institution or the workshop that works with them gets the benefit, so he's constantly complaining and I think that's one of the spots, but I'm so grateful that you mentioned more of these intersectional things, because it's also not just about flying people from all over the world to MACBA because it's the sustainability issue, like how do we fly around? So it's more a comment and a thank you, and hopefully you're not going to be reduced to the black woman issue. Thank you so much.

E. D. O. Thank you, and I want to take this moment to acknowledge, Carles, your exhibition on Tosquelles, because we were talking about neurodiversity, and I think it's very important to also consider what art brut and outsider art have done to our history and how sceptical perhaps people were at the time, but also how far away from the circular economy some of these individuals are, and I think this is also a matter of inclusivity. We're not just talking about gender, race or generational differences, but also those.

C. G. The question is that there is not only a challenge to who is included or not, but also to the economies that all those individuals carry with them. So these artists who might be neurodivergent or whatever else you want to call it, they can't receive the money from the art market because they belong to a different regime of production, of work, of a different way of understanding the production of culture, and this is what the art market has to come to terms with, I guess...

Q5. When you talked about inclusivity at the beginning you mentioned gender, race, colour and collectives. If you allow me, I would just like to extend it to geographies. Well, namely I'm from Belgrade, Serbia, so we'll have to point out east Europe, which still seems a little bit absent from the map in terms of collectives, maybe more avant-garde collectives like NSK, there was a huge retrospective at the Reina Sofia, etc. But then I'll jump to another region that I've recently been working with, the Baltics. I'm working with an Estonian photographer, for example, and I think the Baltics are also not very well represented. I've also heard the terms Balkans and Baltics being confused, which points more to the problematic of these geographies, I think... You mentioned 1-54, which I think was a great platform for the African art scene and to get more knowledge about it. So I'm wondering what could be possible platforms, apart from art fairs, because I can't possibly imagine an art fair of Eastern European or just Baltic art, but let's say Manifesta in Kosovo could be

a platform that maybe puts the Eastern European art scene on the map, even though they called it "cultural cooperation in the Western Balkans" and this term Western Balkans is also problematic, it's a Western European construct. And also, Manifesta has not been specifically inclusive because there has only one Serbian artist, so it's very problematic as a whole and I'm just wondering: what would other platforms be to position geographies that are not so present but that have an art scene and great artists, in my opinion?

E. D. O. Thank you so much for that. I think that what documenta 15 did was also to produce that sort of rebound effect. Like all of a sudden, any curator that has their own agenda, I think in my experience if you're looking for a specific platform you have to develop it, because it has to be from the particular context where things start to change. What we have here is an international platform, but without that working and operating for the people locally, it's very difficult. You can go up as a singular artist, you can go up in the icebergian economy that I was talking about earlier. There is something that one has to engage with, and I think in that sense African artists, African artist collectives, para-institutions from the African continent have learned so much about their own production, about what was needed there, apart from the investment that occurs later on. But if you don't start looking at your own scene, considering also that in modern times there were also practices in Eastern Europe, I would say it's very difficult to get to a point where you challenge this status quo.

I was thinking now of the work of Slavs and Tatars, that I really look at when I think about the period, what they did for this time with the biennial in Slovenia, I think what they did there is very important, and we hope to invite them to our reading spaces here at MACBA when we open the expansion, but this is something that I have to keep secret... But yes, I think it's important to be self-aware of the work that needs to be done, of how to create and nurture your own scene in order to create further platforms.

C. G. Thank you, Elvira, for your answer to this last question, and I don't want to end this conversation without saying that tomorrow Elvira will be opening an exhibition on the work of Carrie Mae Weems at the Mapfre Foundation, a split presentation between the Mapfre Foundation and La Capella in MACBA. Let's mention that Carrie Mae Weems was the first to contend with Harvard University about the daguerreotypes of Renty and Delia Taylor, an ongoing case that sort of throws light on what restitution means nowadays, quite a big issue... Thank you so much Elvira, thank you everybody.

Joe Kennedy

is co-founder and Director of Unit London, founded in 2013 with Jonny Burt. In 2020 Unit London launched Platform, an innovative virtual exhibitions programme designed to give artists a dedicated and focused space to spark conversations around socio-cultural and political issues. In 2021, Kennedy created the first art world-led platform for NFTs as part of the Unit London brand. Kennedy acts as a young patron of various cultural institutions including Tate, the Serpentine Gallery, and the Royal Academy.

Beatriz Ordovás

is an International Director, Head of Digital for Europe, and a Specialist in the 20th Century Art department. She was based in London for thirteen years, where her last role was as Head of Private Sales for EMERI. Beatriz leads the company efforts in Iberia for 20th Century art, whilst retaining her international responsibilities and leading the company's digital strategy in the continent.

Andrés Reisinger

is one of the most sought-after digital artists of the 21st century. Originally from Argentina, he now creates carefully curated projects in his studio in Barcelona. His instantly recognizable dream-like imagery has drawn interest from a plethora of multi-million-dollar collectors, brands, and international art galleries alike. He is named as one of "Forbes 30 Under 30" artists creating and designing the future of the arts and is the winner of the "Young Guns" Art Directors Club New York City.

Kate Vass

is the founder and creative director of Kate Vass Galerie, focusing on generative art. Ms. Vass has worked with private and corporate collectors in top-tier international banks for more than 15 years and advised on wealth planning and alternative asset investments (art, crypto). In 2016 she opened her advisory firm F.A.R.E. Consulting, specializing in finance, art, innovation strategies and consulting fintech and art tech startups.

Pau Waelder

is Senior Curator at Niio. Writer and researcher specialized in art and digital media. He is adjunct lecturer at the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (UOC), as well as in postgraduate courses. His work explores the different aspects of the interaction between art, technology, and society, as well as the relationship between digital art and the art market. He is the author of the book on contemporary and digital art collecting *You Can Be A Wealthy/ Cash-Strapped Art Collector in the Digital Age (2020)*.

NFTs: Now What?

SPEAKERS

**Joe Kennedy, Beatriz Ordovás,
Andrés Reisinger & Kate Vass**

MODERATOR

Pau Waelder



NFTs: Now What?

Pau Waelder (P. W.) I first want to introduce our speakers; I will start with Kate Vass, the founder and creative director of the Kate Vass Gallery, focusing on generative art. In 2016, she opened her advisory firm F.A.R.E. Consulting, specialising in finance and art innovation strategies and consulting fintech and art-tech startups. In 2020 she created the Women Supporting Women foundation, supporting women in art and tech. Next is Andrés Reisinger, Andrés is originally from Argentina, he's an artist creating projects in his studio in Barcelona. His name is one of Forbes' "30 Under 30 artists creating and designing the future of the arts" and is the winner of the Young Guns Art Directors Club in New York City and a very successful artist. Next is Beatriz Ordovás, who is international director, head of digital for Europe and specialist in the 20th-century art department at Christie's. She leads the company efforts in media for 20th-century art, she leads the company's digital strategy on the continent, and among her many works she has had an instrumental role in securing works like Refik Anadol's *Living Architecture* in Casa Batlló in Barcelona. And last but not least, we have Joe Kennedy, the co-founder and director of Unit London, founded in 2013 with Jonny Burt. In 2020, Unit London launched Platform, an innovative virtual exhibitions programme, and in 2021, Kennedy created the first art world-led platform for NFTs as part of the Unit London brand. He acts as a young patron of various cultural institutions including Tate, the Serpentine Galleries and the Royal Academy. In 2019, Kennedy was named as one of Forbes' "30 Under 30 entrepreneurs".

A great group of speakers, and just to introduce very briefly the subject for this talk, as you can see, it is titled *NFTs: Now What?* So we are in this moment where, as you know, a year and a half ago Christie's ignited the NFT market, which was already there, but really came into prominence with the Beeple sale which was previously mentioned, then this market spread like wildfire. It even had some people burning original works to sell them as NFTs. Many things happened very fast, many things that created also kind of a weird situation for NFTs. Not everyone knew what was going on or what they were about,

there was a lot of bad press, there was a lot of enthusiasm. At the same time the galleries, the actors in the contemporary art field and also those that have been working for decades in the digital art world were hesitant to join this great market.

“A YEAR AND A HALF AGO CHRISTIE’S IGNITED THE NFT MARKET, WHICH CAME INTO PROMINENCE WITH THE BEELPLE SALE. THEN, THIS MARKET SPREAD LIKE WILDFIRE.”

But at the same time there was a lot of creativity and innovation going on under the radar, most of the time in places like Hic et Nunc a platform where artists were creating NFTs and selling them on the Tezos blockchain for a very low amount of money, building a community around this platform and around Twitter. And so the market evolved by the end of last year, there were also big galleries, contemporary art galleries already entering the NFT market. Then we have also seen top-tier artists like Olafur Eliasson or Damien Hirst, Marina Abramovi , Ai Weiwei, joining this NFT market or creating NFT projects. And so we are at a moment, after all that has happened, where this kind of market seems to have diminished, it is not so strong as it was a year ago, but still it has already made an impact, there’s already a lot of marketplaces going on. There’s a lot of innovation and a lot of people who believe in this register on the blockchain and what you can have with an NFT with a smart contract, with everything that is involved in this technology...

[Note: Due to technical problems, fragments of the talk were lost]

Kate Vass (K.V.) I think it’s very important for the audience to understand that it’s not like we’re a digital gallery and I’m here all for “Oh, my god, NFTs are the future”. We are normal people [laughs]. In 2017 I hosted the first blockchain art exhibition, it was called *Perfect and Priceless*. You gave a very good reference that Ai Weiwei also engaged in this sort of thing, and we all know that he’s a contemporary artist, so he did a collaboration with Kevin Abosch back at the time and part of the exhibition, just the entire exhibition was taking place physically in the physical space and no one could even say that it’s an NFT exhibition, because we did not show any single NFT per se. Even CryptoPunks, which were exhibited for the first time as an artwork, it was more like conceptual ultimate punk where the collector was challenged in a certain way to understand the future value, whether it was digital or physical. When we showed the work by Kevin Abosch and Ai Weiwei it was a tokenization of moments that they had

shared together in Berlin over three days. Again, it was more questioning the value from a philosophical perspective of how we look at social/economical things and, you know, that the majority of talents will always foresee the future. That’s why the earlier pioneers already started to use blockchain or innovative technologies, not necessarily only blockchain but also different algorithms from artificial intelligence, machine art, etc., back at the time, and with technological progress it’s just a new tool that artists use to express themselves.

“FOR ME, NFTS IS CONTEMPORARY ART, IT’S JUST ONE OF THE TOOLS OF HOW ARTISTS EXPRESS THEMSELVES.”

So it’s not something that we’re talking about here: “Oh, NFTs is not contemporary art.” For me it is contemporary art and it’s just one of the tools of how artists express themselves. We have seen different types of groups, that’s maybe why we still have misunderstandings. The ones who’ve been involved in programming for the last 10 or 12 years, of course they mastered the skills and for them it’s more like a natural set of skills that they can also apply and say: “Oh, I can become an artist now, right?” But that won’t necessarily make them good artists. It can make them good programmers or stockholders. And for people who are specialized in these generative artists like myself, I can say: “Okay, maybe audiences like their art, but if you look at the core it’s just like one work or one code and it’s nothing revolutionary. I’ve seen it already back with the pioneers from 60s, 70s and 80s; it has a history, generative art, for the last 70 or 80 years.”

So we’re not talking about anything new, it’s just, again, one of the tools hyped by the mass media, calling it NFTs so they can sell it better, but nobody understands what the hell the abbreviation stands for, non-fungible token, whatever that means. It’s just literally a tool for transacting and dealing with digital art. We have museums, we have collectors, I myself also collect photography and digital art for many, many years. I mean, that was my first question when I had to deal with video art or with natively digital art: how to transact to their client that there are no traces left, but that it is secure that it will also be preserved in a proper manner and that I don’t have to run around with all the certificates of authenticity that can be lost or damaged. And blockchain was just a registry that enabled this transaction of digital files and confirmed the scarcity of it.

When you start to say: “NFTs are here to stay.” Sure, yes, because it’s just a tool, we’re not differentiating that NFTs is an art. Back in 2017/18/19 we didn’t call it NFTs, nobody named it like that, everybody was referring to that as cryptoart, blockchain art, which is also not entirely correct, because at the end of the day it’s just ultra contemporary. I mean, if you define contemporary art it’s literally what reflects our reality, and our reality is digital, we all live in our phones: AI, Snapchat, Instagram, web2, web3, Twitter, you know, it’s how we communicate, particularly after the pandemic. I think it’s just the acceleration of things again, which happened naturally after the pandemic, and the economical perspective that web3 is now kind of used to commercialise even more and to interact with the audience more, it’s a big mix up of collectibles and art.

“WE’RE NOT TALKING ABOUT ANYTHING NEW, IT’S JUST, AGAIN, ONE OF THE TOOLS HYPED BY THE MASS MEDIA, CALLING IT NFTS SO THEY CAN SELL IT BETTER.”

The last thing I want to say is if you look at the crypto-like society, whatever is going on from the social media perspective, and all the sales that everybody is talking about, big names like Beeple, sales from 2000 to 2020, and then we have other big name sales of CryptoPunks or Bored Apes or Art Blocks or different high edition projects or brands coming into the space. This is not art, this is collectibles, and like Christie’s selling collectibles like a Porsche from 1964, nobody questions that, but if Christie’s sells some collectible like Bored Ape everybody’s saying: “Oh, my God, this is not art.” No, it’s not! It’s a collectible. And when it comes to a closer look at what’s really going on in the market with proper artworks and true pioneers it’s still there, but there’s a very, very little percentage still of good art.

That’s why for the small and medium galleries, this is like the hardest job of all for us: to do our homework, do our research, find these talents, differentiate them and place them on the surface so we can exhibit them and try to make it in a sensible way, so it’s understandable for the audience to engage with. Like the physical and digital form where people can look, ask questions and touch and maybe then look at the digital component and say: “Yeah, okay, but how do I experience the digital and how do I experience the physical?” It’s a different way. You as an audience, you have sensory things from psychological perspective, also how you interact with the physical work and how you interact

with the digital work. So I guess that’s where we’ll overlap in our understanding for education and exhibition with Joe as well, that still people need both at this time to relate to this new type of NFTs or contemporary art we’ll call it.

P. W. Just connecting to Joe, you launched Institut like six months after this big sale by Beeple, I remember how that impacted the whole art world. Can you tell me a bit about the whole process, what takes you from that realization, from what is happening and seeing what is happening in the in art market with NFTs to launching your own platform?

“WHAT NFTS AND BLOCKCHAIN HAVE BROUGHT IN IS THE ABILITY FOR THOSE DIGITAL ARTISTS TO REALLY HAVE SOME VALUE ASCRIBED TO THEIR WORK, AN INTRINSIC SENSE OF VALUE. THAT FOR ME WAS THE TURNING POINT.”

Joe Kennedy (J. K.) We actually started work on Institut before the sale happened with Beeple and it took us a long time to build because I essentially project managed it myself and I’m certainly no tech wizard, so it took us a lot longer to actually launch. I think that time was really all about learning for me personally, and I think for everybody else. As soon as Christie’s announced that sale I think it became the hot topic in the art world and beyond. I certainly took the time to really take a deep dive into the space and learn because the art world that we know, the collectors, the network, the audience and the artists were all equally kind of confused and baffled by this new space. Our collectors and our audience weren’t the crypto collectors, they weren’t collecting NFTs already, they weren’t buying digital art really, because for a long time digital art had no way to be monetised effectively, and what NFTs and blockchain have brought in is the ability for those digital artists to really have some value ascribed to their work, an intrinsic sense of value. That for me was the turning point.

I had a collector of mine who’s been a big collector from our programme and collects a lot of blue chip Western contemporary artists, but has also been very deep in crypto and NFTs for a long time and collects a lot of the kind of early PFP projects like Bored Apes and CryptoPunks. He was just fanaticising about NFTs to me, and as soon as I learned about the value of blockchain to be able to provide a public ledger at scale and provide provenance for every single sale

and transaction, I started to realise, actually, this is the transparency which is going to open up the doors for more people to access our industry, because the big barrier of entry still to the art market for participants is the lack of transparency, whether it's pricing transparency or transactional transparency. And not only that, but the artist could be paid a royalty on every single sale that happens. So the idea of flipping in the art market, which is so frowned upon, in the NFT space is actually something which can be beneficial because the artists are paid a direct royalty and you're able to trace every single transaction that happens.

**“THE CYNICISM THAT WE’VE SEEN TOWARDS
NFTS I THINK IS ALSO SYMPTOMATIC OF A
SORT OF REACTION TO CHANGE, WHICH I
THINK IS FEAR-BASED.”**

For me and for our gallery, accessibility has always been at the core of what we wanted to do and transparency coming into the industry in an infrastructural way, as in blockchain provides the actual technology and infrastructure that underpins every transaction, we're gonna be able to live out our ethos in a much more sustainable, long-term way. I've spoken here a few times now, I'm basically part of the furniture in this place [laughs], but the first time I spoke here, which was like five years ago, I spoke about Instagram and the power of Instagram social media, which is obviously a kind of a web2 product, and it was met with a lot of cynicism, the room was very uncomfortable for a little while. And now a couple of years later, Instagram is sort of the de facto market tool for artists, galleries and participants, and the fear and doubt that we've seen towards NFTs and the cynicism that we've seen towards NFTs I think is also symptomatic of a sort of reaction to change, which I think is fear-based.

If you look at like how web1 went to web2 went to web3, all of those big technological shifts and innovations have dramatically changed the way that we interact with the world, the way that we can communicate with each other, and it has broadened access to the market for collectors and artists. We now have a much more diverse art world, we have a much more inclusive art world, purely because the connectivity is so much greater than it was, and what we're seeing now with the move towards web3 is just an extension of that.

We're accelerating connectivity worldwide, we're allowing people access to new ideologies, new ideas, more new ways of thinking than ever before. What I think this will do to our industry is huge, I don't think it should be

underestimated. The value of a public ledger and transparency in our industry, and the ability to bring in an entirely new audience and network of collectors and artists, you know, artists who have been resigned to just doing digital brand campaigns because galleries wouldn't take them on because they couldn't sell their work. Well, that's now changing. We as a gallery now represent three digital artists all of whom work with blockchain, particularly generative artists, which I think is a really exciting genre within this industry. There are coders and computer scientists now who, since the 60s, have been using machines and autonomous computers to make digital art that have never really been recognised. If they're very lucky they might show in a biennial, they might be included in more abstract museum shows and institutional exhibitions, but they've never had gallery representation, they've never been able to sell their work, and it doesn't matter how many biennials you do, any artist will tell you if you're not able to sell your work then it becomes quite difficult.

**“IT’S NOT JUST A PRODUCT, AN ENGINEERED
PIECE OF CODE. IT HAS A CREATIVE OUTPUT
AND I THINK THAT’S REALLY EXCITING.”**

P. W. Actually, one of the pioneers, Manfred Mohr, once told me that he was presenting his work as computer art and at some point he stopped telling people he did the work with a computer, because people liked it, so if they found out he hadn't done this with a pen and ink, then they wouldn't want to buy it, right?

J. K. I think science and art have traditionally been diametrically opposed and I think we're now moving into a space where those disciplines are merging much more, and I think computer programmers who use coding language to build algorithms is a language in the same way that painting is a visual language, in the same way that poetry is a language, and I think they're now able to use their skills set in a more creative way. So it's not just a product, an engineered piece of code, it's actually something that has a creative output and I think that's really exciting.

P. W. One thing, notably, when you presented this platform it was presented as an art world platform, so you were kind of pointing to the fact that this comes from a contemporary art gallery. I was wondering, if you see that around this time Pace was already entering NFTs and now there's more and more, do you think that when we have enough or large numbers of actors in the contemporary art world will this actually be accepted more widely?

J. K. Yeah, definitely. I think the acronym NFT is just such a problematic term now, and as Kate said, NFT isn't art in of itself, it's just a tool to record something on a ledger, essentially, right? So I think it's important to move the conversation away from talking about NFTs and more towards digital art, because it's what the tool allows digital artists to do. I think there was, at the height of the boom in sort of 2021 of NFTs, we were all interacting with marketplaces, which are kind of like de facto marketplaces, so there's a lack of curation, there's a lack of storytelling aside from some more curated platforms, and I think Art Blocks is a really nice example of how they curate their work. It's very disorienting for collectors who have read a headline in *The Guardian*, they jump into OpenSea and they're just confronted with thousands of works of all kinds, a lot of which is not what you would necessarily associate with contemporary art because the artistic integrity of some of them are not quite there.

“NOW, I THINK THAT THE IMPORTANCE IS ON CURATION AND IDENTIFYING THE ARTISTS WHO ARE GOING TO BE HISTORICALLY RELEVANT.”

I think since the market correction there's been a sort of pulling through of artists who are making real important work, and a lot of the big projects have fallen away. People have lost a lot of money doing that, but that happens in every big boom and every technological advance. But now I think that the importance is on curation and identifying the artists who are going to be historically relevant and important in the space and giving them a platform so we can have a critical discussion about their work, as opposed to just talking about the market prices.

P. W. Obviously Christie's has had an important role in, as I said, igniting this or making it very visible. We could say now within the NFT market that auction houses have gained a leading role in the primary market, and now Christie's is launching Christie's 3.0, which is a platform for NFTs too. Beatriz, how do you see that impacting the relationships of auction houses with the other actors in the contemporary art market, the galleries, artists, collectors, etc.

Beatriz Ordovás (B. O.) I think NFTs is a technology that has shaken the art world in a way which had not been changed before, and it's not only a challenge for auction houses but also for galleries and for artists to coexist with this new technology, which is one of the biggest things that has happened in a very long time. I think the art world has been operating in the same way

for many, many years and decades. And suddenly here it comes, a technology, you know? The question: "NFTs: Now what?" Well, that's a great question because no one knows what comes after, we're all learning as we go. It moves incredibly fast because technology moves incredibly fast, and we're just trying to adapt and survive.

“SUDDENLY, BEEPLE CAME AND WE WEREN'T REALLY EXPECTING SUCH A HURRICANE. I HAVE TO CONFESS, WE WEREN'T FULLY READY FOR WHAT HAPPENED.”

When we presented the world with the Beeple artwork, it wasn't the first time we were using... Well, it was probably one of the first digital artworks, but we had tried before, a great American collection that we sold in 2018 and all of the works were registering in the blockchain and we were very happy to tell people that that was a great way to trace the work forever. That had no impact and no one really cared about that. Then, we went with another digital work, nothing really happened, we had a very humble result, and suddenly Beeple came and we weren't really expecting that this was gonna create such a hurricane in a way that, I have to confess, we weren't really fully ready for what happened and I think no one was. So, to start with, we estimated the work as "unknown", that's nothing we'd done before, trying to tell the public: "We don't know where to start. We believe digital art that has already been transacted in the past years in digital platforms has to be at an entry level which is for everybody." So, we started the bid at a hundred dollars, and I can't remember, I think we had like 350 people registered to bid on the lot, and in the first hour it went from a hundred dollars to a million and then it remained open for a few days until it was sold for 69 million dollars, and the whole world just went crazy.

But it was a challenge for us because we thought we were just selling a digital work because we feel it's important we have things in our auctions that represent what's happening in the world today, and digital art is very much there, we should embrace it as any other kind of art. I agree, we shouldn't be saying NFT art as we don't say canvas art or work on paper art, it's just contemporary art and another way of expression, so it should definitely be in our contemporary sales. But then again, it's like we had these wallets accepting cryptocurrencies, everything moved so fast, we had to do sales off chain... We realised it's a world that operates incredibly quickly. Whenever I tell somebody in the digital world: "I'll get back to you in a week's time," they

look at me like: “Yeah, as if I’ll be alive in a week’s time.” It’s like I said a week, not 10 years, you know, but that’s already a lot of time. But in the end we are like an institution with our process and different departments and when we say to the buyer: “Hold on one moment, like in a month’s time you’ll have your work,” and everybody says: “You’re kidding me.” We’ve also had to learn and we were challenged, and I think Christie’s 3.0 is another step of us getting up to a speed, or at least trying. It took us a while to launch it because we saw a lot of companies and initiatives coming up very quickly because of all the speculation in digital art last year, and we didn’t want to come out with something which was patchy. But it was like just to be there, we really wanted to develop something, understanding better what was needed and try to blend both worlds, the traditional world—which makes me laugh, because I never thought of our collectors in the contemporary department as traditional at all—with the people transacting in the digital art platform. So, trying to find a place where both could meet and kind of transact there and do these sales on chain, which are very important.

“WE ARE WORKING A LOT DIRECTLY WITH ARTISTS, THAT’S PROBABLY ONE OF THE NEW THINGS THAT DIGITAL ART HAS BROUGHT TO US.”

P. W. But now through these platforms, as you’ve done with Beeple, you’re introducing artists into the market, so you’re having a new role. Traditionally auction houses will deal with the secondary market, so how do you see that new role of auction houses?

B. O. I think digital art being commercialised is something so new that although we’ve always operated on the secondary market, that secondary market is not that big yet where we can actually go and play a role yet. We’ve seen some people who are great digital collectors that have put their collections up for auction for charity reasons or just because they want to depart with it, but if you think about it’s very quick to do that, and I think there’s still a long way for these artists to develop out of these great collections that were put together and thought about very early on when no one was really looking at digital art to come to market. We are working a lot directly with artists, that’s probably one of the new things that digital art has brought to us and it’s really exciting, but that doesn’t mean that galleries won’t have a role.

As Kate and Joe were saying before, everyone can make an entry into the digital world, it’s being democratised, which is great, but it’s also a world which is huge, it’s impossible to follow everything that’s been happening, and I think there is room for everybody. We just need to find what it is that we each believe in. You now have galleries that decide to basically hire very contemporary artists who make African art or minimal art, because they connect with it, and then they have an audience that will go to them because they know they filter everything that’s going on and they’ll be presented with what they like. Well, I think that’s what we need to do, we need to find the things we like and what we want to present the world with, and we each have our parcel.

P. W. Andrés, connecting with the role of the artist, you had huge success with your Hortensia chair in 2019, so I wanted to ask you, in this accelerated market and where an artist can have such huge success so rapidly, how did that impact your creative process? And as an artist, from your perspective how do you see what we’re all talking about here?

Andrés Reisinger (A. R.) Well, the question is very interesting, let me explain some parts. First of all, you have to think that I’ve been working with digital tools for more than 15 years, so I haven’t been creating the art I’m doing at the moment all the time and I’ve been changing the things that I create throughout my life, because that’s the idea, right, to know myself. I don’t know who I am, I know myself by creating the art I create, so I need to do it. My parents bought me a computer when I was like six years old for a variety of reasons, but from that moment on I started to dedicate a lot of time into that space, into the connection to the internet but very late at night because it was cheaper, so with my brother we had like two hours at night, and at that moment it was a way of understanding—I was born in Argentina outside of the centre—that not everything happened in my neighborhood. I wasn’t travelling around the world to meet new people or to understand that there were different niches that were interesting and people that were creating those niches and expanding those possibilities in the same way that I was doing in my bedroom. So, for me, the internet was the connection.

The digital is one more way of connecting, and I was having conversations with people around the world I’d never met about how can I improve the way I was doing what I was doing, something that wouldn’t have been possible where I was born because nobody was doing that, not even close. I think with that background you start to understand that people have been working with those tools for maybe 20-25 years every day like a painter works with paint and brushes, it’s a change of perspective. It’s not that now that we’re using

phones, people are creating art with digital tools. A lot of people born in the moment when those tools with those digital systems were presented and were very basic or very archaic, and that's why I think it's very interesting how all of us are seeing that from very different perspectives but at the same time all the same.

We can't say NFTs in an art context because it's okay, it's just a medium. I would like to call it a medium because it's not only a tool, it's more a medium, because you can use a medium to transport things, right, so a tool can be helpful in that transportation. But imagine a project in digital that's impossible to be created in physical. For example, one of my artworks that is called *Pollination*, what I did was open up the possibility for my collectors to change the artwork they'd already bought and collected over a year period, and that's impossible to do in a physical. You have to deal with shipping, you have to deal with physical pieces... In these pollination seasons they could pollinate their artwork, and depending on when they pollinated, they received a totally different artwork as a result. That's something that's pretty basic and easy to do on blockchain, even if there are some technological problems and system failures, that's good, I think it's part of it, I usually embrace that. I was born with computers that were crap and were always failing...

“PEOPLE HAVE BEEN WORKING WITH THOSE TOOLS FOR MAYBE 20-25 YEARS. IT'S NOT THAT NOW THAT WE'RE USING PHONES, PEOPLE ARE CREATING ART WITH DIGITAL TOOLS.”

K. V. I think it's a part of the beauty, to have this randomness, randomness is very important...

A. R. Yeah, a system that is weak is closer to a biological system, I think that's incredible. What we really like about art is that it's very biological, we don't like art that is perfect. A computer is a failing tool like us, we can go and try to better ourselves every day, but we'll not be perfect. Perfect is boring.

P. W. What about creating in this ambience where you have so much attention, you have to advertise your work on Twitter, you have to be there, the prices rise very quickly... How do you react to that and what can happen next?

A. R. Well, there are a lot of things to say about the market. From an artist's perspective, the artists are more into the market than their own art. I prefer not

to be so much into the news of the market or how it's reacting to whatever I'm doing. New social media tools and the way we are connecting, we're exposed to all that information even if we don't want to, I mean I get notifications if someone likes something that I did last week, so it's impossible to avoid that. But I think it's something that's very important for the creators of this era to be more mindful than ever before because the information is crazy, people are nuts for more information and spreading lots of information and feedback and comments and whatever. I think it's necessary, it's good, but you can't believe that, you can't take that as a guide for your career. You started doing this because of something else, not because if people like your work or not. Of course, it's beautiful to receive feedback, but as there's beautiful feedback there are also haters and people that will try to put you in different positions.

I remember in 2020, I got like an adrenaline rush for a month or so and then I started to meditate more than ever, because it was something unreal and was something that was very of the moment. If you think about when you're nervous or anxious, it's very tiny fragment of time, well imagine that being zoomed in for one or two years. That is like our perspective as artists, we feel that for a long period of time, and if we're not fresh and calm and we still do the same things we do, I think we lose our minds, and that's why many, many projects have started and failed the next day, because they're born out of that anxiety and turbulence.

B. O. We're all facing challenges as an artist, also having the capacity to be able to abstract yourself from everything. Well, that will differentiate the artists that'll move forward and keep on creating great things from the artists who'll just follow what people are telling them to do and they'll get lost along the way.

P. W. Much of what has happened this past year has been like riding the wave, like adapting, and it feels like the market is still accelerating. But I would like to ask you all if you think this is good. Is this energising that things keep happening or would you rather things settle down a bit so that there's more time to reach something that's more stable. How do you feel about this?

A. R. I think stable is impossible. You just go from one side to the other, the idea is not to get into the extremes, but I think this will continue to happen.

P. W. Maybe not from week to week, we can get some holidays sometimes! [laughs]

A. R. Digital is crazy, I mean you're dealing with people in the world who have different power ranges, so it's kind of impossible to stop. That's why it's so energetic, and that's why I think you have to be very conscious of when you take that energy pill and when not to, because it's quite intense.

P. W. But maybe mostly in the beginning there was more this energy of easy money that made it so frenzied. Now it seems like people understand this takes time, this takes work, this takes commitment and knowledge. How do you see this aspect of the acceleration as we were mentioning before?

“THE WHOLE IDEA OF THE CRYPTO COMMUNITY IS TOTAL DECENTRALIZATION. YOU DON'T NEED TO CURATE. YOU JUST CONNECT THE ARTIST AND THE COLLECTOR, AND THAT'S IT. THERE'S NO GALLERIES, NO CURATION, NOTHING.”

K. V. Thank you for asking, I mean, I'm the wrong person to ask this question because for me it was not about the money, and I was the one behind actually introducing many digital or generative artists to blockchain. They didn't know about blockchain, they didn't want to use it, they were also fearful of that, they also didn't want to be associated with scams or there was no trust between the marketplace and the artists. And back at the time the prices were also very affordable. That was one of the reasons why I opened up the gallery: to make it affordable, to make it inclusive, to make it transparent for collectors and to put the artists first and be friendly, to connect collectors and artists. So I remember the differences, when you go out on Twitter and talk to an artist and say: “Under my umbrella I will introduce you to this marketplace, we can curate,” because back at the time they didn't curate anything and the whole idea of the crypto community is total decentralisation, that you don't need to curate actually. You just connect the artist and the collector and that's it, there's no galleries, no curation, nothing.

This utopian idea kind of evolved into replicating, more or less, the traditional art world with a very minor difference, but at the same time the biggest one. It's that the power shifted towards the artist: monetary power, the decision-making power and also the brand of the artist, it became first. So the gallery, the marketplace, the curator become a bit secondary, and to be honest we are more like supporters to sustain their artistic value.

When I was introduced into this blockchain I said: “Okay, if you're afraid to be there in the marketplace, you're afraid of failure or to be associated with a scam or potentially with frauds of the marketplace. We'll curate for you and we'll do it as a project, as an exhibition or as a part of it,” and they've been very grateful since then. Because once the pandemic happened and they had all physical shows cancelled, all the museums cancelled, the majority of them were starving, they didn't have anything to eat. But they were already exposed to this new tool, how they can present their work, and those artists now are called OGs in the space, they're literally the ones who've been... I was dragging my hands saying: “Please sell!”, and it was 50 dollars, 200 hundred dollars, we're not talking about big prices here. So when you say: “How long does it take?” it takes a lot of time, a lot of dedication and a lot of belief. And to be honest with you, for smaller galleries it's the hardest job of all, to do and believe and motivate yourself every day, and then there's the hype and what you say about people coming into the space more and more for the money.

“THERE ARE ALSO MANY CRYPTO COLLECTORS WHO COME FOR THE MONEY BUT STAY FOR THE LOVE OF ART.”

There are also many crypto collectors who come for the money but stay for the love of art. And I think by rejecting this crypto space from the traditional art perspective we are missing this opportunity to actually build something beautiful with the space, because if the space is empty it has a tendency to fill itself, right? So, in order to actually build and fill it with quality from the validators like Christie's, Sotheby's, museums, curators and really knowledgeable people who have so many years of experience and so much to say, come to the space, embrace it and educate the new generation and fill this space with quality instead of just pushing it away, differentiating like: “NFTs are a scam and this is contemporary art.” No, please come, please help to fill it with quality.

P. W. And in that sense, and this would be the final question for you all. Cryptocurrencies are still volatile, e-wallets are still complicated for a lot of people, blockchain is still scary for a lot of people. Can we dissociate NFTs from crypto? Do we want to do that? Is there a possibility to see it only as art and then make all the technological layers more transparent or not so connected to this? How did you see that possibility?

J. K. Going back to what you were saying before, I think the pace of the space is so fast and it's so frantic at times that when you look at the two communities, there's one which is very fast-paced, very transactional, always accelerating and moving forward, and then the art world which wants to cling to its old ways, so there's like a natural kind of dichotomy there between the two communities. And what we found when we launched our platform was that although we wanted to onboard traditional collectors into collecting digital art and NFTs, all of the people who started buying from our platform were these crypto-rich communities and we had no idea who they were. So they were all brand new collectors for us, they were buying with Ethereum and Bitcoin. And it's going to take a while for the traditional community to actually start collecting. There are infrastructural products and tools now which are allowing people to pay with credit card or buy with fiat, so you don't actually have to have a connection to cryptocurrency in order to buy and start collecting digital art, which I think is a very important barrier that's being removed at the moment. But the fast-paced volatility of it is just the nature of the space. There has been a market correction, it is slightly slower now, there's more of a kind of focus on quality and curation as opposed to the big boom that we saw last year.

**“IT’S GOING TO TAKE A WHILE FOR
THE TRADITIONAL COMMUNITY TO
ACTUALLY START COLLECTING DIGITAL
ART AND NFTS.”**

If you think from a gallery perspective or from an art world perspective, there's such a proliferation now of galleries and of artists, that we can see and access every day on Instagram who were previously kind of unknown because they didn't have the tools to promote themselves. We need more collectors to come in and support the space, and obviously you bring in new collectors who have different backgrounds and tastes. If you look at the commercial ecosystem, the gallery, if we can bring in new audiences, new people, as Kate was saying, it's so important that we actually embrace and educate this community on what the values of art are, you know, how it can help improve our societies, how it can help encourage creative thinking. And I agree that by keeping NFTs and crypto at arm's length, by dismissing it, we're actually missing a huge trip and really paying a disservice to artists who deserve the opportunity to be able to showcase their work and engage with audiences and have a say and have a platform. That's really the most important thing for us as a gallery. We're doing

everything that we can to provide that context for artists, to be seen not just as NFT artists or as crypto artists or whatever, but as contemporary artists in their own right.

**“AS A GALLERY, WE’RE DOING
EVERYTHING THAT WE CAN TO PROVIDE
THAT CONTEXT FOR ARTISTS, TO BE SEEN
NOT JUST AS NFT ARTISTS OR AS CRYPTO
ARTISTS, BUT AS CONTEMPORARY
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K. V. Can I comment on something very important you are saying? About crypto and about if we can eliminate crypto. I think financial markets were disrupted much earlier than the art world. The art world was actually one of the last sectors to be disrupted with cryptocurrencies and NFTs. But if our social economical system does not work in a traditional model anymore—the whole world is upside down from a political and economic perspective—what can we expect in the crypto spaces? It obviously does replicate the tendencies of depreciation. But at the same time instead of saying: “Can we just replace the cryptocurrencies and pay with credit cards?”, I think maybe we should consider again the total embracement of decentralisation, if it's possible or not. There are already tools that central banks are implementing and giving the opportunities to the mass market to transact with bitcoins and Ethereum, so you actually don't even need to come up with new tools, because it's going to be regulated at some point and this will happen naturally.

B. O. About your question, I'll be very brief. I really think we need to make this technology more user friendly. The technology is there but as a consumer of that technology, it doesn't matter if it's as a collector or because you want to buy something else, you shouldn't be worrying about how everything works. Like when you go online to do some shopping and you just don't care how they created the way for payment and you don't worry about that, you just put your credit card details, you buy what you want and you receive it at home. I think there's a lot of background work that needs to be done in the field so we can make this user friendly and not only for the digitally native people who have been embedded in this world for many years and know how to use it. So, just make it more accessible, basically.

Contributions and questions (c/q) from the audience

Q1. Apart from artists who are creating digital art, some museums are also entering into this world of NFTs. Usually to generate more money for other activities they are transforming traditional works of art into NFTs. What do you think about that? And another thing was a recent article in the newspaper about someone that has a Frida Kahlo design and transformed it into an NFT but burned the original work of art. Do you think this is an act of speculation to sell NFTs more expensive? This was so frightening for me, that people can think about burning or destroying original works of art and transforming them into NFTs. What do you think about that?

J. K. To be honest, I think there's a long way for it to go, the technology you can develop and the use case can develop a lot, but I think the value of NFTs, as we've touched on, it's a public record and so there's a conditional relationship that you can build as an artist or as someone who's creating an NFT with the holder of the token. That could be provisional access to a museum, whether that's private tours of the museum or invitations to events with the curators, but it's amazing as a secondary revenue stream for a museum. Museums are all in need of more funding and more revenue, and if they can leverage works in their existing collection and leverage what they have to be able to produce more revenue, I think that's a fantastic thing. That's one of the values of NFTs that I think needs to be explored more and more, I mean, it happens with the PFP projects, they basically act as sort of membership cards to a very exclusive club and I think that's something that museums can leverage more. I just don't think it's been done yet in the most optimal way.

B. O. From an artistic perspective it's not very interesting, because everything that Andrés just told us about his way of exploring the different media and developing himself and expressing himself, you don't see it on a work that was created by somebody else trying to express something and just creating a digital image of it and selling it. I think it's interesting for institutions from a traceability point of view to use the technology, and I think it's interesting for institutions not just doing that from a commercial perspective but perhaps to find a place in the metaverse where they can create like a digital building of their institution and surprise the world with the works that they have, and try to engage with a new audience.

P. W. Andrés mentioned this involvement of collectors with a process. I believe, for instance, museums could make an NFT of an artwork that needs restoration and then with the proceeds of that sale restore the artwork and

then the collectors could have the image of the restored artwork, which kind of involves people in the process. Something like this could be more positive, which is not just acquiring something as a museum, it could be possible.

A. R. I think there's a whole generation that's digital native, who were born with computers and phones and have friends they've never seen in real life. I think traditional institutions need to integrate those generations because they will still be this generation forever, we are not going to be in the world that long, so I think it's very important to be inclusive for all the people that are in the world right now and are under the age of 30.

**“THERE’S A WHOLE GENERATION THAT’S
DIGITAL NATIVE, WHO WERE BORN WITH
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K. V. I think there are two misunderstandings, because the question had NFTs and then the functionalization component. If we talk about the blockchain, not even necessarily NFTs, how to use this technology and help museums to preserve, to deal with transportation, to deal with their preservation archives, I think blockchain technology can actually help a lot and make the process much easier. But it requires a lot of funding and in institutions it's very difficult with the decision making, but I see a lot of museums building virtual spaces already to engage with wider communities and not necessarily deleting the physical, so both coexist in parallel for more inclusivity, and for physical collections and NFTs as utility tokens to get the membership or access to certain types of exhibitions or works. I think it's just another way of how to monetize and profit, and additionally you need a lot of investments to build this sort of thing. I think the second question was about if the painting is tokenised by fractions and these little fractions are sold to the wider audience, I don't think this is the same as NFTs because that's a different topic, and you also need to take into consideration the purpose of it. It sounds more like a financial tool rather than for their love of art or for clientele.

Q2. Yesterday, in London there was the Gallery Climate Coalition conference, and I wonder what you guys have to say about this in connection to NFTs, blockchain, mining processes and all that, because they have an impact on

the environment, all these things that are heavy on our society, one of which is climate. What do you think about this and in terms of your work and does it play a new role in the discussion?

B. O. I think there are blockchains that have been thinking about the environment like, for example, Algorand, which more and more people are starting to use, Ethereum as well were very concerned so they're changing their technology. Of course this has an impact, but so does the fact that we're all here today. I think when we fly to see art fairs or auctions or with the food that we eat, I think everything we do nowadays has an impact on the environment and we just need to be conscious and careful, and this is a community that I think also minds the environment and they're trying to develop technology that's not very damaging. And as this comes through we're all trying to get on that boat.

A. R. If we think in a wider context, let me know of any other industry that has shifted from having an impact on the climate to having almost zero in less than seven years, completely, so it's pretty fast.

P. W. I believe proof of work is now over and no one is using proof of work anymore, everyone is using proof of stake, which if I'm correct uses the same amount of energy as a tweet for minting, more or less. So, we are more or less better there now.

Q3. I have a question for you, going back to talking about inclusivity. Something that I've not really understood is why there's this total male dominance on this new world of digital media, the artists, the collectors, in a big percentage, while when you look at younger people, teenage girls are as hooked on digital media as boys are. Do you think it's linked to the history of gaming, to investment, to cryptocurrency? Why is this?

K. V. I think I can take that question because we have a foundation of women supporting women in art and tech, and I tend to say that in the real world we have a huge disproportion of male domination, but interesting enough we have a better situation with crypto artists or with female crypto artists. If you look at the statistics of sales or pricing, yes, there are some issues still, about evaluation and secondary markets, the preferences, but the situation is actually much better and I think it's also getting better in the traditional art world.

If we look at the prices and sales from the previous couple of years in Christie's and Sotheby's, we also see a huge development and shift towards female

art, a minimum of 30 %, and in the crypto space there is a much better situation. It was an interesting statistic that I found, that we are missing female collectors in the traditional art world. When it comes to crypto collectors, one of the biggest are actually females in the space, and also if you look at the geographical perspective, I think Vietnam had 80 % female collectors of NFTs and this is interesting, because in traditional art I don't see those numbers at all.

“WE HAVE A FOUNDATION OF WOMEN SUPPORTING WOMEN IN ART AND TECH. I TEND TO SAY THAT IN THE REAL WORLD WE HAVE A HUGE DISPROPORTION OF MALE DOMINATION, BUT INTERESTING ENOUGH WE HAVE A BETTER SITUATION WITH FEMALE CRYPTO ARTISTS.”

Q4. One thing you mentioned that I think is really interesting and it poses all kinds of philosophical or even sci-fi dimensions is the idea of historical museums selling NFTs of their artworks, and it kind of raises the question: does every historical artwork have an NFT? Kind of like the Christian conception of the body and the soul. Is there an inherent NFT embedded within these artworks? I think a lot of museums are selling NFT editions in the same way as selling a poster or a postcard of an artwork. To sell the essential digital ownership of a historical artwork, is that something that can be done and should museums be worried about that or wary of it?

J. K. That's a great question. I mean, if you think about it, I don't think there's yet a great use case for creating a digital token that accompanies a physical work or a physical asset, because it's very difficult to keep them connected, right? If I buy a physical painting which also has an NFT, I could sell the physical work and keep the NFT, so there's some hurdles to overcome. But I think as we move forwards, because of the use case of provenance and the importance of provenance, I think it's not inconceivable that everything we buy in the future will have an NFT, because it provides not only tracing of transactions but it also provides that kind of status, that badging behaviour.

When somebody purchases a Rothko and they put it in their dining room, it doesn't just give them that financial investment but it also gives them access to a particular club, it gives them a sense of ego boosting and bravado to their

friends, but it's that badging behaviour which now can be publicly recorded on chain. So when people buy significant NFTs or digital artworks, they're not just buying it because of an investment, they're not just necessarily buying it because of the decorative or the aesthetic aspects, but they're also buying it because it gives them access to the community around that particular asset or work. Will museums want to start selling unique NFTs that represent their physical paintings? I don't think so, I think they want to hold on to those works and I think if they were to deaccession a painting then maybe they'd create an NFT to go with it, but I think for me the big value and the bigger use case for museums is in bringing in additional revenue streams without them having to actually deaccession the works that are in their collection, because the worst thing is if a museum struggles so much for money they go and privatise works in their collection, they go into hiding for generations. The purpose of museums is for public access to great works of art and I think if we can use NFTs as a mechanism to support that, that's where we should be focusing as opposed to monetizing existing works.

**“WILL MUSEUMS WANT TO START
SELLING UNIQUE NFTS THAT REPRESENT
THEIR PHYSICAL PAINTINGS? I DON'T
THINK SO.”**

K. V. I think also from a legal perspective if you look at a non-fungible token, the tokenomics of this particular case, from a legal perspective it can be played that it can be a utility token, it can be a security token, it can be both. It can also provide and now be integrated with some particular rights that you do sell to the audience, maybe to visit and experience, but of course not resell or copyright or something like that. So I guess it's just depending on the geography and the kind of regulations of how we look at and regulate NFTs and digital assets. I think there are already a bunch of lawyers who are saying: “Yes, we just write within the token with the metadata once it's minted, this is the right that you have, but there are other rights you aren't allowed to have.” So it's sort of an agreement that you are getting into this transaction, which does not necessarily mean you are losing the assets as a museum from your collection, you still keep the whole provenance, ownership and everything. Maybe that's an alternative for the future.

P. W. That's our conclusion. It's clear that NFTs are here to stay, that there's much more than just this simple idea we had of the JPEG sold for millions, so it's going to be exciting to see what happens next. Thank you all for being here.

Tom-David Bastok

created the first platform to offer co-ownership purchase opportunities of artworks in 2010 whilst developing his expertise in the secondary market. He subsequently signed a part of the estate of Georges Mathieu, whose representation he has since entrusted to the Perrotin and Nahmad Contemporary galleries.

Dylan Lessel

began his career in 2010 at Kamel Mennour gallery, of which he became the director until 2018. For the past decade, he has accompanied the development of private collections and worked on a large number of artistic and museum projects. In 2019 the two of them teamed up to manage estates, among others those of Georges Mathieu and Alain Jacquet. Together they further grew their secondary market and art advising activities.

Marc Domènech

opened his homonymous gallery in 2013, located in Passatge Mercader, in the heart of Barcelona's L'Eixample district. Heir to the Oriol gallery launched by his father, Rafael Domènech, in 1976 on Provença street, the Domènech Gallery specializes in painting and sculpture from the 20th century, with special interest in interwar art and the Informalist painting from the 1960s. In recent years he has directed many of the gallery's activities to recover overlooked artists from the last century.


Galleries in the Secondary Market

SPEAKERS

Tom-David Bastok & Dylan Lessel

INTERVIEWED BY

Marc Domènech



ing Galleries Barcelona Symposium

Galleries in the Secondary Market

Marc Domènech (M. D.) Thank you very much for being here. The opening just one year ago of Perrotin Second Marché gallery, and the fact that such a relevant and influential contemporary art gallery worldwide decided to expand their business into the secondary market, has generated a lot of interest in the art world.

It is obvious that there are many elements that come into play in a decision like this. Many of these elements have surely a lot to do with new ways of understanding the art gallery world, with new players coming into the art market scene, perhaps with a necessity to reach new audiences, new clients. Perhaps also it is a strategic response to navigate today's fluctuating market.

In order to find the hidden objectives behind this new project, I'm honoured to be conducting this conversation with Tom-David and Dylan, co-directors at the Perrotin Second Marché gallery in Paris.

Tom-David created the first platform to offer co-ownership purchase opportunities of artworks, in 2010, whilst developing his expertise in the secondary market. He subsequently signed a part of the estate of Georges Mathieu, whose representation he has seen and trusted to the Perrotin and Nahmad contemporary galleries. Dylan began his career in 2010 at the Kamel Mennour Gallery, of which he became the director until 2018. In the past decade he has accompanied the development of private collections and worked on a large number of artistic and museum projects. In 2019, both Tom-David and Dylan teamed up to manage artists' estates, among others those of Georges Mathieu and Alain Jacquet, and have further grown their secondary market and art advising activities. You're basically like two mountaineers roped together, but as I mentioned earlier on, feel free to contradict each other.

I would like to divide the conversation into four main blocks. I would like you to explain about how it all started. I would also like to talk about strategic identity, the gallery's identity. I would like to talk about market and clients. And I would like to talk also—which is because I think it's something very important for you—about artist estates and working with artist estates. We have a lot of ground to cover, so let's begin. Why don't you let us all know how it all started? And also, from your perspective and your first-hand knowledge, which were the most relevant elements that were taken into consideration that led to the decision of opening a secondary market gallery?

“THE WHOLE IDEA OF CREATING A SECONDARY MARKET GALLERY IN A PRIMARY MARKET GALLERY WAS TO COVER A FULL EXPERIENCE FOR THE CLIENT.”

Tom-David Bastok (T-D. B.) So, if I may start. First of all, it's a pleasure to be here, so thank you very much for receiving us. The whole idea of creating a secondary market gallery in a primary market gallery like Perrotin Gallery, was to cover a full experience for the client. Today we can see our collectors, who are not only buying primary market... We had such an amazing experience with this. We were with Emmanuel [Perrotin] in Art Basel and a very big secondary market gallery. I will not name the gallery, but we were speaking to him about general stuff, how are you, we came up with ideas. Then he said to us, he cut the meeting short and said to us, “Okay, please guys, I have one of my biggest clients, the one who's giving me such crazy income. Please can we cut this and we can continue an hour after?” And by mistake, or whatever, we saw the client, who was a random client to our gallery. Because we have such a price range, that goes from ten, twenty-thousand euros up to two, three million. Of course, it's a very large price range, but also, we can't cover the wishes of all our clients and all the clients of Emmanuel. So, seeing this collector, being such a huge one to his gallery, and such a random one, treated like anyone else going into the gallery, it was pretty obvious for us that that kind of collectors need to be helped, that we need to provide them a full experience into the art market. This was one of our wishes, first of all.

Second of all, I think, it's because we are now not doing secondary market as some galleries are doing it, but we are trying also to curate some shows, bringing the secondary market in with the primary market. We are trying to

make some dialogue between the artists. We think that it's not something very far from the primary market. If you are treating it like this, it can be a really full experience for all the clients.

“EVERY BIG GALLERY AROUND THE WORLD IS MAKING SOME SECONDARY MARKET.”

We had an exhibition, for example, *Tout n'est qu'influence*, ‘Everything is only influence’. We took like three designers that we love, being Ettore Sottsass, Jean Royère and Lalanne. The purpose was to put, onto every floor of the gallery, one designer and which art influenced this artist to do what they were doing. To be able to bring into a Parisian gallery, for an example, some Royère works, with a mobile of Calder, a *Red Sumac*, something very particular. Douanier Rousseau with a Matisse, is something you are not often being able to see in Paris. This is what we are trying to do now. It opens the minds of a lot of people in Paris. We have the chance to be working and to be partnered with Emmanuel, so we are also doing this all around the world now, working closely with the sellers of Emmanuel and trying to build collections for the clients, from A to Z.

M. D. I find the location issue very interesting, Dylan. The Perrotin Gallery has nine spaces in seven cities around the globe. Why Paris and not New York, for example?

Dylan Lessel (D. L.) First of all, I would like to add something. Tom-David explained very well why we did it, but we wanted to do it differently. Because as you may know, every big gallery around the world is making some secondary market. Even if they are representing artists and primary market artists. But they are doing it often in a very special room inside the gallery, like a hidden room or hidden space. But when we decided to open this department, actually we did not want a department, we wanted to have a dedicated space for the secondary market.

I think, and we are sure, that it's the first time a big gallery or a big name like that created a space and a five-level gallery only for the secondary market, but with the same name. So it means that it's a signal for the market, for the collectors, that we can totally assume the fact that the secondary market is part of the primary market. And that's why we took the lead to open a gallery, a space—that's why I'm answering why Paris and not New York. We decided

Paris because we are from Paris, first of all. It's a good reason for family and kids to stay in Paris. And also because Paris is moving a lot. I'm sure you read a lot of articles and you see how many galleries open, new galleries in Paris.

I think that the Parisian art scene is getting more and more dynamic. It's a very good strategy to open the first secondary market Perrotin in Paris, and Perrotin is a Parisian gallery, at the beginning. So it makes sense.

M. D. Would there be other secondary market galleries opened around the globe by Perrotin?

T-D. B. We are opening another one in Dubai next week.

M. D. Secondary market?

T-D. B. Secondary market and primary. We're going to mix the exhibitions. We're going to mix the primary with the secondary market artworks. Of course, it's just the beginning.

M. D. Yes, of course.

D. L. So, for example, Dubai: the opening show will be next November. We are doing at the same time a Murakami solo show, the first one in the UAE. So it's something very important. At the same time, we are opening, in the Dubai Gallery, a blue-chip secondary market show, with artists that we are not representing. So now we try to do both, because it works together. We understand that for the audience and collectors, it's easy for them to understand that we can do both. We assume that we don't have to be hidden behind the wall to make secondary market, that we can do something very intelligent and a very great exhibition by the fact of assuming the secondary market.

**“WE ASSUME THAT WE DON'T HAVE TO
BE HIDDEN BEHIND THE WALL TO MAKE
SECONDARY MARKET.”**

T-D. B. And if I can add something else. You know we are always—or since I started this, so close to thirteen years ago, twelve, thirteen years ago—we were always afraid of showing the secondary market works. Oh, this one's going to get burned. I have seen it already like ten times in the market, and everything I'm sure most of you have heard. I think it's completely nonsense

when the artwork is good and the price is fair. If you put the work into a great city and into a great context, it's just an added value to the work and not something that you could say: “Oh, it was exhibited there or there.” When there are museum shows for an artwork, you are always saying: “Oh, that's good, it was in a good museum,” whatever, and things like that.

**“I TRULY BELIEVE THAT
THERE ARE NO BURNED-OUT
ARTWORKS.”**

There is also something very important. Galleries are the only free museums in the world. What better than to exhibit secondary market work with great curating? Then, if it doesn't sell, it's not because the artwork is not good. It's just because the client wasn't there, or the price perhaps was too high or the context was not there. But it's not about the work. I truly believe that there are no burned-out artworks. There is only artwork that doesn't fit the wishes of the client at a certain moment. But, in the end, if the price is fair and the artwork is good, there is no point that the artwork will not sell.

Now we are getting into a momentum where there are a lot of museums, a lot of private foundations, public foundations, that are opening every week around the world, so the A-Plus works are less and less available. As soon as you have something interesting, A-Level, there is no point that the work will not sell. There is no point for you to not exhibit them and be proud of exhibiting that kind of work.

D. L. To answer a little bit more about your question about the location. Location is very important, but it's not the only thing, you know. For example, at the gallery—as you said, we have several galleries around the world—and for the secondary market, we already are working with a worldwide connection between all the sellers from Perrotin Gallery, the sellers from the Asia gallery, from the US gallery, from the Middle East gallery, sellers from the Europe gallery. We have, for the moment, one location, and soon two locations, but it's already working like a full market, a worldwide market. For example, works are coming to the Parisian gallery secondary market from sellers from China, from Hong Kong, from Seoul, from Tokyo galleries. We are lucky enough to already have sellers all around the world, and it's a free market, an open market. We exhibit in Paris and in Dubai but we don't especially need to have secondary market galleries everywhere, because it's already a worldwide business.

M. D. You have already talked about it slightly and I want to get into it more deeply: the identity issue, the art gallery identity. Now we all know that many secondary market galleries seem to have never had a problem to work on the primary market. As far as the primary market is concerned, contemporary art galleries are always asked to have a very clear identity and a very well-defined programme. Art fair admissions committees are usually very strong, to the extent that not many contemporary art galleries can exhibit secondary market works in fairs. Do you appreciate that there is a certain degree of permeability nowadays? Do you perceive that there should be a less rigid and more fluid approach to gallery practices, in the sense of feeling more comfortable working on the thresholds between the primary and the secondary market? Is Perrotin Second Marché a declaration of intentions in that direction? What do you think?

**“WE DON’T ESPECIALLY NEED TO HAVE
SECONDARY MARKET GALLERIES
EVERYWHERE, BECAUSE IT’S ALREADY A
WORLDWIDE BUSINESS.”**

D. L. We have to. We strongly believe, with Emmanuel, that when you put limits on something it doesn’t work. We love not to have limits. That’s the beginning, and the purpose of the gallery. For example, you have proof of that when Frieze has now been doing Frieze Masters for years. You can see that some galleries are doing both, have a booth in Frieze and have a booth in Frieze Masters, it’s for that reason. More recently, Independent Art Fair in New York is now doing Independent 20th Century. It will be more and more like that. Because I remember years ago, as you said, when you were working in the primary market galleries, it was very non-elegant...

T-D. B. Rude...

D. L. ...rude to speak about secondary market. “Don’t speak about secondary market, it’s only about money, it’s only about making this. You are not supporting artists,” and all that. It was all kinds of sentences like that. But I strongly believe that it’s not true. You can make secondary market in a good way, because, as Tom said, you can make great exhibitions to offer to the public and to collectors, and to mix primary and secondary markets. So in terms of image, I think that it’s better to mix both. That’s why we’re doing it and we try to do it in a good way. I know that it will be one of the next questions, sorry, but we have to speak after about estates. Estates are a key point as well

for the secondary market, for the primary market. It may be the link between the primary and the secondary market, the estate market.

T-D. B. But, if I may, you can even speak about Ettore Sottsass: after only one exhibition that we made, the one that I was speaking of before...

D. L. Yeah, one year ago.

**“ARTISTS’ ESTATES ARE A KEY POINT.
THE ESTATE MARKET MAY BE THE
LINK BETWEEN THE PRIMARY AND THE
SECONDARY MARKET.”**

T-D. B. A year ago, last January. We made an exhibition and there were totems by Ettore Sottsass in the gallery. A few months after this show we saw the market growing in auction, like double, triple, four times the price that we were making. So we went, because we wanted to buy some at Christie’s, just in front of the gallery in Paris. Then, we asked our friend there, because we are working closely with them, we asked: “I don’t get it like, why is the estimation like this? How many lines do you have registered there?” And he said to me: “Oh you don’t get it, guys. Since you did this, the Sottsass market went up like crazy.”

It’s the proof that a secondary market exhibition can make things change. Because we did it like this: Ettore Sottsass close to Warhol, close to Wesselmann, close to—no, on the ground floor—we put Alain Jacquet, Jasper Johns. So, they saw Ettore Sottsass in a different way than they were used to seeing it, in a design gallery or even at the Centre Pompidou. It’s crazy. When you put that kind of artist and secondary market works into a good context, everybody is able to see how far it can go.

M. D. Let’s talk then about the market, and clients also. For quite some time there’s been a lot of deliberations about the fact that the art market should become more and more transparent, because transparency would generate confidence and with confidence will come clients. But it is also true that in recent times, we’ve seen many projects, from auction houses especially, that tend to enhance discretion, privacy, anonymity. Is Perrotin Second Marché a response to that? Is it a strategic reaction to auction houses’ expansion into the private sales realm?

T-D. B. You know, first of all, we are working with them. I never saw ourselves in competition with Christie's and Sotheby's and Phillips, or with other auction houses. But we are transparent on the price. For everyone who's coming to the gallery and asking for prices, no one will have an answer like "Oh sorry, it's sold. Oh sorry, not this one." Or "Give me your mail, I'm going to send you the price." No, it's not like that with us, it's not like that. You know, I think that auction houses did this a long time ago.

"A GOOD SECONDARY MARKET EXHIBITION CAN MAKE THINGS CHANGE."

We had the chance in Paris, especially, to open the gallery before Sotheby's opened its own space of private sales. Okay, but what's the point? Do you know how many secondary market galleries there are? How many primary market galleries? At the end of the day there are only the artworks, which are speaking for themselves. For us, if you are able to source good secondary market artworks or good artists in the primary market, this will make the difference, nothing more. So, I don't feel and I don't see all those auction houses being like a competition. Of course, they are, we are all in the same market, but if they are better at finding artworks, they will be better than us; if we are better at it, we will be better than them.

M. D. Is your main interest reaching new clients, or finding good works of art? Now would you agree, for example, with David Zwirner, who says that consignment is the new prey?

D. L. We had a discussion a few weeks ago about that.

M. D. Oh, you did? All right.

T-D. B. First of all, of course consignment is the new prey, when you are not confident enough or money-wise, when you don't have enough money to buy the artworks. We are doing, honestly, kind of a 50/50 between consignment and to buy our own stock. Because I think that when you control the artwork and when you buy it, and when you are confident in what you are buying, first of all, I think it's a proof of trust from us to the client: that we are able to put our money before them into the artwork, first of all. Second of all, when we are buying you don't have pressure, like okay, you need to sell this in three months, in six months, and stuff like that. Of course, consignment is amazing,

and we are very thankful to our clients or dealers who give us the trust to put their artworks into the gallery, into a nice space, and the team, Dylan and I, trying to sell them.

"I DON'T SEE ALL THOSE AUCTION HOUSES BEING LIKE A COMPETITION. OF COURSE, THEY ARE, WE ARE ALL IN THE SAME MARKET."

But it's not only that consignment is a new prey, because you need to think that when you are doing a consignment and when you are putting together a secondary market show, it's not like the primary market. In the primary market you have one studio, one show. When it's a solo show, it's easy: the shipping, the insurance, the curating, the scenography of the space. All of this is pretty—and Emmanuel will kill me—but it's easier, okay? It's easier. For us, it is like twenty owners, ten owners, ten from our stock, the works are coming from all over the world. You need to ensure them individually. You need to make sure that you have good shipping quotes, to bring back the work to the owners if it's not sold, and stuff like that. So the money that you are putting together when you are doing consignment, is a lot. So of course, it's the new prey, but it's not...

D. L. It's not enough...

T-D. B. But it's not enough. If you can build a secondary market gallery only with consignment?

D. L. I don't believe in that. It's very hard.

T-D. B. It's very, very, very hard, because if you don't sell the show, it's not that you are just losing your fixed costs. You are also losing all the insurance, which is costing us a lot, but a lot. And the shipping, and shipping costs now are pretty crazy. To ship an art piece, it's insane what they are asking us, it's honestly insane. A very good part of our gallery, and the vision that we have, Dylan, Emmanuel and I, is to always try to surprise the collectors and the visitors to the gallery. Every two exhibitions we break apart the gallery from scratch, We are putting in curving walls, we paint the galleries all over, we put in arches, put grass on the floor, and things like that.

D. L. You cannot do that only with consignment because with consignment it depends. You add your fees, you know the customer wants a price, and you add your fee. Like, I don't know, 10%, 15%. But at the end of the day when you have a gallery space for the secondary market, you have a team. You have to pay the rental cost, you have to pay, as exactly Tom said, to build the new scenography. So it's not enough. It's good; it's a good addition to the business, of course, consignment, but it's not enough. The way we want to do it. I mean, if you are an art dealer with an office and not doing exhibitions, of course it's amazing, but it's not enough.

**“IF CONSIGNMENT IS THE NEW
PREY? IT'S A GOOD ADDITION TO THE
BUSINESS, OF COURSE, CONSIGNMENT,
BUT IT'S NOT ENOUGH.”**

T-D. B. I think that when a client comes to the gallery, perhaps the client of Perrotin Gallery before us, or the client that we had before Emmanuel, before Perrotin, or the new ones, who are just knocking the door and say to us: “Okay, I have this, can you buy it from me?” If you don't make the study and the quotation of the work, and you are not able to buy it from them, if they need money, you are losing clients, you are losing business. Now we are about to open the consignment page on the website. To bring consignment and to try to have a constant flow, and to be an answer to wishes from clients that we will never see in front of us. So, of course, consignments are amazing. But you need to do it with parsimony.

M. D. The consignment issue, I suppose, is also like a link between the primary and the secondary. I mean being a contemporary art gallery, mainly, do you think that having this secondary market side can enhance your client's trust in contemporary art? Will your contemporary art clients see in the secondary market gallery a second life for their collections, an exit for their collections? So that will enhance the trust in the firm?

T-D. B. You know, there is something that I didn't know before being partnered with Emmanuel. Most of the exhibitions that he is doing all around the world are sold out. Because now the market is so crazy with primary and young artists, and the primary market galleries are, and have to be, protective with the artists, they are making them sign five-year non-resale agreements, or five-year right of refusal, or whatever. They are trying to protect their artists,

because you have many examples of young artists that are twenty-five, thirty, just getting their degrees at any art school, who are selling into the gallery at 20k, and the secondary market brings them 300, 400k. This is kind of nonsense, because when you are putting this work at 400k, and you think that you can buy George Mathieu, an Andy Warhol painting, a Chagall on paper, some really modern and post-war at that price—I don't see the point of buying artworks at 500k when the painting is still fresh.

**“EMMANUEL IS DOING VERY WELL
WITH THE SECONDARY MARKET OF
HIS OWN ARTISTS, BECAUSE HE'S
PROTECTING THEM.”**

For me, it's nonsense, because this is my culture, and this is what I love in my market. Mostly, when I'm buying for myself, I'm buying the history, I'm buying an experience, I'm buying the fact that this guy was the first to do it when he painted it. So of course, we are an answer to this, but you need to think about the contemporary art market—and just to get back to something: Emmanuel always did the secondary market for his own artists. This is something that is very important to say, because we are, Dylan and I, we are in the gallery for older artists instead of the artists of the programme of Emmanuel for the secondary market. He is doing very well with the secondary market of his own artists, because he's protecting them. So, when you are signing the five-year right of refusal, or whatever, if you want to just give the work back, they will take it. He's very conscious and he has a real consciousness of all the life of the artworks of his artists. Therefore, I think we are not an answer to this. He already answered it before us, so I will not take the credit for this.

M. D. Perhaps one day you could come across someone who would say: “Yeah, Perrotin Second Marché is a clear example of a contemporary art gallery's need to lower risks and increase resources.” Would you agree to that?

T-D. B. I would give him the key of the gallery.

M. D. Exactly. All right, okay.

T-D. B. Pretty easy to answer. You are lowering the risk when you are not spending money. When I'm spending 100k to rebuild a building just to put the artworks in a perfect way to have curating, to have something that blows the mind of the client, I cannot say. And when you are buying the artworks. When

you are in a contemporary market gallery, you have consignment from your artists. We are buying the works, we have consignment—it's exactly what we said before. The costs are high. It's not something that you just, oh, you have a phone call, you have a coffee, and then: "Okay, I want to sell my Warhol", then you are calling someone else: "Okay, you want a Warhol? Yes, buy it." This is in your dreams. This happens one, two, three times a year, but you need to put shows together, you need to spend the money, you need to involve yourself in this.

D. L. Also, we have an entire team behind us, because we have to do all the research. We have to do all the authentication, we have to make sure that the provenance is absolutely perfect. We have all of this: we need to check, double check and triple check. Because you are buying secondary market at Perrotin Gallery, we have to be very careful about that. So that costs a lot of money as well, because we have a team behind that.

**“YOU ARE BUYING SECONDARY
MARKET AT PERROTIN GALLERY, WE
HAVE TO BE VERY CAREFUL ABOUT
THAT.”**

T-D. B. Also, when a client is asking for us to buy an artwork, we are not just selling the artwork. We are also coming with auction research, primary market research, prices, a full provenance check. For example, if we have a Keith Haring we will call the Tony Shafrazis, etcetera, etcetera. So of course, this costs a lot. Market analysis...

D. L. It is not just to sell but to buy, to buy an artwork from a collector. We're making files like this, to explain to him and to be totally transparent that the price is this, and to justify why the price is that. Of course, we make a list from Artprice or Artnet, and the secondary market, we research into auctions and prices. But we are also making these files for the clients, communications for private deals, for example. We do comms that this work was at Sotheby's private sale at this price, "this was in the booth of my colleague in Basel at that price". So that he knows, or she knows, the market very well. We have to be totally transparent about that, even when we make offers to buy an artwork, not to sell.

T-D. B. Because we can be rude if we are lying about the prices, and of course look like robbers, you know.

M. D. So yes, I agree. I mean risks and uncertainties are shared between the primary market and the secondary market, that's for sure. Another thing: some secondary market dealers and sometimes also some private collectors themselves, sometimes even through auction houses, have often practiced flipping. We have talked about it earlier on with Julia [Peyton-Jones] and Farah [Nayeri]. This is a practice that has generally been a source of conflict, as you surely know. Are you aware that because of your size and influence, that might generate a certain uneasiness within the contemporary art community? Is it something that you want to tackle?

**“WE ARE NOT GOING TO DO THE
SECONDARY MARKET OF THE ARTISTS
OF EMMANUEL.”**

T-D. B. As we said, we are not going to do the secondary market of the artists of Emmanuel. Also, we are respecting the five-year non-resale agreement that clients may sign when they are buying. Then, we are always checking this, just as Dylan said. When we are checking provenance, then we know as a fact that the guy bought it a year ago from another gallery. But we know, because we are into this market, that they are all signing the contract on this. We will not put ourselves and the client into a conflict with another gallery, because we have a very, very, very good relationship with most of the galleries that we are working with, primaries. So Gagosian, Hauser & Wirth, Zwirner, all around the place. Because at the end of the day, when we are advising clients as a secondary market gallery, and as advisors, as Dylan and I are doing, we are also giving access and we are also putting our trust in our clients, and the gallery is putting its trust into us, to give us access. So we will not play this game, loud and clear: this is not our game.

M. D. One question I wanted to ask you before and I forgot: do you see that there's a difference between clients in the secondary market and the primary market? Do you think so?

D. L. Difference, sorry, between...?

M. D. Between different types of client?

D. L. Yes, yes. For example, I can give you a clear example. After the first lockdown, the gallery space in Paris, the secondary market space, was being renovated, and we decided to go to Dubai. That's why we now have the idea to

open in Dubai. So, when we had gone to Dubai, at one dinner we met someone, and, for example, you cannot believe how many artworks he had bought, how powerful the collection was. Now that guy—and it's crazy—that guy had never been in galleries. He only bought through auction houses, he only bought through dealers, but not primary market, because he wants to be—and he's not a dealer, he's a collector—but he wants to be totally free about his own collection. He knows that if he bought some hot artists in the primary market, you're going to sign a first official agreement. Also, for example: this guy, we bought some artwork from him, and he made some consignments at the gallery, and maybe 25 or 30% of the first show of the gallery in Dubai was with this guy, coming from his collection. It was interesting, and no one had known this guy before at Perrotin Gallery, because he's only—*only*—a secondary market collector.

T-D. B. Yes, from Baselitz to a Kiefer or two.

D. L. It's crazy to meet people who are not coming to galleries to buy. Maybe he's coming to see and to visit shows, of course, because he loves art, but not to buy. So I think that we are meeting more and more guys like that, and collectors. We already know that we will meet new collectors because we clearly announce that we are working in the secondary markets. So yes, it brings new agents and new clients to the gallery, definitely.

**“WE ALREADY KNOW THAT WE
WILL MEET NEW COLLECTORS
BECAUSE WE CLEARLY ANNOUNCE
THAT WE ARE WORKING IN THE
SECONDARY MARKETS.”**

T-D. B. Then you have the opposite: you have the client who just wants to buy in primary, because they are saying: “Why would I pay more for something that I can't have access to? And if I don't have the access, I will skip to another artist.” So, it's both ways as well, you know? You have some who just want to be free and do whatever they want. The old style, buying artists, because it used to not be like this. Since when are we signing five-year non-resale agreements? Since when, five years, ten years maximum? [laughs] Since two, three, four years ago. So, it's cutting some clients out and bringing in others.

M. D. Absolutely. Let's talk about estates now, which is something that you're very much into. Well, while it is true that the market continues its romance,

however erratic and volatile, with the hyper-young, and hyper-new—you already talked about this, a little bit—it is also true that, as Cecilia Alemani's exhibition in the Venice Biennale demonstrates, there's also strong interest to bring into light artists whose artistic careers, due to gender or racial prejudices, went unnoticed in the past, despite the quality and interest of their work. Are you willing as a gallery to operate in that direction? Are you willing to unearth sort of past gems or hidden gems?

T-D. B. This was my second beautiful experience in my life. I had the chance when I was twenty-six, to take care of and convince the son of Georges Mathieu to give me the representation and the full exclusivity on all stock of half of the estate—because the estate was divided between the widow of Georges Mathieu and the son of Georges Mathieu. I took care of the son of Georges Mathieu, Jean-Baptiste. It was pretty funny because I was really passionate about Georges Mathieu, and when I started to speak about Georges Mathieu to colleagues, to art dealers, to collectors, they were all laughing a lot about me: “Ha, you are twenty-six and you will take care of George Mathieu, who is like an old guy. Nobody buys his work anymore, it's like old-fashioned, everybody is in contemporary art, everybody...”

There is a nonsense with this. As if nobody will want George Mathieu ever again, the market crashed. But what they didn't see is how strong the market of George Mathieu was, even when it was a low market. When you see the rates of the bought artworks and all the artworks being sold into the secondary market, it's not the point of the prices, it's the point of the attention. Without any dealers, without any representation, without any concern for the art markets, you still had a really beautiful group of collectors who were still buying Georges Mathieu. When you are seeing the history and when you are seeing the background of Georges Mathieu, that he's been collected by perhaps 120 museums around the world, the best collections have Georges Mathieu, the history is amazing.

When you are putting an artist like this into the context of now, everybody will see the work is pretty fresh and it's beautiful hanging against whatever contemporary artist you want to end with. I think it's just a matter of perception, and a matter of how you're going to show this kind of work. We have estates, of course. We just announced a month ago that we took the estate of Gérard Schneider as well. It's the first time since Samuel Kootz that a gallery is representing the four masters of lyrical abstraction, Soulages, Mathieu, Hartung and now Schneider. So we went to the Independent Art Fair 20th Century, with Dylan three months ago, in the beginning of September.

We took 19 artworks, and the 19 artworks were sold...

T-D. B. The 19 artworks were sold within two days to American collectors who had never heard about Gérard Schneider. Because it's fresh, because when you are putting it into a context everybody sees the artworks and not the price, not the auction market, not the whatever. They are just seeing a beautiful artwork. Then, when you are speaking about the history of the artists, that they were representing France at the Venice Biennale, at the São Paulo Biennale, that he did documenta in Kassel, that he was collected by the MoMA, that he went into Asia too, all around, it's amazing. It's impossible that an artwork of an artist like this costs 50k, when you see clearly that with 50k you cannot buy some primary market artists. So you are buying history. You are buying part of art history when you are buying artists like this.

**“WHAT WE EXPLAIN TO PEOPLE IS
THAT THE MARKET DOES NOT HAVE
ANY INTENTION, BECAUSE THIS
MARKET IS LIKE FASHION, FOR JUST
THAT MOMENT.”**

D. L. We strongly believe that for estates, it was always the same with George Mathieu, with Jacquet and now with Schneider. It's very difficult for an artist to be on the top. Understand that Georges Mathieu started painting, like in late 40s and he passed away like in 2008. Could you imagine to have a fifty, sixty-year career? Of course, at some point of your career you are on the top and then it goes back and then you go up again, you know, like that. But this is only a matter of market and market price, it's not because the artist is not a good artist anymore. It's totally different. So what we explain to people is that the market does not have any intention, because the market, this market, is like fashion, for just that moment. But the artist is still very good, and when you're looking at the painting from the from 60s, from the 70s, it was something very strong in terms of art history in this period. We just opened the eyes of people and explained to them to look at it again, not with “market-wise” eyes, but to look at the quality of the painting. Then the market comes back.

D. L. What is very important is to look at it, not because of the market price at a precise moment, but because of the quality of the painting. And because there is an art movement, or there's a post-war movement, an abstract movement, that is strong.

M. D. Let me stop you there, sorry, I mean I also have many questions left to ask, but I would like to open the discussion to the floor to see if there's anyone who would like to ask a question to you. Are there any questions?

T-D. B. If there are no questions, I would love to finish this for one minute.

M. D. And I would love to ask you both also one question.

T-D. B. Just if you see—because we were speaking about the estates—if you see, for Hartung, Mathieu and Schneider it will be the same. What did all those old-fashioned galleries said back in the days, in the 50s? That, for example, for Mathieu, or Hartung or even Schneider, you need to buy the artworks from the late 40s up to June 1960, because after he was not an artist anymore. Like anything afterwards is not good and it's a nightmare. But now the market is bringing more value to the 80s...

D. L. To the late period...

T-D. B. ...to the late period. Why? Because it's kind of more fresh; and you see Hartung, the spray paintings, are going for crazy amounts. Georges Mathieu, the biggest auction record for Georges Mathieu was for the 80s, and with Schneider I'm pretty sure it's going to be the same.

D. L. It was impossible to understand this five years ago. And what is very interesting is for forty or fifty years, that kind of artist was bought by old collectors. I respect them a lot, of course, but old collectors. Now what we sell from the late period, that this kind of character does not like, we sell it to millennial collectors, the millennial generation. So they are between 25 and 35 years old, very young, and they all want the late period, and not the paintings from the 50s or from the 60s, which is very interesting, Georges Mathieu would be very glad to know that, Schneider as well, very proud. Schneider's daughter is still very amazed about that. She said that “My father would be very proud to know that young collectors buy the late period.” So it is interesting to understand that.

D. L. We are speaking too much, so sorry, it's too long.

M. D. That's what you're here for!

Contributions and questions (c/q) from the audience

Q1. Thank you very much for this talk. It was very insightful, very interesting. I was curious because you said you are working in collaboration with auction houses, and I wanted to know: is it for sorting artworks that you are going to buy? Can you please explain more about how you collaborate?

T-D. B. We are doing—thank you, thank you for this—we are doing the collaboration in three parts even. The first one is buying artwork from them, either in auction houses or in private sales. Also, we are doing a new game, that is the guarantee and the warranty on the artworks. When, for example, they are calling us to say: “Okay, I have this client who wants to put the artwork in auction. But he is not very comfortable with putting up an artwork and being afraid the artwork will not sell.” We say back: “Okay, so at the low estimate we are buying this. And whatever it goes up, we’re going have a share on the profit of the resale of the artworks.” So we are also working like this with them. It’s really a new way of buying artworks. Because we will only do and only play this game with artwork that we will be proud of buying, first of all. We will never do this as a matter of money, we will do it because we want to secure the artwork, we want to buy it. If it goes up, we are very happy, we make money without spending a penny, so it’s amazing. But if the artwork isn’t sold, we buy the artwork and we will be able to exhibit it in upcoming years.

M. D. Thank you very much, Tom and Dylan, for all your explanations and lots of luck. And thank you all for listening to us.v

Nicolas Bourriaud

is a French curator and art critic, who has curated a great number of exhibitions and biennials all over the world. With Jérôme Sans, Bourriaud cofounded the Palais de Tokyo in Paris, where he served as codirector from 1999 to 2006. He was the Gulbenkian curator of contemporary art from 2007 to 2010 at Tate Britain in London. In 2009 he curated the fourth Tate Triennial, titled *Altermodern*. He was the Director of the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, an art school in Paris, France, from 2011 to 2015. From 2015 to 2021, he served as the director of Montpellier Contemporain (MO.CO.), an institution he helped create.

Ellen de Bruijne

is an Amsterdam-based art historian and curator, who founded her eponymous gallery and project space in October 1999, located at the heart of Amsterdam. Over more than twenty years, the gallery has focused on new tendencies in contemporary art, concentrating on performative art, socially related art, installations, and works in progress. Ellen de Bruijne Projects creates a platform for young international artists and mid-career artists to perform, generating shows with high standards on an international level and within an international context.

Alex Mor

is the co-founder of mor charpentier and a Political Scientist that holds a master's degree in Resolution of International conflict resolution. Based in Paris since 2010 and most recently in Bogotá, the gallery has promoted and consolidated an artistic program engaged in current issues and problems with social, political, and historical, approaches. This engagement is reflected in the works of its broad portfolio of artists that often transcends the white cube and seek to present trends in art, with a special interest in Latin America. Mor is also a member of the selection committees of ARCO Madrid and ArtBo.

Paco Barragán

is an art historian, art theorist, and curator specializing in the history of art fairs and biennials. Between 2015 and 2017 he was the Head of Visual Arts of Cultural Arts Centre Matucana 100 in Santiago de Chile. He was artistic director and curator of CIRCA Puerto Rico and PhotoMiami fairs. Some of the books he has authored are *The Art to Come* (Subastas Siglo XXI, 2002), *The Art Fair Age* (Charta, 2008), *From Roman Feria to Global Art Fair*, *From Olympia Festival to Neo-liberal Biennial: On the 'Biennialization' of Art Fairs and the 'Fairization' of Biennials* (Artpulse Editions, 2020).

See it in Venice, Buy it in Basel. Are Biennials the New Art Fairs?

SPEAKERS

Nicolas Bourriaud, Ellen de Bruijne & Alex Mor

MODERATOR

Paco Barragán



See it in Venice, Buy it in Basel. Are Biennials the New Art Fairs?

Paco Barragán (P. B.) Thank you Lluçia and Talking Galleries for inviting me. I think you should all be as excited as I am, not only with the speakers but also with the topic. I'm really excited because actually this is a topic that I tried to pull off in 2015, presented it to a big art fair and they said no, but I'm stubborn. In 2016 I tried again, another big art fair, "no", and then in 2018 I tried again. I was less ambitious with a mid-level art fair and they also said no, so I'm really happy that we can talk about this topic. I hope you will all agree that it's a great title: *See it in Venice, Buy it in Basel: Are Biennials the New Art Fairs?*

I have a nice presentation but before I can start the presentation there are some topics... Biennials vs art fairs, I'm quoting here Italian art critic and editor at Phaidon Press, Michele Robecchi, who's based in London. This is what he wrote a couple of years ago: "I still believe that biennials and art fairs are like apples and oranges, they're both delicious but fundamentally different". I still remember that phrase, you know, apples and oranges. Now I have this wonderful artoon by the talented Mexican-American New York-based artist Pablo Helguera, with a little bit of imagination we can cross out documenta and put Venice and then next to that Basel. So, like him, do we have to choose between Venice and Basel? Do we have to choose between art history and the art market? Do we have to choose between disinterestedness and commodification? Do we have to choose between oranges and apples?

Let's start with our first speaker, Nicolas Bourriaud. Actually, I think I could easily skip the presentation because who doesn't know Nicolas Bourriaud? I think we all know who Nicolas Bourriaud is, and I'm pretty sure that most of you knew about Nicolas Bourriaud like I did when he co-founded and co-directed the Palais de Tokyo between 1999 and 2006 with Jérôme Sans. Another interesting element I pointed out about Nicolas is that he was curator of focus country France at ARCOmadrid in 1999. Amazing, an art fair looking like Venice with a national pavilion. Isn't that funny? Then among the many biennials, triennials, pentennials that Nicolas did, I just highlighted the Tate Triennial, which went down under the magnificent name *Altermodern*, and

the latest edition of the Istanbul Biennial. He was also director of MO.CO. In Spanish it doesn't sound very good to be honest, but it's the Montpellier Contemporary, from 2015 to 2021. And Nicolas Bourriaud is a gifted and prolific writer, of course *Relational Aesthetics*, some of you might have read it, and then another one I like to point out, *Radicants*.

Our second speaker is Ellen de Bruijne, art historian, curator and founder-director of Ellen de Bruijne Projects. We were talking this morning because she, like Julia Peyton-Jones, also did the shift from more a curatorial work to sales work or gallery work. Like most galleries, she has participated in many art fairs, like for example Basel, Liste, ARCOMadrid, Artissima. Some of the artists she works with are Otto Berchem and two Spanish artists among them, Lara Almárcegui and Dora García, Japanese artist Suchan Kinoshita, Maria Pask, Saskia Janssen, and I can easily go on. Most of the artists I was interested in because some of them have, of course, participated in biennials, documentas, national pavillions and things like that.

And our last speaker, last but not least, Alex Mor. I think he has a very interesting profile: political scientist with a master's from NCR, the National Conflict Resolution Center. One interesting thing is that maybe even though most of you are not interested in politics, he was part of the campaign of the presidential candidate Ingrid Betancourt. He's member of the selection committee of ARCOMadrid and ARTBO. He manages two spaces together with his partner, Philippe Charpentier: in Paris since 2010, and a space in Bogota since 2021. Artists the gallery works with or represents, with a very multicultural scope, are: Kader Attia, Alexander Apóstol, Paz Errázuriz, Voluspa Jarpa, Bianca Bondi, and I can go on.

Now, let's start with our friend Nicolas. MO.CO. was many things, but one of the things was that they showcased private collections, so an institutional space showcasing private collections. That's interesting. And this was an installation shot of the Patrizia Sandretto Re Rebaudengo collection that was exhibited in 2021 and beginning of 2022. This takes us to the next image, and this is a show that's ongoing now at Palazzo Bollani in Venice. It's called *Planet B: Climate Change and the New Sublime*. What's interesting about the show is that all the works are on sale and it has been organised by his curatorial platform Radicants. I'm quoting from the website: "Radicants is an international curatorial cooperative, working with independent professionals. We conceive, produce and organize institutional or commercial art exhibitions. We provide advising for projects or programs. Radicants has an exhibition space in Paris."

I wanted to start with Nicolas because I think it's a clear example of how we are walking the thin line between the institutional and the commercial. I showed the image of MO.CO. first because I have this idea, but maybe I'm wrong, that in a way MO.CO. was the dry run for Radicants. Can you tell us a little bit about it and why you conceived Radicants?

Nicolas Bourriaud (N. B.) We could come back to the oranges and lemons of Michele Robecchi, but I don't have the same lemons and the same oranges, actually. I think, for me, the oranges are exhibitions which provide a vision of art and an intelligence of art, an idea about it, and the lemons are all the bad ones, and that's the main distinction I make in a group show, for example. Works being for sale in art, we all know that this distinction has been completely blurred in the last 20 years, so rather than trying to turn around this kind of hypocrisy, it's really important to address it and to create the entities which answer this new situation and are able to provide a new way of intervening in the market.

“WORKS BEING FOR SALE IN ART, WE ALL KNOW THAT THIS DISTINCTION HAS BEEN COMPLETELY BLURRED IN THE LAST 20 YEARS. RATHER THAN TRYING TO TURN AROUND THIS KIND OF HYPOCRISY, IT'S IMPORTANT TO ADDRESS IT.”

For example, Radicants is a curatorial platform, the base of all our activities is a curatorial vision, not only mine, I just did the first one because it was easier. But the exhibitions you could see in Paris, for example, there was a solo show by Bracha L. Ettinger curated by Noam Segal, and we have five different curators at the moment each showing an emerging artist and we have many projects for the future with other curators, not only in Paris but abroad. The idea is that we both produce and conceive, with this network of curators, exhibitions that are museum exhibitions on one side—that are in a way produced with the institution, with the foundation, with the person that wants to make it exist—or commercial exhibitions. Two different aspects of what a curator can do, but it's not dividing the world into galleries on one side and institutions on the other. That's something which is from the past. For me it's the old world frankly, it doesn't work like that anymore, and we have to just answer to this situation by proposing something else. That would be a virtuous circle also, because every project we're doing, actually, when I hire a curator

for a project, this curator gets their part of the economy of the project, he or she is paid also if we sell something, and for the first time curators are really part of the economy, which is never the case anywhere. So these kind of things create a virtuous circle.

**“IT’S NOT DIVIDING THE WORLD
INTO GALLERIES ON ONE SIDE AND
INSTITUTIONS ON THE OTHER. THAT’S
SOMETHING WHICH IS FROM THE PAST.”**

We also work in a different way with artists because we don’t represent any artists, we’re not a gallery, so we also work with galleries. For example, we’ve been working with you on this exhibition here, actually, about Bianca Bondi. It creates a new type of network and a new type of activity which is, in the end, very creative. Even for me, I just discover a lot of things. The thing is I didn’t become an art dealer, because I would be the worst art dealer ever frankly, believe me. But Radicants is a platform where there’s someone who takes care of this, who’s a professional, we hire more professionals also to sell the artworks, because it’s not my job at all. Others organise exhibitions in a technical way, and this is the platform that allows many different types of projects also, including consulting.

P. B. Interesting. Now, let me get to Ellen first and then to Alex. As a gallery you’re used to working with the market, with art fairs, but also with biennials. How do you navigate, for example, the participation of one of your artists at Aperto or Venice Biennale or some other biennial?

E. B. I think we discussed this before. Answering the first question, is the art fair and the gallery world and the museum world and the biennials two separate worlds? I think nowadays it is one world and maybe I’m the proof, because I came from curating and working in a museum and there was a certain moment that I thought: “Now it’s more important for young artists to start a gallery than to start a non-profit space in Amsterdam.” In 1999, that was a situation that there were a lot of good non-profit spaces but not so many good galleries.

So, when you start from art or the artist, then you’re much more looking at what is necessary for them, and at that time it was, and still is, having a gallery that’s more curatorial, that’s not going for the easy pieces but also is prepared to go for performances, more conceptual work or even work that you cannot sell, like *The Rubble Mountain* by Lara Almarcegui that are not for sale [laughs].

And then it’s very handy, of course, that you have a curatorial background because then it’s easier to understand the needs, but at the end of the day the artists have to pay their rent so that’s also important. I see the importance to sell the work and also bring it to a higher level, and career-wise, that an artist is able to jump to a museum or jump to a more important collector. Therefore I started the gallery, but for me it is one world, it’s not a separate world. I really do understand that public money and private money are of course a different thing, because let’s say tax money, public money that’s from us all, you have to be aware of where you spend it. And for instance with Dora García and Lara Almarcegui, when they did the Spanish Pavilion, there was no question asked to the galleries like: “Can you pay for the transport?”

**“IS THE ART FAIR AND THE GALLERY
WORLD AND THE MUSEUM WORLD AND
THE BIENNALES TWO SEPARATE WORLDS? I
THINK NOWADAYS IT IS ONE WORLD.”**

P. B. It’s not the same as with *Aperto*, with the main Italian Pavilion... Alex, let’s go straight to the heart of the matter because there’s one case I know particularly well. One of my favourite artists, Chilean Voluspa Jarpa, with whom you work, she was at the Chilean National Pavilion in Venice and I know that Chile pays a little bit, but most of it you have to fundraise. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

Alex Mor (A. M.) Yeah, well actually that case was one of the only times that we didn’t pay anything for the Venice Biennale, I think maybe the only time, because there’s always something that is asked for galleries depending on the level of the project and depending on the different scales. In this particular case it was an institution called Antena, which is like a foundation with collectors and patrons all over Chile who actually really believe in the soft power of art and actually gather all the necessary money, which was a lot of money because it was a very intense and quite a complex pavilion to build. And they just funded everything, but this is very rare actually. I have to point out.

Before getting into detail I just want to point out like three important things to understand the relationship between funding, galleries and art fairs and biennials. The first one is that it’s extremely rare that an artist gets paid for their participation in a biennial, it almost doesn’t exist. I could only find three examples where it happens among the great variety of biennials that exist. The

second point is that there are different categories and hierarchies between biennials and fairs so, of course, the Venice biennial is stronger than the Cuenca one for example, so actually you don't get the same attention or the same demands in each of them. And the third one is, as Ellen was telling, and I totally agree with her, that this kind of tension between where the funds come and if you sell the work in Basel from the biennial... the same happens within institutions, you know, we've been dealing with this idea within institutions, especially in countries like the United States where most of the time the funding is private, so it's not like a new situation. So, in this case of Chile, to be honest it was fantastic, but it's one case among many in the 10 years of the gallery. It was the first time that we didn't give one penny.

“IT'S EXTREMELY RARE THAT ARTISTS GET PAID FOR THEIR PARTICIPATION IN A BIENNIAL, IT ALMOST DOESN'T EXIST.”

P. B. I know from Voluspa that Antena did a hell of a job because they put together a lot of people, collectors, foundations, whatever, to get that done, so that was really amazing. But what you said, it's fascinating. I have some more images, I took this from *Frieze* magazine, I'm sorry I hacked the hacker, because actually they had curators in there, on the other side they had dealers, and I thought it was fun to put art fairs and biennials, so this brings us to the idea of “Is art just too refined for business?”, which takes us to the next slide which is interesting. This is the Venice Biennale sales office that was running until 1973, and actually until the late 60s and beginning of the 70s practically all shows were sales shows, museum shows, biennial shows, the Royal Academy shows, they were just sale shows as well.

So when we think about biennials and art fairs we think anachronistically from the present: “Oh, at biennials works are not sold, etc.” But it's always been the same, and I want to quote Clarissa Ricci, she's an Italian academic and she has studied and researched the Venice Biennale profoundly, and she says this interesting thing: “The charter reform of 1973 was substantial and it helped the Venice Biennale to become a contemporary platform closer to the documenta model, but in both 1984 and 1993 the sales office seemed an appropriate solution to manage value exchange independently.” Which means that while the sales agency disappeared, and here you see this elegant gentleman Ettore Gian Ferrari who was the official dealer, he charged 15% for the Venice Biennale and 2% for him of every artwork sold. The thing is that while the sales agency was closed due to dealers' pressure, like Leo Castelli, Ileana Sonnabend and

also France May '68 anti-market attitudes and whatever, it has always been on the table and it has always been a discussion with different curators, with Achile Bonito Oliva, whatever, if they were going to reopen the sales agency again.

So you see, it's what you said, Nicolas, it has always been blurred, and Alain Servais, the famous Belgian collector, says he buys most of his works at biennials or museums, and says that if you go into a biennial or a museum and you look at the label and it says “courtesy of the artist or the gallery”, then the work is available. Now the question is: is it ethical? I mean, for example, for the Venice Biennale to ask that the gallery produces and transports the work, secures the presence of the artists. What is your take on it?

“THE VENICE BIENNALE SALES OFFICE WAS RUNNING UNTIL 1973. UNTIL THE LATE 60S AND BEGINNING OF THE 70S PRACTICALLY ALL SHOWS WERE SALES SHOWS.”

N. B. First it depends on the biennials, not every biennial is the same.

P. B. No, documenta for sure not, and maybe some others, but in the case of Venice, I mean, it's clear.

N. B. The question is a bit tricky because I personally don't think biennials look like art fairs, maybe bad biennials, yeah, but look at the Venice Biennale this year, I don't think it has anything to do with an art fair to be honest, and so it's not really true. The question *is a formal question, it's a question of meaning. If you go to an art fair there's no meaning, you're just confronted two artworks which are just isolated, deprived of any context and certainly no narrative, and that's the biggest difference that can exist between the two.*

P. B. But let me get to the ethical question, because we know what happens doesn't only happen in some biennials, especially Venice, but even with dealers, most museum shows and even many National Pavilions in Venice that are totally funded by dealers, galleries, etc. What is your opinion on that? Do you think it's just a sign of the times?

A. M. I don't know if the right term is to say if it's ethical or not. It's a fact, it's just happening and galleries have to deal with that. But an article just came out a couple of weeks ago on Artnet about a very large investigation about the

top biennial artists that are around. It turns out that we have four artists in the top 20 and we have a total of 16 artists from the gallery in the top of the most shown biennial artists. Does it mean that we sell all that and that we sell all the works that these artists show in the biennials? No. I wish, I would be extremely happy because if half of the programme just sells because it's in the biennial... So you have to nuance what type of work is shown in those biennials.

“IF YOU GO TO AN ART FAIR THERE’S NO MEANING, YOU’RE JUST CONFRONTED TWO ARTWORKS WHICH ARE JUST ISOLATED, DEPRIVED OF ANY CONTEXT AND CERTAINLY NO NARRATIVE.”

Also something that's very important to point out is that in this top 20 and even top 50 none of the artists are painters, and that's very important to understand because a painting with the stamp of the biennial sells better for sure. And going back to this ethical question, I'm going to point out an example that happened recently. We have an artist, Marwa Ansanios, who's now in the present documenta, who had a lot of problems, and there's this one painter participating in documenta that actually forced the curatorial team to include a set of three paintings even though they had no room to place them, because they were pre-sold as documenta paintings, and if the works were not presented at documenta the business was out!

N. B. Shit...

A. M. Now we're talking about ethical things. [laughs]

P. B. I used to say that there are three USPs, unique selling propositions or sales techniques, and dealers in the audience please correct me if I'm wrong. One is: "This artist is going to participate at Venice, documenta or whatever." The second one is: "This artist is going to participate in an exhibition at Tate, MoMA or something like that, a big museum." And the third USP is: "This artist is being collected by Rubell or Pinault or whatever." What you're talking about is what in other sectors, especially the financial sector, is totally prohibited, and that's an interesting thing we can link tomorrow to the Paris scene, and that's insider information. Because I think that biennials and also brands and dealers work with insider information and very often the fact that an artist is going to participate in a biennial or an important large-scale international event can be a good sales argument. So we're going back to the limits that are blurred.

E. B. I think the point is that the art world is maybe not so aware of different money angles, you can say, because we're all dealing with artists and art pieces and culture, which is a good thing, and I think in normal companies they divide much more the public money and the private money, and also the intertwining of money things and art is happening now and you cannot take them apart, but maybe in the future. I mean, I think also with normal companies and with countries, they're trying to make it more transparent and this is something that of course isn't transparent. And maybe you can also say it's not fair that some artists are having a kind of free platform on biennials and that you sell it in a profit situation like in a gallery, but this is something that's not an issue now but maybe in the future we have to think about it more specifically.

“DOES IT MEAN THAT WE SELL ALL THE WORKS THAT THESE ARTISTS SHOW IN THE BIENNALES? NO.”

P. B. Yes, you're right. Nicolas, you curated quite a few biennials. My question would be: if an artist exhibits in an important biennial, does that impact the price of the works or their career? How is your experience with that?

N. B. This I don't really know because I never really got interested in that, naturally, and even now I have to say, for example, the artist I'm showing in Venice, I'm not wondering are they sellable or not. I just constitute an exhibition in exactly the same way I would do in a non-commercial context and then I ask other people to sell them, which is totally different.

But the selection is not oriented by the market at all, which is really the most important thing, because the real question behind yours is: is the fact that a gallery sustains an artist a sufficient reason to invite him or her? Actually yeah. It does, a kind of perversion of the system, you know... For example, I know for sure that if an artist was contacted to do the French Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, he or she needs to come with a gallery or otherwise there's no chance to have it. And that's a fact, and that's the pervert way, I would say, that orientates the selection, and that's the enemy, you know? Not the money, money is fine, it's not the question. The question is: does it modify and pervert the choices the curators or institutions have to take?

P. B. I remember Robert Storr when he did his Venice Biennale, he was complaining about having to do a lot of fundraising to get his artists to Venice. Alex, how's your experience with that?

A. M. Actually, I want to point out something really important that Nicolas said, because we're really talking about this tiny, tiny limit between the ethical side and the formal side. This is very important, because we know as a fact that artists who don't have a gallery have little chance of going to a major art exhibition, because they have no funding. It also happens that whenever we try to find financial support to help artists, it also happened to us because, we're going to be honest here, if someone wants to fund a project it's because they have an idea behind it. Which means they're gonna support that work and then they're going to try to buy that work, because they want to have the biennial stamp, and it's very important to have that but of course they're going to get back the production cost, they're going to get a discount and then they're going to buy the work, which means that finally, even if it was a major project, the final gain for both the gallery and the artist is very little. That's a fact.

**“THE ART WORLD IS MAYBE NOT SO
AWARE OF DIFFERENT MONEY ANGLES.”**

And also what happens is that sometimes if you try to find this funding, the institutional collector is going to tell you: “Can we change the project? I'm happy to fund it, but it has to be a project I'm happy with or that I can buy.” And then it can change the curator's vision of it because they want to present the artists at any price and has to change the project, because if there's no exit for that work, it won't happen.

N. B. So the real question is not between private money or not, it's where is that private money situated, where is it? Is it after the choice or before the choice? That's the real question.

A. M. And then you are on a dangerous road...[laughs]

P. B. I want to be a little bit dissident with Nicolas. Look at this image and look at the next one. One is at Art Unlimited and the other is at the Ibirapuera pavilion, in São Paulo. When I said that galleries and art fairs look alike, it's a little bit because they have lots of things in common. We don't need to look much further, but global art, painting, different mediums, installations, corporate and private funding, curated sections, VIP lounges, whatever, Venice even sells VIP cards, platinum, gold, silver, catalogues, etc. So when you look at all those talks at fairs, biennials, whatever, when you look at it one way or another, I think they have started to look alike and I think that they started to look

alike because in a way these sophisticated platforms like art fairs and biennials are something that helps cities compete in this really ruthless, competitive, cultural capitalism in the 21st century where cities compete for being on the map. Actually, this morning the person from Catalan cultural enterprises was talking precisely about that, about putting a city on the map, competing with culture, and this is what it's all about. Today it's not politics, it's not philosophy, it's not religion, the only thing that brings us together is culture. I think that these platforms, or maybe a blockbuster exhibition, like fairs and biennials and things like that are really very strong attractions and they are also temporary, so they are awaited for every year or every two years.

**“WE KNOW AS A FACT THAT ARTISTS
WHO DON'T HAVE A GALLERY HAVE
LITTLE CHANCE OF GOING TO A
MAJOR ART EXHIBITION, BECAUSE
THEY HAVE NO FUNDING.”**

A. M. I just want to de-demonise this idea that putting a work that you see in Basel or that you see in the Venice Biennale, in a fair is a bad thing. Because unfortunately a lot of people think, and Ellen you will agree with me, that we are banks. We're not banks, we cannot just give money for projects everywhere, we have to find a solution and we have to find a balance between what we support and how we get the money back. So if you put a lot of money in a project for Venice and then you ask the artist to maybe adapt some part of that work so you can put it in an art gallery and sell it, and then you get back your cost, you're happy.

And I don't feel that I'm betraying the art world and I'm betraying art history. We are just getting back the money that we're putting in and we have to be honest, we can't just give the money away. I would be happy to just fund works in any single biennial, but it's not possible, and I know that stronger galleries like Perrotin or like Hauser & Wirth or Pace, they agree with this: we can't just continue funding things and not getting anything back. So we have to de-demonise this idea and we have to think that we are living in an ecosystem, we all turn on the same level, but at some point as galleries we need to back up and we need to continue, and in order to continue we have to use these kinds of mechanics, and it's not a bad thing, it's just happening.

P. B. Well, it's just the blurring of the limits or whatever. I think that it's much more complex because, from my own experience, what today in the art

world isn't possible, tomorrow is. I think that in today's cultural capitalism or neoliberalism, whatever you want to call it, it's more and more complex each time and it deals with complexity and contradiction. Especially as dealers, and you Alex, each time you have to confront the decision: do I sponsor this exhibition or not? I guess that for some of your artists like Falke Pisano you get petitions for shows, and especially from the US, that they are asking for funding, so I mean you're a mid-tier gallery, you're not Gagosian or whatever, because Gagosian can easily fund a show at a museum or biennial or whatever. So it's much more complicated for you...

“I JUST WANT TO DE-DEMONISE THIS IDEA THAT PUTTING A WORK THAT YOU SEE IN BASEL OR THAT YOU SEE IN THE VENICE BIENNALE, IN A FAIR IS A BAD THING.”

A. M. But in that sense, like Ellen, we have kind of complex programmes, it's not like 100% commercial programmes, and actually if you're talking about contradictions we have to go further. A lot of the artists in that case, the top four that we are talking about at least in our gallery, most of them criticise power, migration, the capitalist system, and at the same time we have to ask funds to show in the capitalist world that we are against. [laughs] So if we go into the contradiction we can go really far, and we share that common thing. That's why I was really happy to be here because they always think about the good and the bad, and it's just a system that's evolving all the time. There's a lot of contradictions, we just deal with them and we try to handle them the best we can. We can't just say black or white because there's a lot of grey.

P. B. But it's very convenient to see black and white, right? That's what I'm doing, that's my task [laughs]. Before I open the discussion to the audience, I showed you the first image of the artoon by Pablo Helguera and he made a second one for my book and it says: "The first path will lead the artist to aesthetic glory and art historical fame, the second is just what you take when you need to pay the rent." Pablo is always very accurate and very on time.

Contributions and questions (c/q) from the audience

Q1. Nicolas, you talked about artworks being out of a context, deprived of narrative in a fair situation. I'm very close to also having artists that deal with

geopolitics, history, very narrative and deep research, a little bit also with what Alex was saying, and it's maybe like a question to both of you and even Ellen if she would like to participate. Do you believe that with such strong narratives or artists with strong works, where the narrative is super important and not just the aesthetic part of it, could you kind of micro-curate a booth? Make it like a super small exhibition space? I don't think that always, in an art fair context it's always deprived of this kind of meaning. I think that perhaps we could use the possibility to also produce something... Many times it's a dialogue or something...

“THE MAIN DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BASEL AND VENICE IS, FIRST, FORMAL. ON ONE SIDE YOU HAVE A JUXTAPOSITION OF ARTWORKS WHICH ARE NOT ORGANISED IN A COMMON SPACE, THERE'S A TOTAL LACK OF WHAT IS CALLED CURATORIAL GRAMMAR.”

N. B. Absolutely. It's not a matter of square metres, not at all, and even before being a matter of narratives or not, because I really think the main difference between Basel and Venice, to take this metaphor, is first formal. On one side you have a juxtaposition of artworks which are not organised in a common space, there's a total lack of what is called curatorial grammar, because this is a grammar, space is a grammar. When you curate an exhibition, it's not the same part of the brain that you use when you write a text, it's something which is completely different because visual thinking is totally different from discursive thinking. An exhibition first has to take care of the space it is allowed, in an art fair nobody gives a shit about it, right? So it's just boxes and then you just put things in the boxes, you know? Some galleries make some efforts but still it's not the same. So, the first thing is before even the problematics that the artists are addressing is a question of the organisation of the space, I think. And then you have all the narratives which can be historical narratives, theoretical narratives and there can be many other types of narratives, but that's the big difference between the two and those are my apples and my oranges and my lemons. And it's not a matter of artworks for sale or not for sale, that's for sure.

P. B. An interesting detail that you can read in my book, sorry for the shameless self-promotion, is that one of the directors of Basel in the 90s, Lorenzo Rudolf, said that he picked up Basel when Basel was down, with lots of competition

from new art fairs in Paris, Madrid, Chicago, etc. He said that he finally got the fair to be number one again, and then he went to Venice and saw that his biggest competitor was the Venice Biennale, because the dealers were literally standing in front of the artwork, selling it, and that's how and why they conceived *Art Unlimited*, the huge exhibition space to compete, precisely, with Venice and to also attract the bigger institutions. It's a fascinating story.

**“WE HAVE TO STOP THINKING THAT
HAVING A CURATORIAL APPROACH AND
SELLING ARE CONTRARY OR OPPOSITES.”**

A. M. But again, we have to stop thinking that having a curatorial approach and selling are contrary or opposites, you know? I think in our cases, since day one, we curate every single show we do in an art fair. Actually, this morning I received the portfolio that we're going to send for the next fair in London and it's 25 pages. We don't have that much art but everything is built and we give a context and we give a social context and we give a political context and we're there to sell, you know? Ellen has a very complex programme too, but we're happy to sell. Here in the art world there's always this contradiction: “Oh! If you want to sell you have to be commercial,” but there's other ways of being commercial and not necessarily being easy. There's ways, you just have to work out of it.

E. B. Maybe I can add something. I think when I have a question or I just don't know anymore, then I go back to the artist or back to the artwork, back to the artist. Then it's very important to have a good piece and a good piece may be complex, or maybe I have to put a lot of effort to explain and I will do it again and again and again, but in the end I think when it's a good work it will sell or it will get a place. I'm not even thinking about selling but it gets a place and it's in a museum or in a private collection. I want to teach my artists right from the start that there is not something like: “Ah, I'm going to make a commercial work for the gallery and a real work for a museum,” it never works. [laughs] Please stop thinking that you can make a commercial work, it doesn't exist. To make a good work is already so complex, focus on that.

A. M. And actually if you go to visit Nicolas' show in Venice, you'll never guess that the works are for sale, because it looks like a museum show, and I don't think the aim one single minute was to sell. It just happens that the works are for sale, but the construction of the show is not showing a commercial side, it's just that the works are for sale. So you can find those balances and I think it's

fascinating that today there's a bigger awareness about that and that curators and dealers, we are mostly working on that, because, again, it's not just one side or the other, you can find a place where you find both.

N. B. And it's important to insist on the collective model. I'm sure that in the near future all the galleries which are super galleries like Perrotin, Zwirner, Hauser & Wirth, Gagosian, that have several spaces on several continents, we'll have to learn how to work differently and also with other people, and that's my bet, that's it.

P. B. Thank you for being here, thank you, speakers, Nicolas, Alex, Ellen.

Alain Quemin

is an exceptional class professor of sociology of art at Université Paris-8 (France), a researcher at GEMASS – Sorbonne Université, and a senior member of Institut Universitaire de France. He was an invited professor in numerous universities worldwide (UCLA, Columbia University and the New School for Social Research in the USA, Université de Montréal in Canada, Universität Zürich in Switzerland, Bologna University, Universitat de Barcelona in Spain, Unicamp in Brazil, Moscow University...). He also is a Fulbright alumnus. Alain Quemin specializes in the sociology of art markets and institutions and also works as a journalist and art critic. He published in particular: *Les stars de l'art contemporain. Notoriété et consécration artistiques dans les arts visuels*, Paris, éditions du CNRS, 2013, and *Le monde des galeries. Art contemporain, structure du marché et internationalisation*, Paris, CNRS Editions, 2021. He is a member of the International Association of Art Critics.

Recent and New Trends for Galleries

SPEAKER
Alain Quemin



Recent and New Trends for Galleries

Alain Quemin (A. Q.) Just to introduce myself, I am a university professor, my main affiliation being at University Paris 8 in France, but I have also lectured at UCLA, University of Zurich, Universitat de Barcelona and Bologna University for 8 to 12 years, so I try to seize all these occasions to exchange ideas with my students and with my colleagues there too. I am a sociologist of art mostly, I was trained both as a sociologist and as an economist, but while I also tend to develop some interests in art history and mostly contemporary art history, my main focus is on the sociology of art, mostly sociology of the art markets and art institutions.

I also work as a journalist and art critic and also as a curator. Just to give you an idea of my main interests in this domain, I wrote quite extensively on Omar Ba, a Senegalese artist who probably is the one I have written about most, and I am going to organise an exhibition in Sao Paulo in Brazil next year during the biennial about ORLAN and I very often collaborate with her, which makes an artist of African descent and a woman artist.

For my most recent book, *Le monde des galeries. Art contemporain, structure du marché et internationalisation*, I spent about 10 years doing some field work, which was quite easy for me as a journalist and art critic because I was invited all the time, especially by art galleries. Mostly in France but also abroad—in Switzerland, sometimes in Belgium, also in the US and to a lesser extent in the UK. Thus I could make formal interviews and spent so much time going out at night, especially for opening dinners and cocktail parties, which are really incredible occasions for social scientists, because you get much information: people speak very freely while they sip champagne or any kind of alcoholic beverages and then they tell you everything, which of course they would never tell you in private if you made formal interviews. So I really went out three to four times a week during all those years. Sometimes my colleagues in university find it a bit weird, because they think: “You’re partying all the time!” And I’m telling them: “I’m not partying! I’m working!” Of course, you cannot see it but you know, as art specialists as well as insiders, when we go out,

especially those of you who work in art galleries, we may look like we are sort of partying, but we are between networking and exchanging information all the time. Or even making business.

Another thing I also want to stress is that during one year, as I was investigating galleries and gallerists, I decided to travel as much as possible, and especially in order to attend art fairs, as they have become so prominent in the art world today. I really decided on one very special year to participate in 12 art fairs, which is what many galleries will do today. I was covering some of these art fairs as a journalist, sometimes on press trips, but sometimes I would also go only as a sociologist to study what was going on, transactions and the booths. But I also noticed people were always jet lagged. You arrive, you have to install the booth, and later you will have to deinstall, but before that, you have to interact with potential clients in two, three, four, five different languages. Luckily enough, I'm a man, but if you are a woman, you're supposed to be constantly charming and stand on high heels all day long, which really makes you very tired all the time. [laughter]

Before I move on to my presentation and after introducing myself and the context of my research, I would also like to say a few words about one thing that is very important to me, just to underscore how cautious we should be when we talk about prices and figures in the art market. I'm not talking about auctions, I'm really talking about private transactions here, the ones that are developed by galleries either in their own spaces or in their booths while doing art fairs. And I would like to illustrate this with works of art.

This is a painting by Paul Gauguin, maybe you remember this one which was sold in 2015. It bears two names, one is in Tahitian and the other one is in French, *Quand te marieras-tu ?*, 'When Will You Marry?' At the time when the painting was sold, it was sold in a private transaction to the Qatar Museums for the sum of 300 million dollars, and everyone commented that this was the highest price ever paid for a work of art. But things were a bit more complex. Was it *really* sold for 300 million dollars? Not quite. Maybe you remember Simon de Pury, the former auctioneer who became an art advisor and now intervenes in private transactions. At the time, he was the intermediary in this sale, and he was supposed to receive a 10-million-dollar commission, but then the seller did not want to pay the commission, so Simon de Pury had to go to court in Switzerland years after it had been made public in the press everywhere that the work had been sold for 300 million dollars. Then it was made public, while there was this legal case, that the painting had been sold for 210 million dollars "only", so the previous price that everyone had taken for

granted was nearly 50% than the real one. And as this court case came several years later than the sale, most people did not make the connection with the improper information that was given by the press at the time. So, 300 million dollars was what was announced everywhere but the real price that was really paid was 210 million dollars "only".

**“WHEN IT COMES TO PRIVATE
TRANSACTIONS, WE SHOULD ALWAYS BE
AWARE THAT IT IS TOTALLY IMPOSSIBLE TO
KNOW WHAT HAS SOLD.”**

This is a particular case and this was 2015, but you can find some equivalents with the Art Basel UBS report that is highly commented every year. People give the figures all the time, but there are some kinds of problems. I don't know if you remember that in 2017 two competing reports were published. One was published by UBS / Art Basel and the other one was published by TEFAF. And they had hired two different authors, one was the economist Clare McAndrew, and the other was written by another economist, Rachel Pownall. They both decided to publish an "estimation" (the quotation marks are important) of the art market for the year 2016, and they thought that they could include private sales and that this did not raise very serious limitations. However, their "estimations" were totally different. If I remember well, the difference was about one quarter more for the estimation offered by Clare McAndrew than the estimation offered by her colleague. Why? Because when it comes to private transactions, we should always be aware that it is totally impossible to know what really sold and for what amount.

In the previous case I commented before, the only information that we got thanks to the legal battle was not about the price that was really paid for the Gauguin painting. The legal procedure provided an additional information that the painting was *really* sold. We are all so fascinated with figures that, spontaneously, we always want to believe in these figures, even though as art market insiders we should all be conscious that it is totally impossible to know what the reality is when it comes to private transactions, we have to accept it. No serious "estimation" of private transactions has ever been published so far, the 2016 case with two competing and totally different results shows it perfectly.

I work as a journalist also and when I write reports on art fairs especially, editors in chief always ask me: "Can you add some figures about what's sold

at what price?" I am always reluctant and after refusing, I often say: "Okay, but we will print what gallerists want us to believe and we have no means to verify that this is true or not." This should be very clear. The first particular case with the Gauguin painting already showed it perfectly and this other case with two competing reports also proved that figures are totally crazy. I'm not saying that one of these "estimations" was right and the other was false, the very principle of "estimating" such an opaque market is both vain and ridiculous: you should accept that it is totally impossible to do this.

**"TODAY THE MODEL OF THE WHITE CUBE
IS STILL VERY STRONG AND PHYSICAL
SPACES ARE ALWAYS BIGGER, ALWAYS MORE
SPECTACULAR."**

I would also like to illustrate this with a more recent case. Look at this: this is some duct tape! OK, some of you can already guess where I want to go with this, and... this is a banana! What do you get if you add duct tape and a banana? A work of art! [laughter] So this is, of course, Maurizio Cattelan's *Comedian*, that is the name of the work, and once again, a very serious source of information, Artnet News, let us know at the time, along with many other very serious sources of information, that it had sold for 120 thousand dollars when it was presented at Art Basel Miami Beach in December 2019. And there again, there was a case: it went to court because an American artist called Joe Morford complained that Maurizio Cattelan had copied a work he created years before. And when it went to court, it was made public that the average price that was paid for every edition of the work was not 120 thousand dollars at all: it was "only" 80 thousand dollars. Still, at the time it was sold, in the press, nobody questioned that this price could be only a required price, but that transactions could be totally different.

Now, after this rather long foreword – but you will see later that it really was necessary to warn you on the vanity of the "estimation" of private transactions that remain secretive most of the time - I'm really going to talk about contemporary art galleries and the recent changes and new perspectives for them. But first, I want to develop the point of space and territory, because there is an apparent paradox that I find sociologically interesting. Today, when it comes to contemporary art and to galleries, all galleries have their own websites, so you could believe that the activity could be totally de-territorialised, that you can just present the works through the internet, you can present your roster through the internet. And so one could naively believe

that you can have any kind of space or not have any space at all and that this would not be an issue. But not at all! Today the model of the white cube is still very strong and physical spaces are very important. Their location, their physical address is also essential. These spaces are always bigger, always more spectacular. This really is a very general tendency.

**"WHY IS THE PHYSICAL SPACE SO IMPORTANT,
EVEN TODAY IN THE INTERNET ERA? BECAUSE
THERE IS ALWAYS MORE COMPETITION."**

I would like to illustrate this with one of the international galleries we have in France, which is a rather important one. Now it has two spaces in Paris, one in Belgium in Brussels and also one in New York City, that recently opened. The photograph that I am showing here is what it looked like at the very beginning of the 1970s. Can you imagine? I love the sign, "Galerie Templon", at the top of the door. Can you see all the beautiful plants at the entrance? Ah ah. It all looked very cheap, right? Today, this would definitely not be acceptable anymore. Now I am going to show you what the façade of the very same gallery looks like today. You can turn this – the façade in the 70's - into this: the change is radical!

Recently galerie Templon totally remodelled the space, it was redesigned by Jean-Michel Wilmotte, an architect who also works with museums, and he turned the former space as it was at the beginning of the 1970s, of course, it had evolved over time of course, but the recent change is very impressive. Look at what it became. Now, it's totally, radically different. And the same gallery, they opened a second space in Paris and this is what it looks like. Also a very beautiful space. And a much bigger one. Still located in the French gallery district.

Young people in the art market, even professionals, are not always totally aware of how radically the market changed in the 1990s. Before the 1990s, the contemporary art market was very limited, there were very few galleries, money was ridiculously low compared to what it has become since that time. Now, it really is a totally different world, the art world is entirely different. What happened between the beginning of the 1970s and today, the moments the previous photographs were made... really, the 1990s totally changed the scale of the art market. Even if we cannot know it and even estimate it precisely or even loosely, it is perfectly clear that it became much more consequent.

So why is the physical space so important, even today in the internet era? Because there is always more competition, and I will develop this point somewhat later. Because artists are very demanding, they want to present their works in the best conditions, and if you want to make sure that some competitors will not catch your artists and deprive you of them, you have to always offer them better conditions. Artists are very demanding, and this I will also develop later. Also because collectors want to meet physically most of the time in real life, galleries have to expand, to open always bigger and more beautiful spaces, that can sometimes even be evocative of museums.

**“IN PRIVATE, MOST GALLERISTS ADMIT IT’S
VERY DIFFICULT TO SELL ON THE PRIMARY
MARKET IF YOU ONLY DO IT ONLINE.”**

So why is the physical space so important? There is also a general contradiction between what gallerists tend to say in public. They nearly always say: “Oh, even on the primary market, we sell so much online,” because they want to look very audacious and daring and future-oriented. But when you are real friends with them and they tell you the truth, they admit it’s very difficult to sell on the primary market if you only do it online. In France, we had a very good example when the COVID pandemic broke out and the general body that represents the activity of gallerists in the country, CPGA, complained because bookshops were open in France but galleries were not allowed to stay open, and they wrote some very revealing press release in which they stated: “It’s nearly impossible to sell if you don’t meet physically with the collectors and if you don’t present the works in their materiality.” The discourse then was totally different. And I totally agree with this.

It is also essential to choose not only the right city but also the right location in that city: this is sometimes questioned by some people, but I believe that this is also an illusion and this remains highly important. For instance in Germany, after the reunification, many galleries moved from the Ruhr region to Berlin. Berlin became the place to be to open a space. Sometimes it is not super important commercially but you have to be in Berlin, or it is better to be in Berlin if you are a German gallery. Quite recently also, many galleries have found the necessity to open spaces in Paris— I will develop this again tomorrow morning and this is notably connected to Brexit, but not only—especially such big names as David Zwirner, Lévy Gorvy or LGDR, Galleria Continua, which was already installed in France but far away from Paris. The latter decided to open also a very big space in Paris and soon Hauser & Wirth will do too. But you also

have many other small galleries or medium-sized galleries that already existed abroad that have recently decided to open other spaces in Paris.

Another thing is choosing the right location in the right city. You have a website, okay, but you need to have your own space and you cannot open anywhere. It is very determined by the social quality of the space and by the social identity of the space inside the cities. Of course, the best example is New York City and the Chelsea District, because Chelsea is where the power is today, and if you are a very important gallery this is where you will compete most of the time. There are some exceptions, but this is generally where you will rival with your direct competitors. Today in New York City you really only have three dynamic districts for very international mega galleries. The main district is still Chelsea, then you have the Upper East Side, which is mostly for second spaces, and the other district that is really booming at the moment is Tribeca. People used to believe in Queens or in the Lower East Side but this is mostly over. I am generalising a bit but I think this really is the general idea. You have to find the right location, but you also have to find it at the right time and this also is super important because cities and their districts evolve over time.

**“YOU HAVE A WEBSITE, OKAY, BUT YOU
NEED TO HAVE YOUR OWN SPACE AND YOU
CANNOT OPEN ANYWHERE.”**

We all know of the case of Gagosian opening his mega space on West 24th Street in 1999: it totally changed what contemporary art became after this, because Gagosian was offering his artists a space that had proper museum-like qualities, so it really was a radical innovation. And for very many years, Gagosian remained unrivalled. But then, other galleries understood that if they wanted to compete with Gagosian they had no choice: they had to also open one of these very big spaces, because otherwise, they had no chance of attracting the important artists, especially star artists, the ones every gallery wants to represent. What always amuses me is that many people today forget that already in 1986, Gagosian had come to Chelsea. But at the time, Gagosian 1986 wasn’t Gagosian 2022. He was not such a heavy weight, although he was already a very significant gallerist. But moving to Chelsea then was too early and it was a big flop. Gagosian had no choice, he had to close his Chelsea space until he came back 13 years later. This time, it was a big success, because this time was the right time. I would like to quote two excellent sociologist colleagues of mine, David Halle and Elisabeth Tiso—some of you might want to know more about this and the concept of “right turn” which is developed in

their book, which is called *New York's New Edge*. You have to be at the right place but you have to be there at the right time, otherwise it won't work.

Now, let's talk about art fairs as their territorial dimension is interesting too. There are literally hundreds of art fairs in the world today and of course, they all pretend to be international while they are not really all that international. So I wanted to question this and I did research on data dealing with gallery participation in the year 2008, on what it was like for an international gallery to participate in art fairs in 2008. At the time, I could identify 42 truly international art fairs. After I started with a very vast list, I decided I would only focus on art fairs that have very different nationalities of participating galleries and not only two, because then they would be more or less regional, as we say in the contemporary art world, meaning two neighbouring countries. I really wanted to have at least three countries being represented enough, this is how I finally got a much shorter list of 42 art fairs only.

**“YOU HAVE TO BE AT THE RIGHT PLACE BUT
YOU HAVE TO BE THERE AT THE RIGHT TIME;
OTHERWISE IT WON'T WORK.”**

I am sure especially young people in this room will be a bit puzzled with what I am going to present now, but while it may sound very strange, I promise it's true. At the time, in 2008, most international galleries participated in a very low number of art fairs compared to today, and this number for international galleries, even big names, was around three or five, not in the Middle Ages, in 2008, three or five art fairs per year only! And the absolute champion for gallery participation at art fairs, I'm sure you will never guess which one it was, was... Galerie Krinzinger, an Austrian gallery. The reason is rather simple: they had no choice as the Austrian market is too small to develop very significant sales. This is what also pushed Thaddaeus Ropac to develop most of his activity abroad, opening spaces in other cities, because Salzburg especially is not super dynamic, except during its music festival.

So the absolute champion worldwide was Krinzinger, and at the time, Krinzinger participated in 12 art fairs in a year, and people were totally amazed: “Wow! 12 art fairs a year!” And the second most active gallery in art fairs was a gallery that does not exist anymore, which was Galerie Yvon Lambert, a French one. They participated in nine art fairs. And people thought: “Wow! How can you participate in 9 or 12 art fairs a year?” At the time, less than 15 years ago, it looked like it was something really extreme. Today many international

galleries will participate in 10 to 12 art fairs annually, this really has become the norm. But figures can be MUCH higher. For instance, I checked for Galleria Continua, it reaches more than 20 art fairs every year. Can you imagine the change, jumping from a maximum of 12 to more than 20? And Continua is no exception, you will find a significant number of other galleries participating in more than 20 art fairs a year. This is also why it is so important for galleries to have their own physical space, because when they apply for art fairs, they're judged on their spaces and the space has to meet some standards, which become more demanding these days. So you have to make all the necessary investments so that the gallery looks really good.

**“THERE ARE LITERALLY HUNDREDS OF ART
FAIRS IN THE WORLD TODAY. OF COURSE,
THEY ALL PRETEND TO BE INTERNATIONAL
BUT ARE NOT REALLY ALL THAT
INTERNATIONAL.”**

During the COVID pandemic, some people said that art fairs would decline. I never thought so, because art fairs are important in order to meet new potential clients and also to socialise with your “friends”, as gallerists tend to call their clients or collectors—you never say “clients” normally. Several gallerists told me in private conversations, especially after they drink, when we meet at cocktail receptions, which made them more trustworthy, that they can make as much as 50% or 70% of their sales every year doing art fairs. So art fairs are really central today in the business model of galleries. But this was not the case at the beginning of the century or the millennium.

There also are recent shifts in the geography of art fairs, but what really struck me is how quickly the galleries moved from Art Basel Hong Kong to Frieze Seoul in just one year. When Frieze Seoul opened in September 2022, gallerists understood that Hong Kong was very threatened, and Seoul really seems to be the new place to be. When you see that such an important gallery as Thaddaeus Ropac decides to open a space in Seoul—believe me, this guy is super smart, if he decides to do this, he knows that Seoul will boom. I wouldn't like to be Marc Spiegler today and have to cope with the potential or likely decline of Art Basel Hong Kong, because many galleries probably won't want to participate in Art Basel Hong Kong anymore. But the fair, MCH group that owns it, will have to sell the booths, so maybe there could come a moment when they will have to close Art Basel Hong Kong, not immediately but it is

a possibility in the future if too many booths remain unsold or if the general quality of the participants decline.

Most of you also know that FIAC was recently replaced by Paris+—of course, the name is ridiculous, Paris+ par Art Basel, but this is Art Basel anyway, so MCH group— And this is a very important point for Paris. So the geography is shifting and evolving quite quickly.

However, the most radical change in gallery activity that is also likely to accentuate is a very strong increase in the capitalistic intensity of the gallery model. Twenty years ago, you could just open a space, you had to find the right location but it wasn't very demanding, you didn't have to make high investments and people would accept that you ran a contemporary art gallery if you had the right programming. That's not really possible anymore. Now you have to invest always more money in the activity. The traditional model of the gallery is dead, it does not exist anymore.

**“THERE ARE RECENT SHIFTS IN THE
GEOGRAPHY OF ART FAIRS. WHAT REALLY
STRUCK ME IS HOW QUICKLY THE GALLERIES
MOVED FROM ART BASEL HONG KONG TO
FRIEZE SEOUL IN JUST ONE YEAR.”**

all really changed with Gagosian, as I said, at the very end of the 20th century, with the opening his West 24th Street space, something which had never been seen before. I remember when I first saw the place in 2000, I could not help comparing it with a small museum. And at the time, there was absolutely no equivalent gallery space in the entire world. Gagosian was also the one who really introduced the present model of international development, he was a real innovator. Today, Gagosian has 18 different galleries in the world, which is totally crazy. He was unrivalled for many years but then some galleries tried to copy the model that he developed, like Hauser & Wirth, who are also very smart. They try to offer the artists the most spectacular spaces in order to present their works, such as their space in Los Angeles for instance, but also their Chelsea gallery in New York City. David Zwirner has two spectacular buildings there too. And you also have other galleries like Thaddaeus Ropac who has a huge gallery in Pantin, in the suburbs of Paris, also White Cube in London, Sprüth Magers in Berlin have a very beautiful space too. This is also very important and now you have all these galleries, especially the ones I

mentioned before, that can really compete with Gagosian because they have developed the right spaces.

If you go to Chelsea in New York City, what I really love is that all these prominent gallerists who all are men and are all installed in Chelsea all want to control their own street. So they are all installed close to the others but they control their own street for their main gallery, even those who have several buildings in Chelsea. They show their big muscles like: “This is my street and don't you dare open a mega space in my street! I control it!”, and people accept it. The main difference is between Gagosian developing his structures horizontally and the other three main galleries in the district, Hauser & Wirth, David Zwirner and Pace, who developed vertically. Ten years ago, multiple floor buildings did not exist for galleries, it introduced a radical change. And when somebody begins developing such work instruments, you have no choice. If you want to stay in the game, you have to make the investments too.

**“NOW YOU HAVE TO INVEST ALWAYS
MORE MONEY IN THE ACTIVITY. THE
TRADITIONAL MODEL OF THE GALLERY
IS DEAD.”**

Capitalist intensity always increases and gallerists have to compete more and they compete for collectors, although collectors are rather secondary. What is really at stake today is catching the best artists. If you have the best artists, the most desired artists, the collectors will follow. And what is really very striking for instance, it is probably more visible in Europe for galleries like Thaddaeus Ropac or White Cube, when they organise their dinners, they will have Russian or German collectors travelling and begging for buying Baselitz or Anselm Kiefer, and there are real waiting lists, or even for Sean Scully. And these artists sell for over one million euros or dollars—when you reach these prices, the currency does not really matter—1.2 million or 1.5 million. So these leading galleries can really attract these super important international collectors because they have the right artists. Still, when contemporary art emerged as a new art category in the 1970s, artists were more or less substitutable, there was not that much money at stake and singular individualities were not built yet, they were built later over long time. Today, when an artist quits one gallery for another, it really gets commented, just like in football, because we know that the financial implications may be huge.

So now the present model really is “grow or go”, and I often say that a gallery’s activity, especially for high-end galleries and mega galleries, is a bit like a poker game. If somebody puts a high sum of money on the table and you want to stay into the game, you have no choice, you have to also put as much money or even a bit more if you want to continue playing the game. This was already a problem when a famous French gallery closed even before all this accelerated considerably in recent years, Galerie Jérôme de Noirmont. That was already quite a long time ago. This gallery represented artists such as Jeff Koons or Shirin Neshat, very significant names. When the gallery closed at the time, the gallerist explained that, if he wanted to stay into the game, he and his wife had no choice, they had to make very big investments, and they didn’t feel like it. But more recently, this also happened to Metro Pictures, it was such a surprise when they decided to close. There were other reasons, of course, but one of the reasons was that if they wanted to stay into the game, they had to make huge investments.

“THIS ALSO EXPLAINS WHY SOME GALLERIES TODAY TEND TO MERGE.”

This recent need of much capital is also something that explains why some galleries today tend to merge. This was already the case for Gavin Brown’s Enterprise, a case that maybe you remember. He made a bad bet because he decided to open a gallery in Harlem and had very few collectors coming to his space. So he was very dependent on art fairs to make sales, and during the break of the COVID pandemic, the gallery couldn’t survive. But he had a colleague, Barbara Gladstone, who had excellent spaces in Chelsea and so he was integrated. They don’t present it that way, but Gavin Brown became a collaborator of Barbara Gladstone’s and he brought with him the best artists in his roster. So immediately, the new gallery, still called Barbara Gladstone, became much more prominent by integrating part of the Gavin Brown’s Enterprise. And in France, it was just announced a few days ago that two rather small galleries, Galerie Jocelyn Wolff and Galerie Samy Abraham, decided to merge. So this is also a tendency that will probably increase. We always have this model of fringe oligopoly where small structures will start developing the market for artists and, very quickly, the big structures will integrate the artists that were initially promoted by small galleries. The most difficult position in the system is that of medium-sized galleries. It is quite challenging for them to find a space in this market, because they have to make significant investments and do not often represent many artists with high prices.

I would like to finish talking about NFTs. I was really happy this morning to hear Dame Julia when she mentioned—she didn’t frame it exactly that way but I think that we share rather similar approaches—: if you want to talk of a proper market for NFTs as works of art, this would mean you have 3 things: you have a supply, you have a demand and you have... art. The real question is: is it really *art*? Where are we now? We have to accept the fact that the works that make the highest prices today (and, as a matter of fact, that made much higher prices in the recent past years) are different. Yes, let’s say that are different, not to be too harsh... I mean they either are no art at all or they are a different kind of art, to say the least. All the NFT’s that reached the highest prices were not created by people who are identified as proper artists, who showed in leading institutions or galleries. They are outsiders to the contemporary art world.

“IS THIS ART? THIS REALLY IS A QUESTION. I’M NOT SURE THAT THIS WORK MAKES A CONSENSUS.”

Of course, all of you can recognise Beeple and his (in)famous work *Everydays: the first 5000 Days*. When we had a round table on NFTs here at Talking Galleries, I really found it interesting that some speakers defined this as art and others defined it as... collectibles. But collectibles for 70 million dollars, that really makes A LOT of money. I decided to make a close-up on some of the images of this work that is the most expensive NFT work by far, and as I can really be super naughty, I even decided to make several close ups. So this what you see if you zoom on this work by Beeple. But you also find some super high prices for Bored Apes and CryptoPunks. A question that should really be faced is: is this art? This really is a question. I could make some developments with Arthur Danto or Howard S. Becker, a philosopher and a sociologist of art: what is normally at stake is making some kind of consensus in the art world and in the art community. I’m not sure that this work, for instance, makes a consensus and that many experts or even just proper insiders in the contemporary art world would hold it as art.

I would like to finish on this very last slide, I inserted a picture of myself when I was in my early 20s. I belong to a generation in France, I was still studying in university when PCs—this is what PCs looked like when they were first introduced, I’m not kidding at all—personal computers were introduced everywhere in the world, at the very beginning of the 1980s. When personal computers were introduced, for a period of about ten years, we knew that the

technology was fantastic, and we knew that it would become something big, but we didn't really know what would occur. I was a student in university and we were meant to familiarise with these new tools, we took classes and it was obligatory for everyone to... learn the basics of coding! People were convinced if you wanted to help students to become real professionals someday, they had to learn the basics of coding, which was a nightmare for most students. I didn't understand anything, and moreover, there were different languages, nobody knew which one or ones would become the standard. I panicked all the time, I was studying in tow of the best universities in France simultaneously, and we learnt... different languages of coding! On the opposite, we were not told anything about Office: Word, PowerPoint and Excel, nobody had understood that this was what was to become essential for most people, not coding! Today, you don't even have to familiarise the students with these softwares because now when you think of PCs, what is necessary is being at ease with these three tools... and you don't need coding. Coding has become a specialised activity. But at the time, when I was a student, people were convinced that the future of personal computers was associated with coding!

“I DON'T WANT TO SAY THAT NFTS WILL NEVER HAVE TO DO WITH ART. STILL, AT THE MOMENT, WE HAVE TO BE CAUTIOUS AND NOT BE ARROGANT.”

Quite the same with the internet: when the internet emerged, at the time, nobody could guess that it would become so important, we had absolutely no idea. We could maybe think or believe that the internet would replace mail but not really phone calls. But it even took time before we could consider that postal mail would radically decrease. Why? Because in France, for instance, there was only one internet access provider and very often it wouldn't work for five or six successive days. If you wanted to send a document; you would fax it. But it was impossible to imagine that technology would be so trustworthy someday that we would use the internet for sending (e)mails. And there were no search engines, of course the introduction of search engines totally changed the use we can make of the internet, especially Google. Before Google existed and search engines were introduced, we could never imagine we could use the internet the way we use it today.

This is why I would like to finish on this general idea about the perspectives surrounding NFTs. I don't want to say that NFTs will never have to do with art, still, I think that at the moment, we have to be somewhat cautious and not

be arrogant. NFTs only emerged in 2016–2017 and immediately, some people decided that NFTs were meant for art. When a new technology emerges, there is always, when it is such a radical change, a period of uncertainty before society knows *how* the new technology will really be used. And maybe other later technical evolutions will make it possible to use it in a certain way or not. So I would like to moderate the enthusiasm, and once again, as Dame Julia this morning said: “No, we don't sell NFTs, we have no interest in NFTs. We sell... art.” Maybe it will be something good in the future, but I think at the moment, if you seriously consider the creators of NFTs like Bored Apes, CryptoPunks and the works by Beeple, of course there are other artists, but even these very recognised artists, they are not the ones who make all the highest prices with their own NFTs. Beeple emerged out of nowhere, out of the blue, we had never heard about him and, still, immediately, some people decided that it was worth nearly 70 million dollars. So, I think that it's a bit too early to know what use can really be made of NFT's (maybe they will be used as property certificates and not works, that's different), and we have to watch closely what may happen. But let's not be too arrogant and not believe that we know that NFTs are art, which they are not, or that they will be art in the near future. They may be but... let's wait and see.

Contributions and questions (c/q) from the audience

Farah Nayeri (F. N.) That was an excellent presentation, thank you very much. I just wanted to ask you Alain, because a lot of us sometimes in the newspapers, in the auction world, we read about the art market bubble, the bubble, the bubble. And as somebody said, there is a bubble at the very top of blue-chip artists, the big names, but for the rest of the art market, there really isn't a bubble. And I just wanted you to address the fact that the bubble really concerns a small cluster of people like Jeff Koons, etc. How is the rest of the art market? The small and mid-sized galleries. Because there's a crisis going on there, maybe some people in the room can tell us more.

A. Q. Thank you, Farah. I think that even at the top, you have different types of artists, some artists who overproduced and probably Jeff Koons is one of these cases, Murakami probably produced a lot too. And then, you have other artists who are more reasonable, like Georg Baselitz or even Anselm Kiefer, and I know that in their cases, their galleries have to control the demand. I know some collectors, certain couples—as I told you, I socialise a lot with people who are well off—, who sometimes want to buy two works by Anselm

Kiefer at White Cube or Gagosian or Thaddaeus Ropac, and their sellers say: “No, it’s not one per person, it’s one per couple.” The demand is such a high demand that these galleries have to restrain the collectors. I think for these artists, these super rich people will always be super rich and all these values are solid. But for some other artists, they’re almost speculative. Even some of these leading galleries tend to promote young artists and make their prices increase very, even too quickly, which I think is a bit dangerous. And then you have all these artists whose prices are very uncertain because you don’t know if they will remain in the long run and sometimes, the prices are totally insane.

“SOME GALLERIES WANT TO MAKE MONEY IN THE SHORT TERM, WHICH IN THE ART MARKET IS ALWAYS VERY DANGEROUS.”

So I think that, at the moment, the artists who are the most at risk are especially the ones who overproduced and the young ones whose prices rose too quickly, because you need time to make sure that the value will get somewhat stabilised. And sometimes, the galleries—of course, not the serious ones, the serious ones should try to control the prices and make them all increase little by little just to test the clients and just make sure that demand is strong enough—but sometimes some galleries want to make (much) money in the short term, which in the art market is always very dangerous.

F. N. Worth as an artist, having a gallery... I don’t mean to insult anyone here, but tell us why it’s still worth having a gallery.

A. Q. Well, I asked some artists and especially very important ones, very famous ones, and they always explain: “I go out, I’m attending a dinner and somebody asks me: ‘What’s your gallery?’ If I say none, I have no credit anymore.” And if you check some artists like Georg Baselitz, Anselm Kiefer or William Kentridge, all these artists who have very strong demand, they’re not stupid: if they accept to give 50%, or OK, when they are such stars, most of the time, they won’t give 50%, sometimes they will only give 30% or even sometimes 20% to their galleries on their sales, it’s because they know that their galleries really work for them! Their galleries will invest time in their careers, will use their contacts with the most important museums, with the most important contemporary art centres, with biennials in order to place them, and they will also place them in the best private collections too. So if the gallery really does its job, as an artist, it really is in your interest to collaborate with the gallery. Otherwise, all these big names that I gave, who all have

waiting lists, they could go and they would go. If you look at Damien Hirst, someone as cynical as Damien Hirst, he decided to sell directly, I think it was at Sotheby’s in 2008, and then, after a few years, he came back and decided to work with his galleries again. And it’s not stupid at all, it’s even super smart. I think if Damien Hirst decided to come back after saying goodbye, it’s because he knew precisely that he needed the galleries in order to do the job that galleries should do.

“IF DAMIEN HIRST DECIDED TO COME BACK AFTER SAYING GOODBYE, IT’S BECAUSE HE KNEW THAT HE NEEDED THE GALLERIES.”

Q1. Thank you very much, I also really enjoyed your talk. I’m Lena from Austria, I run a gallery in the countryside and it’s the main gallery there. But it’s a medium-sized or small gallery, so of course, I’m a little bit discouraged, because I’m experiencing exactly what you’re saying. I have the best artists, even country-wise, I think I have very good artists, but if I don’t grow and grow and grow and invest more... and I don’t come from a very wealthy background. So I was going to ask you for some special stories, I mean there’s always somebody who does it differently or something that hints at creativity, how to do it differently.

A. Q. You can marry a rich man or woman, or try the lottery, the lotto, these are the best two options I can suggest and normally, it helps a lot [laughter]. Now, more seriously, a solution I was suggesting previously in the talk could be merging with another structure and you keep your two spaces. This precisely was the beginning of the success story of Sprüth Magers. They did it even before it was necessary to grow, and I think this is why at the time, it had such a strong impact on their development, especially as Monika Sprüth and Philomene Magers had quite distinct lines. So when they decided to merge their forces, immediately, they became much more important players. I think if you can find partners and cooperate by organising shows, exchanging artists, opening your roster a bit and more or less merging, I think it’s a very smart strategy.

Carine Karam (C. K.) Hi, I’m Carine, global VP of sales for Artsy. You mentioned that a lot of galleries tell you that they don’t do very well with online sales. As the largest marketplace for buying and selling art online, I definitely want to challenge that and I also want to ask you: how much do you think these

galleries are adapting their business practices for online versus trying to do the same thing and put it on the internet?

A. Q. Okay, I'm just going to ask you a question and I do not know if you can answer it: do you sell big names and artists with such a strong demand as the ones I mentioned previously, Georg Baselitz and Anselm Kiefer, but I also Sean Scully. Do you sell these big names on Artsy?

C. K. Well, we broke an artist's record last year, Julie Mehretu, and sold her piece for 6.5 million dollars, *Sight Unseen*, and I'll be talking more about this kind of thing tomorrow during my talk.

A. Q. Primary market or secondary market? Was the gallery interested in the sale?

C. K. Primary market with the artist's participation, it was in an auction and it was also supporting a non-profit as well.

A. Q. So the charitable dimension of the sale probably changed the nature of the deal a bit, didn't it? I think it's rather exceptional.

C. K. But keep in mind the success, and what you're able to sell and see on the platform is a direct result of what a gallery will post. Because we are a two-sided marketplace, so the marketplace is fuelled by what the galleries are posting or thinking could be sold and all also adapting to the online user, which many galleries don't. And I think that's a huge part of what they're missing in building their online presence, and especially if they're doing it on their own and not on a large marketplace. You have to invest a lot of money if you're going to try to sell online by yourself versus being in the place where millions of people are already visiting other galleries and art fairs and so on.

A. Q. Excuse me, but I'm just being curious, if there isn't this factor of the charity, which can motivate an artist or a gallery to collaborate with you, what are your highest prices on the primary market? And can you name the artists? I think it's public, so maybe you can.

C. K. We've sold works for a few hundreds of thousands of dollars...

A. Q. You previously mentioned millions and now hundreds of thousands of dollars...

C. K. I did, yes. Again it depends on if a gallery will post a work. While we're still in a very transitional phase between traditional art market and online, if a gallery doesn't post it, we cannot sell it for you. So I think it's more a product of a gallery not posting it for a multitude of reasons, whether it's comfort, thinking it could be sold, and I think that's really what the driving force is of what ends up selling. So back to my original question: how much do you think galleries are adapting their models to the online user to actually be able to see that success?

“THESE BIG GALLERIES ARE A BIT RELUCTANT TO COLLABORATE WITH ONLINE PLATFORMS.”

A. Q. I think it's a bit difficult to sell works of art this way, especially unique ones (not multiples) and on the primary market, because very often, most buyers on the primary market will want to see the work. And the private relationship, the human relationship, is also very important to buyers, especially to very important buyers. They want to socialise, they want to be integrated into some kind of social life and to the life and experience of the gallery, they want to become part of the gallerists' "family", you know? I think this is one thing that is absent or that is difficult to create online. But I think platforms should try to also develop direct links to potential buyers, to organise activities where people can meet in real life. Sometimes, I believe the distinction between the two networks, physical and online, is a bit too strong, and I think in the case of Artsy for instance, Artsy should invite its buyers to meet physically, to organise regular dinners, cocktail parties. I'm sure some people don't want to mix and socialise, but I think others would be very demanding. If online platforms want to develop and increase the prices, I think this could be an option, but at the moment, I know that big galleries are a bit reluctant to collaborate with online platforms.

C. K. We do have very good parties, for the record. We'll invite you the next time. [laughter]

Q2. You've talked a lot about growth and investment and your career spans decades. What do you think in terms of the current headwinds and do you have any experience in periods of recession and contraction in the global economy of how to take that message for galleries and how they can also protect themselves, for younger galleries, in the face of higher interest rates and potentially much lower growth?

A. Q. That's a very good question. As I mentioned before, I was trained as a sociologist but also as an economist. There's something which is totally incredible, a fabulous advantage for the contemporary arts sector: people always want more contemporary art. Traditionally, when there was a financial or an economic crisis, after a short time—there's always some kind of delay—, the art market would also collapse. But this did not happen recently because there's always more demand for contemporary art and it tends to compensate general economic cycles. Sometimes it's really pathetic to see the prices that are reached today by traditional, conventional or ancient art compared to contemporary art. But at the moment, the contemporary art market is never really threatened or is not threatened anymore by general economic recession, because there's always more appetite for contemporary art. I think this really has to do with the society we live in. Contemporary art has changed over time and today, people find it easier to access contemporary art than to access ancient art or even modern art. So today, even if the economy is slowing down and if there is some kind of recession, the art market is not that affected.

**“THE ART MARKET IS NOT THREATENED
ANYMORE BY ECONOMIC RECESSION,
BECAUSE THERE'S ALWAYS MORE APPETITE
FOR CONTEMPORARY ART.”**

Q2. Do you believe that's true across the entire market and that is going to be the case with emerging mid-career artists as well or just the top blue-chip artists?

A. Q. I think it's even stronger at the top of the market because the super rich are always richer, so for them, it's super simple. They keep buying. But for the rest of the market, I think it's less significant, but it's also a rather global tendency. I think people in this room can be confident about the future because there is such a strong tendency for the development of the contemporary art market that normally, it resists and this is even true for the mid-market. Of course, when it comes to cheap artworks it's not really an issue. It seems that only extremely severe economic crises can affect the contemporary art market today, not more ordinary ones.

Alex Mor (A. M.) My name is Alex Mor, I'm from Mor Charpentier gallery in Paris and Bogota and I'm just following on a bit from what the first lady asked from *The New York Times*. There's a lot of my colleagues here from mid-sized galleries, as I could be. We do art fairs everywhere in the world and I

have the impression from your very interesting presentation that something that happens very often is that when you read the news the day after, as any fair in the world, it's always strong sales, six figure sales, amazing sales, everything broke everything. But when you are inside the fair and you talk to your colleagues from mid-sized or smaller galleries, that's not true. A lot of the information is always biased by the results of a very small amount of galleries and a very small amount of artists that are not asked, because we want to keep the status quo that everything is fine. And even though I enjoyed a lot this presentation, I think that all the examples come from the same side, and I think that it's important to see that other people have other systems. And other galleries have other ways of working that don't depend on these really high-end powerful galleries. It's important to keep that in mind and to give a chance to those galleries to really say what's going on. Again, it's okay, we're doing well, it's not that we're struggling, but I think this bias, and I totally agree that the question you were asking is very dangerous because it's giving a wrong image of what's really going on. Baselitz's prices are always going to be up and we all want Baselitz, that's fine. But there are other artists that need to be challenged, that need to be heard, and other systems and other galleries that also need to be heard and it would be great in spaces like this one to give them the chance to talk about it.

**“LIKE ANY MARKET, THE ART MARKET IS
BASED ON TRUST. IF YOU DON'T BELIEVE THAT
IT WILL DEVELOP, YOU PROBABLY WON'T BUY.”**

A. Q. I totally agree with your remark when you mentioned the press releases that always follow the closing of an art fair: all gallerists feel forced to say that sales went so well, because they know that if they didn't say so, in the next edition of the art fair, they would probably be blacklisted. The art market is a market just like any other market: it is based on trust. If you don't believe that the market will develop, you probably won't buy because you know that it's better to wait and buy at a lower price. I find it super funny when the prices are slowing down or decreasing, which is not the case anymore because even in this context, galleries say that as prices are going down, it is the right moment to buy, buy, buy. And when the prices are going up, they say that prices will be higher in a few months so... buy, buy, buy. Whatever the tendency is, as a collector, you should always buy, at least if you listen to gallerists!

However, I would modulate what you said about mid-sized galleries that are different from these mega galleries, the ones that I mostly mentioned. You are

absolutely right about Anselm Kiefer or Georg Baselitz, because they are such strong artists and are represented by some of the biggest and most powerful galleries in the world today. But the art world is an ecosystem and if you are a mid-sized gallery, you have to cope with these big competitors who can always steal your most promising and best artists. I think in your case, and this is also an answer I could have given you before, one of your strengths is that you specialise in a certain type of artists, especially Latin American artists. It can be an advantage, you have to adopt and present a strong identity and a line which makes it less likely that your artists will leave you for these super powerful competitors who can offer them access to the best exhibitions in the best museums and also the best collectors, the best collections. So if you develop a line which becomes strong and with which the artists will want to be associated, it partly protects you somewhat. But if Thaddaeus Ropac or Larry Gagosian comes and says to one of your artists. "I want to work with you," it remains very difficult for the artist to say no.

A. M. The problem is that there are very few journalists and very few people who dig to understand how that works, and it's always the same examples again and again and again. It makes me nuts because when you read all these reports always covering amazing sales and then you talk to all your colleagues who were around, it's wrong. Most of the time, all this information is wrong, so what I'm asking is if there's a journalist or people around to really dig and to really check so there's not only one side of the story. There are many sides and you cannot generalise only talking to the five top players because the five top players are always going to be good!

A. Q. I totally agree with you. So we can seize the occasion to finish on a consensus. Thank you.

Ilaria Bonacossa

is the Director of the National Museum of Digital Art of Milano. From 2017 to 2021 she directed Artissima International Fair of Contemporary Art. She worked in institutions such as Whitney Museum, Fondazione Sandretto, Museo Villa Croce, Antinori Art Projects, among others. In 2007 she was a member of the Jury for the Leone d'Oro of the 52nd Venice Art Biennale. She has been a member of the Technical Committee for acquisitions of FRAC Provence-Alpes Côte d'Azur; the Steering Committee of PAC Milan, and a member of the Selection Committee of the Prince Pierre Prize, Monaco.

Anika Meier

is a writer and curator specializing in digital art. She built up König Digital for KÖNIG GALERIE, worked with CIRCA on Marina Abramović's first NFT Drop, and with Herbert W. Franke on his NFT Drop Math Art on Quantum. She co-hosts the Twitter Space series "discussing art NFTs" with Micol Ap (VerticalCrypto Art). She is on the curation board of Art Blocks. Her curated exhibitions include: "In Touch. Art in the Age of Post-NFTism" (with Micol Ap); ART NFT Linz; "Tribute to Herbert W. Franke"; "The Artist Is Online," König Galerie and at König in Decentraland (2021), among others.

Jérôme Sans

is a curator, artistic director, and director of institutions known worldwide for his pioneering and transversal approach to cultural institutions and exhibitions. He co-founded the Palais de Tokyo in Paris and co-directed it for the first six years together with Nicolas Bourriaud, before becoming the director of the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art (UCCA) in Beijing from 2008 to 2012. He has curated the Taipei Biennial (2000), the Lyon Biennial (2005) and Erwin Wurm at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade (2022). He is also accompanying the development of Lago Algo, a new cultural hub in Mexico City, and Materia, a newly created platform for digital art on the blockchain, as Head of Art Strategy.

Andrew Goldstein

is the editor-in-chief of Artnet News, the world's most-read news publication covering the art world and the art market. A career cultural journalist who has spent the past decade at the vanguard of online art publishing, Andrew was previously the chief digital content officer at Artspace | Phaidon. Prior to that, he was the editor of Artinfo, building it into the most popular art news website at the time. Andrew has written about art and culture for the New York Times, New York magazine, Rolling Stone, Spin, Portfolio, Man of the World, the (pre-Trump) New York Observer, the New York Post, and other publications.

Art's New Digital Vanguard: Where We Are & Where Things Are Going

SPEAKERS

Ilaria Bonacossa, Anika Meier & Jérôme Sans

MODERATOR

Andrew Goldstein

10.00–11.30

“Art’s New Digital Vanguard: Where We Are & Where Things Are Going”

Ilaria Bonacossa National Museum of Digital Art
Anika Meier NFTs expert and curator
Jérôme Sans Materia
moderated by **Andrew Goldstein** Artnet News

Talking Galleries Barcelona Symposium



Art’s New Digital Vanguard: Where We Are & Where Things Are Going

Andrew Goldstein (A. G.) I’m very pleased to be on the stage today with this incredible trio of distinguished experts to talk about a topic that is frankly pretty perplexing. Maybe it keeps you up at night or maybe you’re totally over it by now. Or maybe, just maybe, you believe that it represents the most consequential artistic avant-garde of our lifetimes and you’re deep in Talmudic study of Twitter and Discord feeds. Of course, I’m talking about NFTs, the metaverse, AI art and everything else that can probably be best lumped under the umbrella term of art’s new digital vanguard. And I think, as we all know, NFTs had something of a jumped the shark aspect to them for a while now. We’ve seen everybody from Madonna and Anthony Hopkins to Budweiser and Starbucks jumping on the bandwagon, and now the crypto crash has given the haters plenty of ammunition to declare that the whole thing is over. But I think we all know in our heart of hearts that that’s not even remotely true. In fact, if you look beneath the surface and past the hype, you can see that there are bridges being built between the old art world and this new NFT world that are poised to dramatically shape the future of both of them. That is really what we’re going to talk about today, and if we are lucky, we might talk more about the art than the art market for a change, though no promises there.

Let’s dive in. Jérôme, you’re a museological heavyweight, I think that you might have the most experience with the traditional art world, so I want to start with you. What would you say would be your explanation of what the perspective of the traditional art world was on digital art before the pandemic back in 2019?

Jérôme Sans (J. S.) Well, I would say the art world has always been in between old and new, these factors of what is happening. So going to this old and new, I have to say I’m confused myself because I don’t know what the new thing or the old new thing really is...

[Note: Due to technical problems, fragments of the talk were lost.]

A. G. Maybe, Anika, let me put the question to you because you've been writing about this digital vanguard for a long time in your column previously. I wonder how could you describe the way that you perceived the art establishment's perspective on digital art before the pandemic?

“THERE'S A LONG HISTORY OF DIGITAL ART. AND NOW THREE LETTERS COME IN AND PEOPLE ARE SUDDENLY CONFUSED. BUT MEME, ART, GIF ART, ALL THESE THINGS, THEY HAVE A VERY LONG HISTORY.”

Anika Meier (A.M.) Yeah, I think confusion is the right word and I find it really interesting what you said, because it's been happening since more than 100 years, right? So why doesn't the art world learn from the past and seeing that whatever they start having prejudices about or hate because it's new or think it's not art, why doesn't the art learn from that and be like, okay, this is something new, let's not make the same mistake again and let's try at least to look at it with, I don't know, an open mind. But that's not happening. And I think the confusion comes in because, like you've just mentioned, there's a long history of digital art, for example, and now three letters come in, and they are N, F and T, and people are suddenly confused. But it's basically, you just said, let's not talk about the art market that much, hopefully more about the art, which would be great. But NFT is basically the art market, right? Because as soon as you mint something as an NFT, it shows up on a marketplace, so the NFT is actually, to put it simply, the digital contract, right? Without an NFT there's no market, and the other way around for digital art, and I guess that's maybe confusing because prior to someone buying a JPG for \$69 million, it was a niche.

Digital art was a niche and there are not so many people who know about the history of digital art, and sadly they see JPGs and think it's something new. But meme, art, gif art, all these things, they have a very long history. But in school and everywhere else, we learn about... and in museums, we see paintings and sculptures, but not so much digital art, and NFTs somehow are the short form of digital art, but we might speak about that later. But, yeah, I think the confusion comes because of these three letters. Maybe at some point we'll find a new term, because also, if we speak about painting, there's conceptual art, there's everything, and I think we need that for digital art and NFTs as well, categories.

A. G. We've talked about the long history of digital art that goes back, I mean, you can trace it back as far as you want, really. If you look at digital, it goes into technology, you can trace the entire history of art, essentially, into different kinds of technological solutions for applying some kind of mark on some kind of surface. But digital art per se had this great history before March 2021, and then all of a sudden, that Beeple sale at Christie's kind of changed the arc, and it kind of changed the contours of the story that we can tell about digital art. And so how did that Beeple sale at Christie's change things for you and how did it impact you personally?

“THE ART WORLD WAS SHOCKED BECAUSE NO ONE IN THE OLD ART WORLD, COULD RELATE TO THIS PERSON.”

Ilaria Bonacossa (I. B.) Well, personally, I read it in the news and I was surprised. It was the first time that an artist I'd never heard of was making so much money, and I think it's an interesting story to tell. I mean, now I have a new job, I'll be opening the first National Museum of Digital Art, but I don't have a history in digital per se. Even if, like you were saying, Nam June Paik maybe it's electronic art, and that is part of the history I can relate to, but I've always worked with young artists, so we were talking about embracing new things that are happening. But I think reading what happened then, first we have to remember it was 69 million in crypto, it's not exactly the same as saying 69 million in dollars because obviously it was crypto.

The art world was shocked. Was it shocked because of the price? Not really, high prices have been coming in. It was shocked because no one in the art world, the old art world, could relate to this person and this person was functioning in a world they were not relating to. So was it shocked because you were buying a string of code? Not really. People have been buying Tino Sehgal, where you don't even get a contract, it's an oral transaction. So the art world is ready for crazy forms of contract binding and conceptual art has gone all the way to buying an idea. I think what shocked the art world was that it was taking the power out of the hands and it was showing in a very clear way the idea of this intermediation, which happened in many markets, the music market, the fashion industry and in the art world.

Yes, galleries were selling online, Artsy was active, but this idea of intermediation wasn't really happening. So I think it shocked everybody because it put on the

table the possibility of this intermediation. Then, on the other hand, it's also true, and your work is about this, that it's not some form of intermediation, call it curating, call it selection, is also necessary in this world because if not, we go back to the idea that it's just the price that sets the quality. And I mean, I think examples like Van Gogh have shown the art world that some artists die very poor, and it doesn't mean they're not important for art history.

“THE ART WORLD NEEDED A BIG SHOCK, IT WAS TIME TO HAVE CHANGES. WE ARE STILL FUNCTIONING LIKE IN THE 19TH CENTURY IN THE ART WORLD.”

A. G. I think that's a very important point about the difference between price and value, and I think we can delve into that a little bit more. But I think it's unquestionable that the Christie's sale was the greatest piece of marketing in recent art history. It was a sensational, headline-grabbing, internationally renowned event. I wonder, how do you guys understand it? How would you see the impact of that in terms of accelerating into the public discourse, this new thing called NFT?

J. S. Well, we need shock. I think the art world needed a big shock, it was time to have changes. We are still functioning like in the 19th century in the art world, as I said earlier. People are surprised when it's a moment of aggressive competition where there is no rule. It's like the hood and they are surprised that things happen. Imagine a market, since we're talking about economy, where there are no rules. Imagine the fashion industry with no rules, imagine the cinema with no rules, imagine music with no rules. It would collapse. We are the last island in the world where people are, basically, I'm checking on my shoulder, business done. It sounds like a tribal system, not a contemporary system, it's totally crazy. It's normal, the shock was something unknown, made a shock like a coup d'état, came from nowhere. Bang!

I was very happy to see the art world shaken by something they couldn't see coming, but it was coming. It could have come with anyone, any person, you could have done it yourself, anyone in the room here, with all the people around Beeple. It was not just by himself putting something on the planet and it came like this, excuse me. I lived twelve years in China, often the market is organised like that. You take an artist and everybody, all the big collectors are behind them, put a big price on the market and then this is the selling price of

this artist. It's been like that for years, the art market has been living like this, making a price and saying: "This is the price of the market." Come on, it's easy to beat the price and make something on an auction house. So for me, let's be concrete and not be naive. Beeple isn't an artist, we all know that. It was a fantastic shock for me, waking up our whole world saying: "The world doesn't function anymore the way you are. Guys, wake you up! Otherwise, you're going to miss everything in the next decade. Your entire system is collapsing."

We're entering a new way of living, a new way of behaving. Digital changed the entire system. It was already the same when my friend Nicolas and I were the first to communicate in my little country only by digital. People said we were crazy. People want to have the invitation card. We said: "We don't want this." It was 20 years ago, not yesterday. 20 years ago we started like that, they said we needed to have this invitation to go so far. We decided no, finished, gone. It was a shock for the art world at the time. Now we think it's totally stupid, it's normal, but it's like this. every decade you need to have a change. And this is a radical change we need to all have in the way we're working, including me, I'm not just the only one to be saved. This is why Nicolas is inventing his own platform. The entire system is changing right now, there is a lot of signs globally, if you look properly, that we are all changing. Of course, NFT looks like UFO, it's scary, three letters like this.

“LET'S BE CONCRETE AND NOT BE NAIVE. BEEPLE ISN'T AN ARTIST, WE ALL KNOW THAT.”

I. B. Quite scary, but also very seductive. It's the first time you have friends who call you and say: "Maybe I should buy an NFT, tell me what to buy." And these are people who have never been in a contemporary gallery.

J. S. I was in Los Angeles a few months ago and a young twelve-year-old guy was proudly coming to me with his computer and saying: "I'm a collector, I have 100 pieces in my collection." And it was 100 pieces of crap that he bought for nothing, and he said: "I'm a collector." So you see, everything is changing, and I found it quite amazing and interesting, even though what he was showing me was nothing, but I found that attitude very interesting, the way to function was totally different.

A. G. I want to delve into the actual particularities of what is underneath the term NFT, but before then, there's something you said that I find interesting,

which is that you were emphasising the shock of the Beeple sale, but you were saying that the art is not really that important, that Beeple as an artist is not that significant. Anika, I put that to you, do you agree that the value of that moment was more in terms of the shock of its unexpected dollar figure? Or do you think that the art was kind of a clarion call from a new artistic sensibility that cannot be denied?

A. M. The number was good, 69 is a good number [laughs]. I found it interesting that everyone had to suddenly mention the number 69, right? Oh, by the way, I also have a collection, but now I'm scared to show it to you, because maybe you say it's all nothing. I have 500 pieces, but let's look at it later... I mean, if someone says they're an artist, they are an artist, right? So I wouldn't say he's not an artist, maybe that's another topic.

**“I GUESS THERE’S JUST A LACK OF
KNOWLEDGE IN THE NFT SPACE ABOUT
THE HISTORY OF ART, THE MARKET AND
EVERYTHING.”**

I think what's interesting is people seeing JPGs as art, because we're all on Instagram now, the art world hasn't really been on Tumblr, but people who've been on Tumblr, they know that artists have shared their work on Tumblr. So, many of the artists finally making money with NFTs, they'd been sharing their work on Tumblr, right? And that's also how Kevin McCoy and so on, they had the idea to do NFTs, because that was during the heyday of Tumblr culture and artists were sharing their work on a daily basis on there and they didn't get paid.

In the best-case scenario, a brand came up to them and said, well, do me a campaign using gifs and do this and that. So that was what they were hoping for and why they kept sharing their work. But now, if we look on a blockchain such as Tezos where the art, let's say, sometimes just costs a few cents or very few dollars, we now say: “Oh, it costs 200 Tezos”—that's just 300 and something dollars and it's expensive on the platform, right?—we say, oh, that's a high price, but suddenly it feels like I have a collection and it feels like I'm finally paying the artists. It feels like a paid Tumblr, right? And I can also curate my own taste if I want, I can somehow invest and think, well, this artist is going to make it and the value will go up.

But I think there's so many ways and markets, also for NFTs at this point, and I'm really surprised. Sometimes you sit at a dinner table after a gallery opening, I sat at a dinner table at Basel, and people sitting next to me said: “I don't find NFTs interesting, there's no good art.” And then I was like: “Oh, but how's that even possible?” And then they said: “Yeah, I was looking on OpenSea,” and then I was like: “Oh, you were looking on OpenSea. That's interesting because I mean, if you don't know what you're looking for when it comes to music on Spotify, you're lost, right?” You're on Spotify and then there's so much music, but how do you find what you like? And if you just start looking around on Spotify, you probably think music is the worst thing on the planet, because you don't like any of it. So I guess there's just a lack of knowledge in the NFT space about the history of art, the market and everything, because it's going back to what it has been before. They're working now with allow lists, which is basically a waiting list for a gallery, and all these things come back because they figured out you can't just put work there and then sell it for 69 million dollars, that's not how it's going to work. And then, yeah, both worlds need to somehow learn about the history of the other world, and I don't know if it's even important to bridge anything.

A. G. Well, let's get into that a little bit later, because that's very interesting. So, I think NFT's, as we've talked about, is a fairly janky term because it's not very specific. It really talks mainly about the blockchain as a component and it's kind of essentially like saying that something is on a web page, it's mainly just a hosting protocol. But if you're talking about NFTs, what's assumed is that it's a digital artwork, it probably has some kind of generative or maybe AI component to it, and ostensibly it might be best experienced in the metaverse. I think these are the kinds of assumptions that are embedded with it, so let's dig into these individually. When it comes to digital art, you're building this national collection of digital art that is meant to be a repository of history for the future. So where is your collection going to begin in terms of telling the history of digital art? And where would you see the vanguard of that history being expressed today?

I. B. Well, you begin where the state museum before you finishes. So there's MAXXI in Rome that has also been buying digital artwork, they have Jon Rafman and Ed Atkins in their collection, who I would consider as artists working in the digital world. But if you see what MAXXI buys, they try to buy pieces that have something physical, so like an adaption that also has strange wooden room that you're obliged to use when you show it. So where do I start? I start from files, not NFTs, but works where I'm buying a file. I'm not buying

a big box, I'm not buying a screen, I'm not buying pike, but I'm buying files. Why? I'm not going to have a budget which can catch up the whole history of digital art, so I might as well try to buy forward, not backwards. Then if you encounter collections in the country that have this type of art and they're willing to donate, it would be thrilling.

“WHEN YOU’RE SPEAKING OF NFTS AND YOU’RE A NATIONAL MUSEUM OF DIGITAL ART, A BIG ISSUE STARTS HAPPENING. THE ITALIAN NATIONAL BANK DOES NOT RECOGNISE CRYPTOCURRENCY AT THE MOMENT.”

But when you're speaking of NFTs and you're a national museum, a big issue starts happening. The Italian National Bank does not recognise cryptocurrency at the moment. Italian state museums have bank accounts in the Italian National Bank because we are owned by the state so, formally, I cannot buy NFTs at the moment, but I can get them donated in a way. So maybe you do a project with a partner who's active in that world and you give them visibility, you offer the curatorial platform and you get the NFT. But at the moment, as an Italian state museum, you can't, because yes, there are platforms that you can buy in normal currency.

In a due diligence done through the state, someone would raise their hand saying: “We have a problem.” In the same way, if anyone is aware how public collections are made, when you present a proposition of acquisition, you have to present a due diligence on why that public money is supposedly being spent in a fair way. It's very difficult at the moment to present a fair value assessment on NFTs, it's so short the market, it's so volatile that it would be very difficult to stand in front of a commission and say: “I'm sure this is a fair value.” Maybe they're getting a great deal, but how can you document it?

I think in my case, being a state museum is a bit of a problem. You have to be creative on how you can get to the vanguard. But I'm sure probably in the 70s, if you were a state museum and you were proposing to buy conceptual art, you would have the same problem. I mean, the board would say: “Are we buying a piece of paper for that amount?” So it just takes some time and a way of creative engagement so that maybe you do a show with an artist. The show is both because the museum will be physical, it won't be only virtual, so it will be physical in some way, ideally, or some form of it will be metaverse? Who knows? By 2026, maybe there'll be other forms of space and physical, and maybe that's how you find an interesting way to solve the problem.

J. S. Twenty-five years ago I was part of a national commission in France to buy a work of art. I was proposing a Pierre Huyghe video and they were all asking: “How can we conserve these kinds of pieces? It's impossible. It's a video.” The debate went on for an hour and we had to jump on the table and scream at all those people and say: “Where are you from? Do you understand in which world we are entering?” We had to fight like hell to get this piece bought Twenty-five years ago, same debate, same thing. And now they are saying how proud they are to have it. They forgot the story, and Pierre and I asked, can you sign in the paper how difficult it was to buy this piece and they said: “No, we can't. Thank you very much.”

A. G. That's why you need people willing to jump on the table in the institutions. But Anika, talking about the history of digital art, generative art has a long history, and you are just working now, you just launched this new project as a tribute to Herbert W. Franke, the digital and generative art pioneer who helped found Ars Electronica in Linz and who died earlier this year at the age of 94 or 95. So where was generative art back when he was working with it in the early days? And where is generative art today? What is the cutting edge of generative art?

A. M. He basically experienced what you experienced, right? I mean, he started in the 50s with electronic arts using technology to create art, and no one took him or them seriously. I know that he didn't jump on a table, maybe he should have. He was very humble, I met him in March through Alfred Weidinger, the museum director at Linz, Herbert was Austrian, they had to postpone his big solo show because of the pandemic and then they were really sad. And then Alfred said: “Okay, let's jump in and show him in Linz for his 95th birthday,” and I went with him there because he said I would enjoy it. I posted on my Instagram and on my Twitter and people were going crazy, and I was so surprised that people were going crazy because I told them I'm going there and everyone was just, you know, I was so surprised about the amount of messages I got. And then I was like: “Herbert, do you know that you're a legend for the people on the internet, for artists working today?”, and he was like: “Really?”, and I was like: “Yes, how about you come on Twitter and see it yourself? So I convinced him and his wife to just do it and I thought, well, nothing's going to happen, you can just read along. But then people went crazy, and it was like 10,000 followers after 48 hours. And then I said: “Okay, I'm going to stay with you now because I put you in this mess, right?”

He was super interested in NFTs because he had always been living in his time, or we would say maybe ahead of his time, because people back then didn't

understand. In 2006, he was already in the metaverse and he's also Germany's most famous science fiction writer. But it has always been difficult for him. His first publication, when I reread it after meeting him, I was like, this is crazy, this sounds like it was written in 2022, because back then he was already trying to convince people that you can make art using technology. He was fighting this fight his entire life, and then at the age of 95 people, the mainstream, suddenly caught up with him, right?

**“THROUGH HERBERT [W. FRANKE]
BEING ON TWITTER, PEOPLE REALLY
STARTED LOOKING AT THE HISTORY OF
GENERATIVE ART AND UNDERSTANDING
WHAT HAS HAPPENED. IT'S IMPORTANT
THAT MUSEUMS ALSO START SHOWING
THE PIONEERS.”**

There's an NFT platform titled Art Blocks. I was on a panel in a museum two weeks ago and asked people in the audience if they knew Art Blocks, and there were like more than 100 people from the traditional art world, and none of them knew Art Blocks, even though prior they said they collected NFTs. I think they made 40 billion or so last year in NFTs, and that's simply crazy. I'm on their curation board and the team chooses to work beforehand and there's a curation board with 35 people, and only 2% of the artists actually get through the board. So there's actually a selection process behind it. But, I mean, generative art, all of the artists, all the pioneers were being laughed at back in the day: “Nah, you can't make art with a computer. That's nonsense. It's not even art,” but it's the same story today, just that it's suddenly selling and there's a big audience for that, maybe because it's also an investment, but also because they're really learning about history.

When Herbert joined Twitter in March it was super interesting, half of the people knew him and half didn't, and they figured out that what he has been doing the past sixty years they are now trying to do these days. I was very surprised that basically sort of everything has been done, and that's why also so much of the work resembles what he'd been doing, so it's really nothing new if you start looking at the history. Through him being on Twitter, people really started looking at the history of generative art and started understanding what has happened, and I think it's really important that museums also start showing the pioneers. I mean, Lynn Hershman Leeson, I think, Nicolas,

we spoke yesterday about Lynn Hershman Leeson. She's one of the most important artists and media art and she's rarely had any solo shows and she's now 85? It's crazy.

A. G. I think in the early days of generative art, it was very much in the conceptual sphere. It was almost a little bit, like, contiguous with what John Cage was doing, using chance to have a disintermediated way of creating an artwork. Today, it's very advanced from there, it's so much more complicated, you have OpenAI's Dall-E, which is now officially available to all human beings, as I like to put it. And I think Barcelona's *La Vanguardia* newspaper, just on Sunday, had a headline emblazoned the top of its cover reading: “Will the algorithm be the artist of the future?” And there's a lot of talk about replacement, there's a lot of talk about threat, and I wonder: you work with a lot of artists who are engaged with AI art. What is their perspective on it? Are they wholeheartedly enthusiastic about their new robot friends, or are they a little bit queasy about it, exploring the potential perils? What's the perspective that the artists you work with take AI art?

**“THAT'S WHY ART WORKING WITH
TECHNOLOGY IS INTERESTING, BECAUSE
ART CHALLENGES THESE WAYS OF
USING TECHNOLOGY.”**

I. B. Well, I curated a show with Trevor Frankland, for example, and he's very critical, not of AI, but of how we take AI as an objective neutral form of collecting data and how, in a way, we have to be more conscious that all forms of data collection have a kind of political agency, like someone has decided what data is being collected. After 9/11, a lot of investment went into facial recognition from all states, but they were looking for terrorists, and people were tagging images and if you were from the Middle East, 90% of the time you got labelled a terrorist. So, is that an objective AI form of recognising people? I think we have to be a bit more careful of how we embrace AI, and that's why I think it's interesting how artists touch it, because artists don't use it to sell more shoes, but try to criticise how it's working. That said, when Amazon proposes a book, I always love them, so there are some forms of algorithms that work.

But there is an issue, in the end, when statistics was invented, to go back to the idea of the lesson of history, statistics was thought of as something objective and true and it could decide better than human beings. Now we feel that anything that comes from big data is right. So there's this idea of

where human subjectivity stands, and are we only going to go with AI, big data mainstream? And, you know, whoever's not interesting or not significant or small, we just throw them away? Maybe not, but I think that's why art working with technology is interesting, because art challenges these ways of using technology. In a way, when I think of the museum, I think the idea is we want to create digital citizens and not just digital consumers, while a lot of the exposure we get to digital is to make us buy things. It can be very sophisticated, it can be super seductive, but sometimes it could be good that we get exposed to digital to think.

“NOT EVERYONE IS ABLE TO DO SOMETHING COHERENT WITH ANY OF THESE TECHNOLOGICAL TOOLS. THE PROJECT, THE IDEA IS THE FIRST THING BEFORE THE TECHNOLOGY.”

A. G. What do you guys think when people say: “It's not ethical.” How are the artists you're working with engaging? Art Blocks is a generative platform. Jérôme, how would you say the artists you're working with are regarding this new kind of tool?

J. S. Well, it's impossible not to look at it, it's not possible. Not just the artists, all of us. We cannot be out of it, it's impossible. But to say it's an art form, I don't think so, or everything's an art form. The problem is, it's like talking about the powder to make colour, we can all have powder of colour but I will never be the best painter in the world. I will never be Anselm Kiefer, who was mentioned several times yesterday, even though I have all these palettes in front of me. So what are we talking about?

Of course, we are surrounded by thousands of sources of information today. We're not living on an island, the island is over. We all have twenty windows open, minimum, all the time in our computer, on our phone and things like this, so we are surrounded, bombarded by information. We cannot say we don't know anything. We are aware, or we should be aware of a lot of things. So this kind of things, of course, all artists have that in mind, all artists understand in which world we are, but what we're doing with this technology is something else. Not everyone is able to do something coherent with any of these technological tools. The project, the idea is the first thing before the technology, before the form you use.

For me, it's difficult to talk about generality, because what we are obsessed with as curators, what we're obsessed with, materials, for example, is to make significant projects within the space we are and with the time we are living in. If we don't match these two things, something is wrong, because you can add more pictures in the world like everybody is doing without understanding, myself included, of course, putting thousands of photos in my phone that I would never use. I'm producing ruins and producing problems, ecological problems, we're all doing that. We're all typing all the time, even though there is a lecture, everyone is looking at their phone, everybody's doing something, we're all doing that. It doesn't mean that we're all fantastic photographers, we're all the worst photographers. The same with technology, so it's not a trick to be a good artist. Not because we're advanced we're going to be the best artist, not because we're going to use the latest technology. As always, we go back to the roots: art is concept.

A. G. I think that's a very important point, and it's a tool, it's not a medium. Anika, you were working with Art Blocks, I mean, a lot of people point out certain projects like Tyler Hobbs' Fidenza as a great example of a really artistically accomplished, generative art project. What are some of these projects that you are really drawn to, that you think are significant?

A. M. Maybe that's something else than the market thinking it's really significant, because I might look at things differently as a curator. But I wanted to say something briefly about the other question, sorry. It's the same with photography, you know? At some point, only people who could afford buying a camera and who understood how to use it technically could take photos and then it became a mass medium. Same with AI now, right? So it's the same story, and also those headlines are the same, a bit repetitive. But what really works for an art audience as well, I mean, Refik Anadol, you all know him, right? He's been using AI for a very long time, and then at König Galerie, I had a position at the gallery, head of digital, and worked on the exhibition. We showed Refik Anadol last year in November and there were hundreds and hundreds of people queuing up.

J. S. First time in the gallery to have such a crowd. It's like Murakami in Japan, something crazy.

A. M. Yes, it was crazy. I was there the first day we opened and I wanted to be there, because I wanted to see it. I was like: “Johann, there's going to be a huge crowd. We need to be prepared. It's not going to be not that many people.” And it was like that for the whole time. But why was that? He creates

an experience, immersive, and you really can experience the art. It was super impressive in that big brutalist church, that's why people queued and wanted to see it. And that's maybe also the issue, right? I mean, most of the things we see on our phone, but as soon as we can experience art, and that's what being an artist means, right? Maybe you don't have to bring all digital art to a physical space, but then that's also the job of an artist, being able to work with the art they are creating and not just using prompts to create AI work. I should try that, by the way, I haven't. [laughs]

“THE METAVERSE IS VERY NEW IN A WAY, AND I THINK FOR MANY ARTISTS IT’S NOT SOPHISTICATED ENOUGH. THE EXPERIENCE IS STILL NOT READY ENOUGH, BUT IT GOES VERY FAST.”

A. G. The third component that I think is understood in the term NFT is the metaverse. It's probably one of the most talked-about parts of this digital vanguard today, in part because of our friend Mark Zuckerberg, who likes to rebrand his company Meta [laughs]. But it's also probably the least clear, it's the least clearly defined, it's the least baked. It's a very encoded kind of platform. And I wonder, maybe Ilaria, what is your perspective on the utility of the metaverse right now? How often are you running around in the metaverse?

I. B. Not enough, for sure [laughs]. I think the metaverse is very new in a way, and I think for many artists it's not sophisticated enough. I'm sure the metaverse will be a really interesting place, and the idea, it all comes from the world of gaming, so it is fascinating. It does create aggregation with people who don't know each other, are far away, it's the idea of our social way of connecting in the near future, which is very different. That said, if you look at catwalks on the metaverse, and for sure they invested intensely, for artists that's not enough, the control they want to have on their products. I think it's been used by artists when they enter the already made worlds of the metaverse and enter gaming platforms and create their work, or go to the periphery of these worlds or investigate it in a creative way. I think the experience is still not ready enough, but it goes very fast, it's a question of allowing the technology to catch up.

A lot of the museums have done it in a very boring way. It's like a 3D sketch of the museum with the little artworks and the little figures going in, and that's not really an exciting experience. The people who are in the metaverse don't go in that museum, they don't really care, because it's not offering them anything

exceptional. So, again, about this bridging, if it makes sense or not, to bridge the two worlds. I mean, some museums have even thought of entering, having a space in the platforms where people are, but still, it doesn't mean someone is interested. It's really a developing space and I think it's going to be big.

I have two daughters of 13 and 15, and, you know, that's where you really hit digital technology in the real world. My biggest enemy is TikTok at the moment, when my 13-year-old enters TikTok, she's gone. I have no way of getting in touch with her until I rip her mobile phone out of her hands. But it's fascinating, we are the generation where they said: "TV is bad, you'll watch too much TV, it's dangerous," and my kids never turn on the TV, it's an archaeological object. So, yes, these things will develop, but it's still maybe early, and in that sense the art world is coming to terms with interesting ways of using it.

A. G. My own personal experience with the metaverse in a very limited way is that it's kind of like *Myst*, that early video game where you walk around and you try to solve puzzles and it's kind of like a party with the lights turned on, it's a little bit awkward. And I always think: "Why can't they just let you steal the art?" If you could steal the art, it would be so much more fun, if you could do some kind of heist. [laughs] But Anika, you've done projects on the metaverse, and I wonder: what do you think is something that you've seen that's a really compelling use case for artists on the metaverse? Or something that's really a project that has integrity on there?

A. M. The metaverse is also not a new topic, right? I mean, Herbert W. Franke, for example, wrote novels in the 70s where he imagined a metaverse, and that's crazy, especially rereading it today. I'm like, no, no, this is not possible, he wrote it in 70 and it really reads like a Netflix series, which is crazy. So it's not a new thing, but it's an interesting project. I guess the important part is what you've just mentioned with TikTok, that it's super easy to use. You turn on your phone and you open an app and then you see what you want to see, and you can engage and you can comment, and you can be part of it and also participate, right?

Platforms such as the Decentraland, for example, it's a virtual world on the blockchain, and with König Galerie, we were the first big commercial gallery in Decentraland. Johann König and I curated the exhibition *The Artist is Online* last year in April, and it was a total coincidence, because Johann asked me already in 2019 to curate a digital art show with him which we were supposed to show in the big space in the nave of St. Agnes, and we were somehow done, most of the art had been produced and then the pandemic, boom! And then

everything digital moved online and there we were. And they were like: “OK, let’s do a painting show the year after or whenever it’s possible, and let’s do something online.” We were just perfect with the timing, with the whole thing, and everyone was like: “Oh, Johann König is just being quick again,” but we had been really working on this thing for one and a half year or longer.

“AS SOON AS IT BECOMES EASIER TO ENTER THESE VIRTUAL WORLDS, THEN PEOPLE WILL ACTUALLY DO IT.”

With Decentraland you have to be on your computer, that’s the first thing, right? You have to be on your computer, you have to create an account, you have to understand how to use it. Best case scenario, you even have a wallet. So there are so many barriers to enter the metaverse at this point in many cases. Then there’s also platforms such as Cryptovoxels and the museum in Linz, they have a physical museum location there and it’s always one of the most visited places in Cryptovoxels, because they host events, artists are there, and I think even Bleep visited once. Or what we’ve done at the gallery, and what the artist Thomas Webb is now working on independently and turning into the most interoperable metaverse at this point, it’s called the Worldwide Webb. If you want to enter it, we don’t mind you being on your phones, you don’t even need to connect your wallet. So, I guess as soon as it becomes easier to enter these virtual worlds, then people will actually do it.

We opened Thomas Webb’s solo exhibition *Exercise in Hopeless Nostalgia* on 14 August 2020 and 4,000 people came, it was online, and because he built it with the team himself, we were really scared that the service would crash if too many people came. So we were really not trying to make it big or make it that public. We had to announce that, but we were like: “Let’s play it safe,” but then 4,000 people came, and the good news was that the service didn’t crash. It worked! People really enjoyed being in this online game. Tom built a Berghain and people queued, and artists and galleries met from all over the world and just had a good time, so as soon as the meta world starts to be accessible for everyone, it will be fun and interesting. But then, as you said, only 5% of the population in Germany go to a museum, so why then suddenly would we expect people to be interested in art on the metaverse? It doesn’t make that much sense if only 5% of the people go to real museums.

J. S. Well, that’s exactly the point. I think the problem, what I see is a misunderstanding, what metaverse is or should be. For me it’s not metaverse

but what I wrote here, meta versus the real world, because people are so obsessed with what we have and keep duplicating the same. Why do above what we have below? That’s a mistake. If it’s really virtual, it should be totally virtual, totally different. I don’t need to have the same house here and upstairs. I already can’t manage the one I have downstairs, why should I have a new one upstairs? So for me it’s totally idiotic. It reminds me of the very short life of *Second Life*, that was a great idea, we all believed in it, it was a boom and then a bang. Why are we doing the same again? It’s kind of boring. We’re bored with our life here, why should we be bored with a second life over there? Why would we invent something more inspiring, more crazy, something that gives you more possibilities, opens new windows, new doors, new muscles for new things. For me, this is what metaverse is about, and most of what I’ve seen is duplication, because we are afraid of the new again. I’m waiting to see people inventing new forms, new forms of architecture, new forms of behaving, new forms of buying, shopping, living, experiencing, and maybe artists are the best to be the first to invent these new forms, possibly.

“MOST OF WHAT I’VE SEEN IN METAVERSE IS DUPLICATION. IT’S KIND OF BORING. I’M WAITING TO SEE PEOPLE INVENTING NEW FORMS.”

A. G. Or video games. I mean, video games have really led things into the future. *Fortnite* is a far more advanced version of *Second Life* that people of all generations are actually using. We talked a little bit about the bridge, of this old and new world bridging, we’ve also talked a little bit about all these strands of digital art that are percolating right now. But would we all agree that there are certain factions in the traditional art world, and let’s keep auction houses out of it, because I think they’ve been the most enthusiastic embracers of all things crypto...

J. S. Some galleries, like KÖNIG, which was one of the only one in the entire world to dedicate one section to that, because we keep talking here about mega galleries... This one had the courage, the vision, to see the present and the future. Why don’t more galleries do that?

A. G. I wonder if beyond that, certain galleries and certain museums kind of wish the whole thing would go away? [laughs]

A. M. That's what we've been asked for interviews. Johann and I were interviewed by media from all over the world and the opening coincided with the big hype and every single journalist asked Johann and myself: "When will this hype be over? When will it be over?" We were like: "Oh, wait, this has just started, so why are you asking when it'll be over? That doesn't make much sense."

**“DOES EVERYONE HAVE TO BE IN
THE METAVERSE RIGHT NOW?
PROBABLY NOT.”**

But also, like I just mentioned, we started speaking with the first blockchain startups in 2019 and I curated a museum show in Leipzig, but it really takes visionary people like museum directors such as Alfred Weidinger or Johann König, who has been interested because he always questions the traditional art market and the role of the gallery in the future. And like you've said, it won't keep on being what it is, and if you're not thinking about it at the right time, you're probably at some point left behind or don't have a business running or it's not even interesting for people. I mean, why did all the people come and queue for Refik Anadol? Because it was something new, but then also as soon as you're doing something new, then people, especially from the art world, are not your biggest supporters, because they're lagging behind. So yeah, that's just what I wanted to throw in, I mean, just be more, I don't know, visionary might be the wrong term, but maybe more...

J. S. It's a good one.

A. M. Maybe live more... I did an artist talk with Lynn Hershman Leeson and I asked her how it felt to always be ahead of her time and then she said: "No, wait, that's not the case. I've been always living in my time and all of you were lagging behind," and maybe that's also the case now. Artists working today, and maybe people like you and Nicolas, you were living in your time...

J. S. We tried.

A. M. You're trying, but the rest is not keeping up, because they're busy with other things, which is totally fine. But yeah, here we are with the gap which needs to be bridged, maybe, or not at all. I mean, does everyone have to be in the metaverse right now? Probably not, maybe it's really boring, I don't know.

A. G. I think that everybody loves the historical avant-garde. I don't think that anybody would say that Die Brücke or Fluxus or any of these historical avant-garde are dubious, but it seems that there's a lesson that's not learned, that the avant-garde is constantly evolving ahead of where the consensus is.

I. B. Yes, and then it's not that everything in the avant-garde stays in art history. I mean, it's always been, you know, like when you look at the past, it seems easy, but the truth is that it's already been distilled by time, power, whatever, and it's also been distilled wrong sometimes. Now they're all rediscovering figures that have been and this is how the history goes. But yes, that's always how it is. It's hard to have a historic perspective on the present, it takes time. And also you have artists that maybe do two great works and in those years seem amazing and then they stop, so their contribution to art history is not that big, even if those two great artworks are great artworks, but they kind of get out of the picture. So it does take the time.

**“IF AN ARTIST IS MINTING, HE DOESN'T
REALLY NEED THE GALLERY, HE NEEDS
MORE A CURATOR. GALLERIES HAVE
TO RE THINK HOW THEY FUNCTION AS
INTERMEDIARIES IN A SYSTEM WHERE
THE RULES ARE DIFFERENT.”**

But I also think, not to kind of defend galleries, but galleries respond to what artists are doing and the galleries have always been that way, so the model has to change in a way because the gallery was the intermediary selling something they believed was great. If an artist is minting, he doesn't really need the gallery, he needs more, maybe a curator. Galleries have to rethink how they function as intermediaries in a system where the rules are different, but they also follow what the artists are doing, so in a way it's about galleries studying and entering in contact with a generation that uses digital technology to make the work and for falling in love, because in the end it's never a general... I mean, I don't think galleries ever decided: "We're going to do video art," but they met one video artist they felt was significant and they wanted to show it, and they knew they were not going to sell it because at the beginning, if you were doing video art shows, it took years, it was only a few institutions and selectors...

So I think it has to get back to that relationship of a human being making creative projects and someone who's going to help them sell or find their

support, because maybe it's really going to change. It's not going to be about important artwork sold for double digits, and this digital art will be sold more like music. People who want to look at it will pay 99 cents and your gallery will be the intermediary who helps you find all the people in the world who are willing to spend a little to be able to engage in your work. I mean, we're really thinking of a transformation which is radical, so it's even strange when we try to put everything back to the old history of the important gallery with the expensive artists being sold to one single collector. That's very old. Maybe it's different.

“WE’RE IN CRYPTO WINTER, BUT I DON’T THINK ANYONE CAN THINK IT’S A DEAD END. MAYBE IT HELPS TO ACTUALLY ENGAGE WITH GREAT PROJECTS, AND IT ALSO HELPS QUALITY COME OUT!”

A. G. For galleries there's the side of what the artists are producing and what they want to support, and then there's also the side of what the collectors are interested in and who these collectors are. And I think that recently it's been impossible to avoid all the money that has been popping up in the crypto sphere. Now, of course, we're in crypto winter and everything has kind of plummeted. You can buy a Bored Ape for the highly reasonable sum of some hundred thousand dollars instead of 2 million. It's a bargain: buy your apes now! [laughs] But do you think that that plummeting of the net worth on this crypto speculator side of things, is that going to slow down the bridging of this old world or the new world? Or do you think that the velocity is already built to the point that it's going to just continue and spread and spread?

I. B. Maybe it helps, on the other hand. The hype was making people very scared who weren't comfortable, and I mean it's a winter, but it's a winter that's going to get back to the spring. I don't think anyone can think it's a dead end. It maybe gives people a little bit of time to get their bearings and kind of enter it because the speed, if you weren't knowledgeable, made it very scary. So maybe in a way it helps to actually engage with great projects and wanting to learn about the artists. Maybe it also helps quality come out! If not everything is precious, in the end, the idea of distilling quality has to stay in some form. I think that's why what Anika is doing is great, because it's not just about: “No matter what, I want to sell it as expensive as I can.”

J. S. Inevitably, as you said, after winter there is always spring and then there's summer. And as you can see on the other side of the sphere, in the traditional art world, the market didn't stop. It has never been as big as it is today. If we look back 20 years ago, 30 years ago, the market is beyond any expectation. We all forget how it was in the early 80s, the scale, the number of people. Artsy is a very good example here in the room to show how exploded it has become during the last decade. So you don't have to be a genius to understand that we will not stop, it will continue in a bigger form.

“LET’S WAIT FOR THE SECOND ROUND. REAL ARTISTS WILL COME AND PLAY. AND DO WHAT WE’RE DOING, WITH REAL FORMS OF ART.”

I was living in China for twelve years and people didn't understand what China was about at the time. They never understood it would be a bigger part of the market, a bigger player. And for other countries too, like I'm working now in Latin America. This region is waking up now as well, many new platforms are coming and joining the art market, so it will not slow down.

Even though there's a winter, we all go to ski, we're always in the cold, we take our winter coat and then wait for a better time to go outside, and take our bathing suit again and all go to the beach, and of course, the same beaches. So it's a normal process, the market will not end at all. Of course, like every new thing, there's always some fast people who will go first. At first, we're not really convinced, let's wait for the second round. For the second round, real artists will come and play and do what we're doing with real forms of art, like you will do with your museum. There's a new thing coming, you know, so let's wait for the summer, next winter, and we'll see what we can say. Let's not be giving advice too fast as always and say it's over. I will not say this, I'll leave it to other people to say that. I think the future is far bigger than what we think.

A. G. I have one more question before we proceed to the Q&A...

A. M. I'm sorry for interrupting. There's a funny saying: “The second mouse gets the cheese,” right? So the first mouse dies, the second mouse gets the cheese. I love saying that. But about the crypto winter, I mean, the interesting thing is art has never stopped selling. It's just that the NFT space is communicating on Twitter and the art world is communicating on Instagram, so there's simply a disconnect and the art world isn't seeing what's actually going on. And then

yesterday I saw numbers, trading volume on OpenSea down 97%. Yeah, great. That's all the profile picture projects, all the Apes and all these things are not trading anymore, but just because the world economy is down, it doesn't mean art is not selling, so these numbers are a bit off. But all of the really strong art projects, and also historically relevant from my perspective as a curator, they're selling out within seconds, but people are not aware of it because it's not communicating in the media. There's Artnet who are doing a fantastic job, but they also have other topics to cover so they can't cover every single NFT project. There are outlets such as Outland or Right Click Save, they cover all these projects and they're doing a fantastic job, and Alex Estorik from *Flash Art*, he is their editor in chief. If you really want to know about the space, read Artnet, and if you want to dive deeper, read Right Click Save or Outland.

“JUST BECAUSE THE WORLD ECONOMY IS DOWN, IT DOESN'T MEAN ART IS NOT SELLING. ALL OF THE REALLY STRONG ART PROJECTS, THEY'RE SELLING OUT WITHIN SECONDS.”

There's things really happening and they sell out quickly. What else do you have? Kevin Abosch has a project called Survival, everything on Tezos, FX Hash, they have a higher trading volume than Art Blocks. Generative art is doing super well and all these really strong projects sell, you have to be there when the art drops. If I'm not there, I have an issue because then I have to buy it for a higher price on the secondary market. So if you're part of the space, if you're interested in art, if you know where the artists are and if you know where to find it, nothing has changed. It's just the Bored Apes and these things are not really happening anymore, because the investors and flippers have left the space, but who's still in this space is really interested in the art.

I did a tribute for Herbert W. Franke who died on 16 July and I brought 80 artists together, pioneers and people like Arnold Zenken, the stars on Tezos, and it's simply people who are super interested and it's really selling well. So nothing has changed, you just need to know where to look for the art. And yes, summer will be even better, we hope. Let's hope we can bring the art world in, or as an artist, Rafaël Rozendaal, told me: “Are you sure we want to bring the art world in? Because everyone in crypto is so nice, everyone is helping each other, and the art world is so competitive, they're not helping each other. Are you sure?” [laughs]

J. S. It's true. It's really collaborative, which is very different from traditional art where it's a more egotistical system, so they all work together. All those people are always together inventing, including other people, other artists, within their realm and they share things together. So it's more like community, a community of people who really want a totally different system of working. I have to say it's very refreshing.

“ARE YOU SURE WE WANT TO BRING THE ART WORLD IN? BECAUSE EVERYONE IN CRYPTO IS SO NICE. AND THE ART WORLD IS SO COMPETITIVE.”

A. M. And everyone is really nice. I mean, when they speak about each other, they're so nice and helpful, so it's really a totally different world. But I also think because they are aware you can't be competitive or try to do things on your own. If you're finding out how things work, you have to exchange thoughts and ideas. So, yeah, we come together with many people once a week to discuss with others daily to speak about updates and what's going on and discussing things. I don't think it's like that in the art world, or do other gallerists call their gallerist friends and are like: “Hey, how are things going? Who's buying what? Do you know a collector who would want to buy this?” I don't think it's like that.

I. B. Some galleries do. There's also the nice part, the old art world, it's not all horrible and competitive.

A. G. The last thing I just want to put out there, because I think this is critical, is that the thing that's really been an obstacle, I think, for bridging this gap is that the prices are so out of proportion to the value. And I think that that's been very hard, because people have been looking at prices as being equivalent to value, because when you go to OpenSea, there's no other way that you can really navigate it. And people say: “Okay, this is more important than this because this costs more than this,” and that's not at all how art attains its value. Everybody knows that. The idea is hopefully that if prices go down, maybe there can be some a little bit of filtration. But let's go to the questions.

Contributions and questions (c/q) from the audience

Q1. I'm Scott, from Rise Art. First a comment on the thoughts on timing and this crypto winter. It's quite interesting right now, because since the speculators have left the space a little bit, I think artists now have a lot more space to breathe and do their projects in a way that speaks directly to collectors. So I actually think that right now some of the best projects are coming out and probably the best environment that's happening in the space. I guess the question for the panel thinking about this is the one area that I have a hard time with. We started last year, we've been really active in the space but there's always been this idea of displaying artwork. How do you think collectors in the future will actually engage with their collections a little bit more? I know people have online galleries, the metaverse and everything, but none of it really has that kind of same appeal in ways that people are able to kind of share and curate their own collections. How do you think that will evolve in the coming years?

“I'M WAITING FOR US TO SEE NEW COLLECTORS THAT WILL INVENT NEW FORMS OF COLLECTION FOR TODAY AND TOMORROW.”

J. S. Big question, and a very generic question, so it's difficult because which collectors are we talking about? Because everybody thinks they are collectors today. You have ten small drawings and you think you're a collector. So what kind of collector are you mentioning here? Are you mentioning historical collections or young collectors who just started to buy things? It's complex because, well, there is not that many collectors who have vision of why they are collecting, what they're doing with a collection, where it will go in the future. People think more like a temporary collection, but they don't think what it means in the long run, where it goes, where it's going to be afterwards. What is the meaning of that? Why do I buy this and not that? So it's complex. I would say I can't answer your question to be honest, because there are many people who are adding things, I don't call them collectors, they are adding things to their house—which is great, good, we need that and it's good for the art world, it's good for the system—but collecting for me is like curating, it's the same.

For me, I find it's good to have these people around, because they make the system still function, but they don't add anything to the system more than

just bringing money. So I'm still waiting and your question is good in the end, because I'm waiting for us to see new collectors that will invent new forms of collection for today and tomorrow, what they will do with that, how it will end in the metaverse or another form. Because what I see today, those museums or people making their collections in a digital way, it seems they have no money to build a proper building, so they do the building in digital and you have the same experience going through a bad sketch up made by a wrong architect, so it's a little sad for me. I think we are waiting for something more extravagant, more meaningful for the present and the future than just showing things in a room and in other room.

A. G. Ilaria, you're actually building a museum?

I. B. Well, on one side, I can say that when you go visit collectors that show you their NFTs on an iPad, it's kind of sad, because the truth is, it's much more interesting if they share them on a digital platform so more people can see them than just those who go to their home. And you know, if they want to show you, they can even sit you at the table and show you on their computer.

“THE BIG QUESTION IS IF YOU'RE A DIGITAL ART COLLECTOR, DO YOU WANT TO HAVE A PHYSICAL SPACE?”

The big question is if you're a digital art collector, do you want to have a physical space? It's not compulsory. If it's about how many people see it, it might be better not to have a physical space. Then if you're a museum, like in my case, the brief is that they want a physical space, so then you're really trying to engage with this idea of how physical and digital can interact. And to be honest, I think the artists are the best guides to finding ways. They've done it from the birth of electronic art all the way, and pioneers have done shows and projects and brought these worlds together, and you'll be the nasty person saying: “Yes, this can be done. No, this cannot be done.” And obviously, in Italy, we like to make things difficult, so the museum is in a building from 1925, so all the historical walls, we can't touch them, we can't make holes, etc. But on the other hand, that is challenging for artists because they live in the real world and they like to go to real places and think how their art can interact. Then maybe collectors will not want to buy in order to own and will want to buy in order to share.

Farah Nayeri (F. N.) Hi, I'm Farah Nayeri. I had a question, I think I'll put it to Ilaria because you're a curator in this space. I was really mystified to see the incredible prices that these Bored Apes were fetching at a given point. I mean, it was just climbing and climbing, and I looked at this and thought: "This is a disaster waiting to happen, because these are cartoon-like images of bored apes and how much value can they have over the long run?" It really did look very bubbly to me, that whole phenomenon, and I was not alone, obviously. And then even looking at the price that Beeple fetched, 69 million dollars for his work. What everyone thinks of Beeple, and I have respect for Beeple, but the 69 million, what do you think? We were in a kind of bubble situation, were we not? And the bubble has popped and deflated.

**“THE CRYPTOPUNKS OR BORED APES,
THAT’S A DIFFERENT VALUE SYSTEM.
IT’S JUST A HUGE COMMUNITY. IT’S
NOT JUST AN IMAGE. THAT’S REALLY
IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND.”**

I. B. I think the truth is we live in a capitalist economy, and things are worth what someone is willing to pay for them, and we can't really be moral about it. I mean, if you think what soccer players are being paid... In a sense, if a single private collector is willing to pay something because owning that object makes them happy and they have the means, then the significance to art history is a more complicated issue. And yes, it feels like it's a bubble, but to be honest, even some paintings by young artists, it feels like they're being traded at prices...

F. N. Yes, but the person paying huge amounts of money for a Bored Ape or one or more of these Bored Apes, weren't they kind of thinking that there's going to be a downward dip after? How can one buy something like that and think that the value is actually going to carry on climbing?

I. B. But it's true that if you own cryptocurrency and you had acquired it in previous years and you had enormous amounts of cryptocurrency, you couldn't buy a house with crypto, or jewellery, a girlfriend, a hotel. You have to buy NFTs. This is something that maybe doesn't get told of the story, that there was an accumulation of cryptocurrency and they could only spend it in that world. They couldn't spend it in the real world.

A. M. I guess what's really important is that there's a community around this. Same with CryptoPunks. I mean, there are people who bought them when they were super cheap, and I know a lot of people who own more than one Punk, and they would never in the world sell it for any money. It's community, that's what they believe in. I think you or Nicolas used the word *religious*. They would never sell it, and they also say it on Twitter, right? We started with 0.1 Ethereum then we saw it go up to 140 Ethereum and now it's 60 Ethereum. It's a different value system and I guess that's really important to understand.

F. N. It's like baseball cards...

A. M. Exactly. It's just what they believe in. And also with some of my NFTs, I wouldn't sell them. At some point I might consider it if I could buy a house for it, but I have offers on some NFTs and I'm like: "Okay, do I accept it now?" It's like ten thousand and I paid three, but I just really want to keep it. It's *Mutant Garden Seeder* by Harm van den Dorpel, in my opinion the most historically relevant generative art project because they are mutating on the blockchain, I don't know if you know them. *Mutant Garden Seeder* is a historically relevant work and it's really evolving on the blockchain and they are mutating. I have offers on them and I'm like: "No, I'm not selling, I want to have it." And the same with the Apes and the Punks, and it's just a huge community. I'm not part of it, but it's not just an image.

A. G. Not to be overly cynical, but I think it's the same thing with the highest prices you see for any kind of artwork at auction. Maybe the person buying it is not just stupid, maybe they have some kind of agenda, maybe there's some reason why they would like those prices to be so high.

Nicolas Bourriaud (N. B.) Just briefly, one aspect that maybe I didn't see addressed is the formal family of the artworks we're talking about. And for me, what's striking when you look at Beeple, for example—it was interesting when I met him, because obviously we're not on the same planet—but when you look at the work, for me it's like street art. Is the NFT phenomenon, so striking for the art world, just like the irruption of street art, between brackets, high art?

I. B. I saw a very good piece by an Italian artist who's mainly a researcher in AI. He's called Mauro Martino and he did this generative video where he collects all the memes with artificial intelligence and kind of place them on the screen. So at the beginning it's thousands of kittens, then it goes to CryptoPunks and it's a three screen installation. It goes crazy and it goes to all

the contemporary, and I was looking at it and I told him: “Wow, it’s crazy. This feels to me like a contemporary history of kitsch.” When pop art was born, kitsch was a big irruption. When you go on OpenSea, there’s this feeling of kitsch for someone who’s in the art world. But maybe that’s also interesting, that kitsch is taking over, or maybe it’s not interesting but it’s a mirror of how our world is developing.

“WHEN POP ART WAS BORN, KITSCH WAS A BIG IRRUPTION. WHEN YOU GO ON OPENSEA, THERE’S THIS FEELING OF KITSCH FOR SOMEONE WHO’S IN THE ART WORLD.”

N. B. The difference might be that Rosenquist or Lichtenstein knew perfectly well that they were dealing with kitsch. I’m not sure that it’s the same with most of the street artists we’re talking about.

I. B. I agree with you.

A. G. It’s very interesting, because what is street art on a canvas? Is it still street art if you put it on a canvas?

J. S. Well, we all know that the street has always been the place of influence for fashion, for music, for art, for everything. Street art, yes, like the music industry they understand the viral thing. They really want to be popular in that sense, which I totally understand and I’m totally interested in that, and I think some artists are really interested in that. Some really serious artists have this obsession to be everywhere and be nowhere at the same time, so they are attracted by that. They are still afraid, but they understand the possibility of touching a bigger world with a digital system as opposed to the traditional system where you have to go like in the old days, from one city to another and repeat yourself. And people start to criticise you because you’ve done ten shows with the same kind of pieces and people claiming it was better five years before. So I think there’s a new interest in this system, yes. Coming from street culture to the “high art” system.

Q4. Hi, my name is Ania, I’m from Hestia gallery and residency in Belgrade, currently living in Paris. It’s kind of related to just what you’re saying now, but just before, I’d like to make a comment about the soccer players and what they’re earning in this, as you said, capitalist world. I don’t know if we can

precisely relate it because there’s a very big industry behind that, and I think that watching the “clásico” derby between Real Madrid and Barcelona is all over the world, a big event, as well as Michael Jordan earning most of his money with the Air Jordan brand and the Nike endorsement. So I don’t know if we can still compare the soccer players money with Beeple, I don’t know. It’s an interesting comparison that you did, Ilaria. It’s just a comment...

I. B. I just want to add that it’s Beeple at Christie’s, not just Beeple, because that makes the platform bigger.

“WHAT PEOPLE HAVE IN MIND WHEN YOU SAY NFT IS A KIND OF ABSURD PICTURE OF SOMEONE MAKING SOMETHING VERY SIMPLE, BASIC THINGS. BUT IT’S NOT JUST THAT.”

Q4. In terms of the panel, I like going back to the historical avant-gardes that you mentioned, Andrew. My favourite historical avant-gardes are from Latin America and Eastern Europe. The way they worked was breaking the cannons by using the streets as their performance venues, institutional critique, there was a social commentary. So the question would be: do you think that these digital vanguards, as you call them, could also be used not just for things that look like street art, but to also talk more about societal issues? Because I’m not seeing that and maybe I haven’t looked deep enough, but I’m not seeing any huge narratives in these new digital works. I would like to explore it more, I’m not very knowledgeable.

J. S. That’s a very good question, because what people have in mind when you say NFT is a kind of absurd picture of someone making something very simple, basic things, basic pictures, basic drawings, a childish system. But it’s not just that. There are some like this, of course, but there are some serious artists in general who are dealing with this form. Coming from Belgrade, I can think of Marina Abramović. She recently made an NFT with a famous, iconic picture where she’s standing on a horse holding the flag that her father had when he was a hero. And she was standing at the beginning of the conflict between Ukraine and Russia as an NFT. So, for me, it was a clear position, and she was throwing it in New York, physical and digital, on both sides of the world, to say: “I have a position.”

Of course, I totally agree with you, any art should have a position, all of us should have a position, we can't just be entertainers and be happy with everything. We have to have political, economic and cultural engagement. And for any kind of artwork, for everything, we all have to have this attitude, I totally agree with you. Any good pieces are basically that.

I want to reassure you that, of course, there have been some important pieces recently, Miltos Manetas, who is one of the big players in this field. The art world tried to forget him, in a way, but he's someone historical in the digital realm. He made a piece with us called *This Cannot Be Erased* based on Julian Assange, trying to raise the question of freedom in our world today, which for me is one of the biggest issues we're facing today, wherever we are. So there are some pieces, there are some artists, of course. You can see it in one way, very entertaining, very nice, physically beautiful, but there is the second layer with engagement, political, etc. Don't be afraid, there are some very good artists who have great projects.

Q5. Bringing it back to the art more so than the art market, we've covered a little bit about generative art and how that's been a huge trend within NFTs, but I'd like to know some traits or your thoughts on curating digital art that is not generative or doesn't use AI.

I. B. I don't think the searching is that different than from normal art. It's about knowing a bit, trying to understand the context where the work is born, a bit of the history of the art, if the work is significant, there's always this kind of objective. What I think is significant might be different from Jérôme or Anika, but in the end you have to do a bit of homework, because I think what we were talking about is sometimes the traditional world comes into this world, and knows nothing about the history and maybe gets super excited about something that feels already consumed and vice versa. I mean, if you think about Beeple and think of On Kawara, conceptually it's not such a big idea, posting every day something and marking the passage of time. But the people who know Beeple don't know On Kawara and vice versa. Then if you're talking about types of art, 3D video is very interesting and now even film is using 3D. Cannes Film Festival and Venice have a small section of 3D film which enters the small competition. So it's hard to say exactly what technology, interactive art... Internet art has morphed, but there have been great projects using internet art. So it's really all the technologies, the artists can be fascinated and investigate it.

A. M. I worked with Marina Abramović on the NFTs and it's been the hero, and there's been unreleased material and there was a message behind it, right? But we discussed the topic of hero in conjunction with the release and we also chose the blockchain Tezos, a green blockchain, which was also very relevant. So that's more than just the art. I mean, purpose, we know that from the art world, but I think that's really important, that there's a clear message and not just a cartoon image or something. But then when it comes to digital art and that's, I guess, the most important part of where we run into issues, there's no criteria somehow, and also when it comes to art criticism, right? I mean, we know what good and bad painting is because we know about the history, but that's totally missing, especially when it comes to NFTs.

**“WE KNOW WHAT GOOD AND BAD
PAINTING IS BECAUSE WE KNOW ABOUT
THE HISTORY, BUT THAT’S TOTALLY
MISSING WHEN IT COMES TO NFTS.”**

So what's the criteria for what's an interesting project and what's not? Or even when it comes to the history of digital auto-generative art, what's interesting, what's not? Is it about the use of new technology? Does every generative art project have to use the latest technologies, has to work with AI or whatever? I think we all have to find really defined criteria and that's a job all of us have to do together, it can't be like one or two single people. Then it will be way easier to answer these questions because art will always be subjective, like music.

A. G. Hopefully these will be the kinds of arguments we have in the Cedar Tavern where you're fighting over abstract expressionism...

J. S. We have a question from our friend from Artsy.

Carine Karam (C. K.) Carine from Artsy, thank you, Jérôme. I have a comment and a question. The comment is that we're always talking about Beeple, and he certainly put NFTs on the map for people outside of the digital and crypto world, but there's been a higher selling artist since him last year called Pac, who sold for 91.8 million and I never hear his name come up, so I just thought that was interesting. My question is: thinking about NFTs as a means of registering art on a blockchain and being able to track its ownership, the real art world has something that most other artistic sectors don't have, which is it doesn't pay royalties to artists, right? The secondary market will typically see the most value driven for an artist and they don't usually benefit from that.

I. B. In Europe, in theory, there is by law the *droit de suite*, so every time an artwork is sold by a living artist they should be getting their percentage, but how it is applied and how to control it without blockchain... But formally and legally it is recognised as a right of the artist. Then obviously the blockchain makes it something real and not just an idea.

C. K. Right, so you probably get the sense of my question, which is: are NFTs or blockchain, for the regular art world, the answer to being able to pay royalties to artists for every resale of their work forevermore, so there could never be really a starving artist if they have success in secondary markets?

J. S. Well, to go back to the real world, I had a band before, I have music in the system. Each time it's played anywhere in the world I get some feedback. Why don't artists have the same as musicians, photographers, all authors of any kind? The art world is the only one to escape the system. I find it totally normal that artists should get the right on their artwork forever. I remember being very young in New York and hearing artists crying because they sold all their earlier pieces because they were starving to death, and they don't belong to them anymore, and they're now worth a fortune. So they lost their fortune and people were selling, buying, buying, selling, they saw the money going up and they didn't get a part of the cake. I didn't find it normal. I think it's fantastic that in the end, so long after that, there's a system saying: "Hey, guys, you can make it." Why doesn't the normal, traditional system do that properly? The law says it but in the fact I'm not sure all my friend artists get the money when it's re-sold. So I find it fantastic just for that to have this respect for who is doing something.

A. M. And also getting the money straight away, it's also important for artists. I'm doing a project called *Unsigned Together* with Operator, because there was an article in *The Guardian* that said that if male artists sign the artwork, the price goes up, if a female signs, the price goes down. Next week is the last week of the project, we're selling 100 signatures by 100 mainly digital artists and it's going super well. Someone buys, money comes in, beautiful. And also, for all other participants in the project, I get a percentage of everyone else, and the money is just there and artists don't have to wait. I remember artists when I curated museum shows then simply because it takes ages for accounting to take care of the invoice, and they had to pay pre-production, and then some of them couldn't pay their rent. That was horrible, having artists in your inbox saying: "Hey, the museum is not paying. I can't pay my rent. Please do something." And now these things are somehow solved through the blockchain, which is great. And if some writers or art critics say it's not art, then I'm sorry, I don't know, you're totally missing the point.

A. G. Conceivably these could address some of the biennial commissioning issues that were spoken about yesterday.

I. B. I think in many countries collectors are worried about all the tax side of things being officially registered on blockchain. I've been invited by the Italian Notary Association that proposes a blockchain registry for artworks, obviously voluntary, and I would think artists might be interested. But I'm not sure how many collectors, and not because I'm saying collectors cheat on the tax, but for example, for the Italian tax police, if you buy art, you're a billionaire. That's just a granted. So if you buy art, you're a billionaire, and they start looking and then you get a fine because your babysitter's hours are not coinciding. So maybe it's not on the art that you're cheating the tax, but you enter the spotlight and this is also an issue, I think, and it will have to be solved. And all the side of tax regulation linked to blockchain. It's being discussed and regulated in European Parliament and it's still very new. I think it might take a bit longer for the art world to embrace it, when they understand the side of how it's tackled, how you have to declare it, etc.

Guillaume Piens

is an art historian by training, organizer, and artistic director of cultural events, but also an art collector. He has worked among others for FIAC and Paris Photo which he directed from 2008 up to February 2011. He was notably the curator for Paris Photo of the spotlight on Japan in 2008, the Arab world and Iran in 2009, and Central Europe in 2010. He was the artistic advisor of the 1st Saint Germain des Près Photo Festival from 2011 to 2013. He is currently the director of Art Paris, the springtime leading event for modern and contemporary art at the Grand Palais in Paris.

Alain Quemin

is a professor of sociology of art at Université Paris-8, a researcher at GEMASS – Sorbonne Université, and a senior member of Institut Universitaire de France. He was an invited professor in numerous universities (UCLA, Columbia University and the New School for Social Research in the USA, Université de Montréal, Universität Zürich, Bologna University, Universitat de Barcelona...). He also is a Fulbright alumnus. He published: *Les stars de l'art contemporain. Notoriété et consécration artistiques dans les arts visuels* (2013), and *Le monde des galeries. Art contemporain, structure du marché et internationalization* (2021).

Giusy Ragosa

A graduate of the Fine Arts of Bologna (Italy) in Communication and Art Pedagogy, Giusy Ragosa began her professional career in France with a founding experience within the educational department of the Centre Pompidou. From 2010 to 2015, she held the position of chargée des publics at the prestigious Galleria Continua / Les Moulins. In 2015, she joined a new investment fund for contemporary art in England. Since 2018 she has been the director of Galleria Continua in France for the Les Moulins and Paris sites.

Farah Nayeri

is an arts and culture writer for the *New York Times* and the author of *Takedown: Art and Power in the Digital Age* (Astra House, 2022). She also hosts the *Culture Blast* podcast. Originally from Iran, she lives and works in London. Nayeri began her journalism career in Paris as a reporter for *Time* magazine and a contributor to *The Wall Street Journal*. She later became a correspondent of Bloomberg in Paris, Rome, and London, covering politics and economics, then culture. Nayeri is a public speaker and panel moderator, regularly chairing conferences for the *New York Times* and for institutions around the world.

Is Paris the New London?

SPEAKERS

**Guillaume Piens, Alain Quemin
& Giusy Ragosa**

MODERATOR

Farah Nayeri

12.00–13.30

“Is Paris the New London?”

Guillaume Piens Art Paris
Alain Quemin Sociologist of art
Giusy Ragosa Galleria Continua
moderated by Farah Nayeri Journalist and author

Talking Galleries Barcelona Symposium



Is Paris the New London?

Farah Nayeri (F. N.) Ladies and gentlemen, I wanted to welcome you very warmly back to this wonderful symposium and to this next session on a hot topic: *Is Paris the New London?* Before we were coming on to this session I had a little email exchange with Lluçia Homs and Sol García Galland, the masterminds of Talking Galleries, and we had a little discussion about: “Should we keep this title or not? You know, *Is Paris the New London?* That’s a little bit of a strange title,” which is a kind of fair question, but then I decided: “No, please can we keep it? Because it would get your attention and it would whip up a nice little debate.” Which is what we like when we have a panel discussion. And in case you’re wondering why someone called Farah Nayeri should be talking about Paris and London when I should be in Tehran burning my head scarf, I am a long-time resident of Paris first of all and a long-time resident of London. I moved to Paris when I was quite a young child and lived there for a very long time, I have a French passport, but I have been living in London for more than 20 years now, so I think I can look at the drawbacks and the advantages of both these cities. And, of course, in this panel we do have two Frenchmen, I’m pleased to say, and we also have Giusy Ragosa who is Italian but her gallery is based in Paris and she lives in Paris, so I think we could get very different perspectives.

I went around last night preparing this talk, as I do, and I looked online for sayings by famous people about London and about Paris. About London, the 18th century British author Samuel Johnson said: “When a man is tired of London he is tired of life, for there is in London all that life can afford.” Of course, this being the 21st century we would have said “when a person” rather than “when a man”, but never mind. Oscar Wilde famously noted: “The man who can dominate a London dinner table can dominate the world,” so these were very complementary comments about London. Then I looked for comments about Paris and the author Henry Miller said: “To know Paris is to know a great deal.” Ernest Hemingway, in something that you’ve probably heard, said: “If you’re lucky enough to have lived in Paris as a young man, then wherever you go for the rest of your life it stays with you for Paris is a movable

feast.” And finally, Audrey Hepburn, the quintessentially elegant actress, subtly declared: “Paris is always a good idea.” I turn and put that Audrey Hepburn saying to Giusy Ragosa of Galleria Continua. Your gallery now has an outpost in Paris, quite an important outpost in Paris, as far as I know I don’t see you in London, so can you tell us Giusy why Continua chose Paris?

“WE CHOSE PARIS BECAUSE AT THIS MOMENT PARIS WAS A PLACE WHERE WE COULD DO THINGS IN ANOTHER WAY.”

Giusy Ragosa (G. R.) Actually the story is much longer for this question because the true question for us, and I say for us because when you invite Galleria Continua you invite all the group, so I’m here like Giusy but Continua is here. So, the true question for us is: can Paris be the new Tuscany or the new San Gimignano? We chose this city in a special moment. I want to be honest with you. We opened a space in the countryside of Paris, 50 kilometres from Paris, two old mills, very beautiful, with a public project and people are invited to come to enjoy art, it is a very special project with a pedagogical programme, etc, etc. So I spent a lot of time of my life saying: “We’ve never been in Paris.” Paris is a capital so a lot of things are in Paris, and the whole of Continua wanted to be in another place where we can build other things...

F. N. A reminder that Continua is based in the gorgeous Tuscan town of San Gimignano, sure most of you know.

G. R. We started from there, but we really chose the city where the three founders were born, San Gimignano, so it was San Gimignano that chose Continua, not the other way around. It was a little bit the same for us, so I spent 14 years saying: “No, we will never be in Paris because we do things in a different way, we want to propose a different model in France.” All things are in the capital and to do something outside was very hard and a very strong proposition, and we made it. And then in 2021 everything, every bookshop and marketplace was closed, and they told me we were going to open in Paris, so what could I say to all the people that I told we’d never be in Paris? The three founders of Continua are real dreamers, so what they wanted to do in January 2021 was install something that can be open, because for two years we fought with the fact that everything was closed, the art world had stopped, we stopped travelling, we stopped doing things. That was crazy, because all the time we were everywhere, dreaming up projects, meeting people, all our

stories are about meeting people. So Paris was sad and very closed at this moment, and we thought: “Let’s open something different.”

F. N. You opened in 2021?

G. R. Yes, in January.

F. N. That’s an incredible time to open a gallery.

G. R. Yes, it’s crazy, and we chose Paris because at this moment Paris was a place where we could do things in another way, because all the references were lost, everything was closed so we found a good moment for us to build something different, something new.

“PARIS WAS A ‘SLEEPING BEAUTY.’ PEOPLE WOULD SAY IT’S A BEAUTIFUL CITY, BUT IT WAS NOT SEEN AS A PLACE FOR EXPERIMENTATION IN TERMS OF CONTEMPORARY ART.”

F. N. Guillaume, you are the famous and very popular director of Art Paris, and of course you’re someone who like Alain will know Paris extremely well. In our exchanges and emails you were singing the merits of Paris at the moment. Can I get you to tell us why Paris is so special? Because last night Jérôme Sans and I had a little chat and Jerome was saying: “This is the most important moment in the history of the Paris art scene since the Second World War.” Do you agree with that?

Guillaume Piens (G. P.) I think Paris is really undergoing a moment of artistic effervescence we haven’t seen from for a very long time. My career started at FIAC in 2000 and then Paris Photo, so I know exactly how hard it was to attract fine galleries in Paris. People were talking about London, but first Berlin at the end of the 90s, and then London. Frieze was launched in 2003 and I was at FIAC at that moment and we had a sense of defeat. The team FIAC were at Frieze and we could see that the energy was in London and not in Paris. So, what’s going on now is quite incredible, it’s maybe the only good news in the world today, I think.

F. N. Can you tell us some of the objections that were being raised when you said: “What about Paris?” What would they say to you? What was missing in Paris before?

G. P. I would say that Paris was a “sleeping beauty.” People would say it’s a beautiful city, it’s a prestigious place to do things for established artists, but it was not seen as a place for experimentation in terms of contemporary art. People were leaving, I knew a lot of people in the 90s and beginning of 2000s that were leaving to London or to New York in search of something more exciting. In Paris we had this impression that nothing was moving and there was a kind of stillness. As you know, we had a very socialist stage starting in 1981, so everything was handled by the state and with little place for private initiatives. It was difficult in the early 2000s and I think we looked at London a lot, we looked at Berlin as well. And it was interesting to see that before Brexit, certain people wanted to do good things for Paris.

“WHAT PARIS PROBABLY LACKED FOR MANY YEARS WAS THIS INTERACTION OF WORLDS BETWEEN THE PRIVATE SECTOR AND THE PUBLIC SECTOR.”

I think the most interesting thing was the rise of private initiatives. I should mention Antoine de Galbert with the Maison Rouge, and the Cartier Foundation before that, which was set up in 1996. Cartier, as you know, is going to have a new headquarters opposite the Louvre. They’re going to have a new venue that will open in 2025 and it’s going to be a striking 17,000-square-metre venue designed by Jean Nouvel, so this is going to be a next step that is going to be important for Paris. But I should go back to Antoine de Galbert, I think he really opened the way with the first really private foundation led by an individual, not a corporate company. Then we had Vuitton, they decided to build the Fondation Vuitton in 2006, the decision was made in 2006 and it’s interesting to know that. And then we have the Pinault Collection, who first wanted to do a project, as you know, Île Seguin, in 2000...

F. N. Yes, I’m aware, and then he went to Venice and opened two venues, and now he’s got the Bourse de Commerce in Paris.

G. P. Yes, the Bourse de Commerce was decided in 2014.

F. N. It’s true, in other words, a lot of these decisions were made not yesterday or the day before, but many years ago.

G. P. There’s a saying now, that thanks to Brexit, Paris has become the new centre for contemporary art, but I think it all started around 2010, Gagosian

opened his galleries in 2010. Then things accelerated in 2017 when Macron got into power, I think, because there was a more liberal thinking as well, and I could feel that the energy started to be interesting and a lot of private initiatives developed.

F. N. If I may just jump in, the fact is that Paris was, as you say, a “sleeping beauty”, and now it’s a beauty but it’s no longer sleeping, it’s wide awake. Paris was, of course, as we all know, this extraordinary Mecca of traditional, Old Master art museums. Then, as you say, these private foundations jumped in. Louis Vuitton, he decided to ask Frank Gehry to create this extraordinary glass vessel on the edges of Paris, and put a lot of extraordinary exhibitions on there, the Shchukin Collection, the Morozov Collection, just some spectacular exhibitions. Then we had Pinault, who after opening two places in Venice opened the Bourse de Commerce in the heart of Paris, and now the Fondation Cartier, which already had a major building by Jean Nouvel in the Montparnasse area, is opening across from the Louvre.

So, as you say, there’s a lot of private money, which in France was almost taboo for a long time: “We don’t like to talk about private money. Art cannot be muddled with money.” First of all there was a thirst for contemporary art and there wasn’t enough of it in Paris, contemporary art existed at Palais de Tokyo, but elsewhere people were thirsty for it and they weren’t getting it, so I think the private money also filled that gap. I think Alain Quemin will describe this whole process better than me, if you could jump in and pick up on something that Guillaume said, which is to say: Brexit is not the reason why we are seeing this resurgence of Paris, this is a much more deep-rooted phenomenon.

Alain Quemin (A. Q.) Yes, first of all I totally agree, but I would like to underscore that we are not here to promote Paris, this is Talking Galleries, so we have to be somewhat analytical and try to understand how it all occurred. I think there were two steps, and I totally agree with what Guillaume said before, it was a rather continuous process, and I think while Brexit made foreigners more conscious of that, I totally agree that what Paris probably lacked for many years was this interaction of worlds between the private sector and the public sector.

One thing that also seems super important to me was 2012, when Thaddaeus Ropac decided to totally overhaul the social representations we had of the city and decided to open this mega space in Pantin, because while for many years

it was nearly impossible for Parisians to believe that we would go beyond the Périphérique, the motorway that encircles Paris. Thaddaeus Ropac found a new space, three big buildings, former factories, and he created the first mega gallery in France and probably the first mega gallery of that size in any city in Europe. It was such a radical change that Gagolian, who was the unrivalled leader at the time, just a few days after Thaddaeus Ropac opened the space, which was very daring, it was a total bet, many people didn't believe it could work. He had to open also another space, also a gigantic one in Le Bourget. But it was totally unexpected because while normally Gagolian, who was the leader, should have been the one who'd had the idea first, and it also was very surprising that Ropac opened with an Anselm Kiefer show and just a few days later, Gagolian also opened with an Anselm Kiefer show. So he definitely was a follower, but while in the symbolic order of art galleries at the time, you had this European guy who took the initiative and this American tycoon was forced to follow.

“LET’S TALK ABOUT THIS CHANGE OF GENERATION. IT’S IMPORTANT BECAUSE THE FRENCH CULTURAL LANDSCAPE WAS ALWAYS SHAPED BY PUBLIC MONEY.”

Then I totally agree, two years later Fondation Louis Vuitton opened with this huge, daring building. As you know, in Paris we are all very attached to heritage, so when it comes to contemporary buildings we are always reluctant. Creating this building was a very radical sign, and they organised incredible exhibitions, and now the concentration in Paris has totally changed. We have all these either public or private institutions, and if you start with Centre Georges Pompidou then just a few hundred metres away you have Bourse de Commerce, and then you have Fondation Cartier, then in the centre of Paris you have Musée du Louvre, then you cross the Seine and you arrive at Musée d’Orsay, some meters away you have the Musée des Arts Premiers... The geography has changed radically!

F. N. It's an incredible cornucopia of offerings. The question I want to ask you before we go back to our other speakers, I just wanted to get a sense from you of how come private money became less taboo? I mean, I grew up for many years in France and personally I was reluctant to go into a private foundation that showed art because I thought: “Art is in the museums, and this private

foundation, what is their relationship with money and art?”, and everything was all very separate, it was like Chinese walls. How come these Chinese walls came tumbling down in France?

A. Q. When you see what private money can make it is very impressive. When you go to Fondation Vuitton and you see the exhibitions, they are incredibly well done, and they hired Suzanne Pagé, who was the former director of Musée d’Art Moderne de Paris. She was very esteemed, but she had to retire because she was too old to work in the public sector, in France we have these laws that are super strict. Then she was hired by the private sector and she could help with her expertise. She's an incredible curator, they organised exhibitions like the ones you mentioned—the Morozov exhibition, the Shchukin exhibition—and at the moment they are showing Joan Mitchell and Claude Monet. They have so much money they can do things the public sector can't.

“WHEN I STARTED AT FIAC IN 2000, THE COLLECTORS WERE VERY FRENCH CENTRIC. NOW, YOU HAVE THESE VERY SUCCESSFUL ENTREPRENEURS THAT ARE MUCH MORE INTERNATIONAL.”

F. N. If I might add, the Shchukin and Morozov collections were curated by the great Anne Baldassari, just to get her name out there.

G. P. I would like to talk about this change of generation. It's important because, as you know, the French cultural landscape was always shaped by public money, it dates back to Louis XIV. Art was used as a tool for the projection of power, so the state has always been with the academy. If we're going back into the French history, there was always the place of the state which was very important, and also this distrust or suspicious attitude toward private money. There's a lot of French intellectuals who think that private money is like dirty money, that art is public and should be only handled by the state because there should be no private interests. I think this is a big change in France, this is a big change in terms of collectors...

F. N. But how do you explain that? Going from “money is dirty” to now?

G. P. Because you have this new generation of French people who are really international, they speak English these days. When I started at FIAC in 2000, the collectors were very French centric, and now you have these very

successful entrepreneurs between the ages of 30 to 40, they have money and they want something else and they're much more international. They've been to see the Tate in London and I think everybody was impressed by the way London became the prominent place in the early 2000s. In the 90s, London only had 25 galleries and suddenly London became the place to be.

F. N. I noticed that going from London to Paris so often. I would go to London, Tate Modern would be doing this and then the Serpentine would be doing that, then I'd go to Paris and then maybe two or three years later I would suddenly see a big Grayson Perry show at the Monet Paris, I would see a lot of artists who we had seen in London two or three years earlier, even British artists like Tracey Emin or Damien Hirst becoming massive phenomena. We had a massive Damien Hirst show at the Fondation Cartier, which is quite a prominent prestigious place to have a show. He had all his little recent dots, his sort of like pointillism phase, and they were all there.

**“ONE OF THE KEYS OF THIS
RENAISSANCE OF PARIS IS THAT
YOU HAVE PRIVATE INITIATIVES
COMPETING WITH PUBLIC
INSTITUTIONS.”**

Anyway, Giusy, tell us about this business of how Paris has grown to like money more and consider it less “dirty”. [laughs] How are you dealing with that and who are your collectors?

G. R. I just want to add something, what we said before about private institutions. I speak like an institution because people know us like that. So, like a private actor we understand, and I think all colleagues and other galleries understand, that you can't do things without the public's support, so I'm speaking about public money.

F. N. So, you are saying that your gallery is working with public support?

G. R. I think that we are inside something much bigger, an ecosystem that is both public and private. I want to show here, for example, you can see how important it is in the moment of crisis. I think it needs to be understood that the pandemic moment was something that really changed things, because in the pandemic, and also in crisis in general, the public institutions and political money for the pandemic was there. For example, we were in the

COVID moment, everything was closed, and FRAC, the Fonds Régional d'Art Contemporain, started to buy things...

F. N. This is a regional fund for contemporary art that the French state has set up and that goes out and buys art with taxpayer money.

G. R. Yes, and maybe for us it doesn't make a difference, but it was very important for little galleries, and I say that in this way because we are also workers. So, what the French state did for us was very important, and when you are a private enterprise or institution, you need to think of this.

F. N. They helped you pay the salaries during the pandemic.

**“THERE IS THIS DESIRE FOR PARIS, AND
A LOT OF FOREIGN GALLERIES WANT TO
BE IN PARIS NOW.”**

G. R. Yes, and when you choose a place you need to think of this, right? Paris is not the big market that one thinks, London is quite huge, but Paris started to be interesting not for its market but for what the city started to do and what they want to build.

F. N. Maybe I can get Guillaume to build on that. What are some of the advantages?

G. P. I just want to add that maybe this is one of the keys of this resurgence or renaissance of Paris, that you have private initiatives competing with public institutions, and that's the renaissance in a way, because there's this very interesting moment where you have the Pompidou and, you know, it's interesting, because the way Vuitton and Pinault are making exhibitions has triggered a reaction from the public institutions, so it's a very interesting situation.

F. N. But I'm also interested in hearing from you as a fair director, because you had a fair.

G. P. Yes, I've got a fair, and I can see the rise of Paris because my selection committee was yesterday and I received a record-breaking number of applications, something that we've never experienced before. There is this desire for Paris, and a lot of foreign galleries want to be in Paris now, they want to open galleries. And I also think it's interesting, because we're talking

about the big galleries, but what I like about what's going on right now is you have the big blue chip galleries rubbing shoulders with mid-sized structures and galleries that are also opening a lot new spaces in Paris.

F. N. Can you give us some numbers, like how many people applied and how many did you accept?

G. P. We have two selection committees, but factually we received 250 applications and we've said no to 150 galleries.

F. N. That's a lot! I'm glad I'm not one of them.

“THE ARRIVAL OF ART BASEL HAS BEEN VERY IMPORTANT BECAUSE IT PUTS THE FINGER ON PARIS AS A PLACE TO BE.”

G. P. But it's a good sign for Paris. As you know, in terms of fairs, we're going to have Paris+ by Art Basel starting in two weeks. I think the arrival of Art Basel in Paris has also been very important because they put the finger on Paris as a place to be, which was not the case before. As you know I've been travelling in many countries and for a lot of scenes, if you talk about Eastern Europe, for example, the destination wasn't Paris, it was London or New York or Berlin, and there were a lot of scenes that didn't consider Paris as the place to be. But I think with the arrival of Art Basel, it has a kind of leverage effect, and I know there will be a lot of groups of collectors and U.S. museums attending Paris+, and maybe before they would have gone directly to London and now they're going directly to Paris, so it's very interesting to know that.

F. N. Alain, I know that Brexit is not the reason for all of these things happening, Paris has been active and bubbling and doing extraordinary things long before there was this horrible—sorry—vote in the UK in 2016 to exit the European Union. And of course, yesterday we did have Julia Peyton-Jones reminding us that the art market in London represents something like 9 billion pounds, I think she said.

G. P. 9.9 billion dollars in 2020, I've got the figures. According to the Art Basel reports the UK art market is estimated at 9.9 billion dollars, while the French market in 2020 was estimated at 3.1 billion dollars.

F. N. Fine, so there's really no dispute around the fact that London is a huge marketplace, I live there and I'm constantly in Paris. Paris being the new London, that's kind of a silly question. Paris is not going to be the new London, Paris is going to be a very complementary and gorgeous city across the channel via Eurostar from London, and these two cities should cohabit and create a perfect world. I think it's a perfect world, living between the two cities as I do. But Alain, I do think however that Brexit has played a role, indisputably there has been a role played by Brexit. I'd like you to tell us exactly what that role has been?

“SOME GALLERIES HADN'T OPENED A SPACE UNTIL NOW IN PARIS, AND THE BEST EXAMPLE IS DAVID ZWIRNER. BREXIT ACCELERATED THE TENDENCY; IT MADE PARIS MORE DESIRABLE.”

A. Q. Well, some galleries hadn't opened a space until now in Paris, and the best example is David Zwirner. He made it explicit that he decided to open the space in Paris because of Brexit, and also Marian Goodman. Shortly after Brexit she decided to close her London space but she kept the one in Paris. This really makes a big difference, it accelerated the tendency, it made Paris more desirable, and I think this is also why the MCH Group that possesses Art Basel really wanted to get an art fair in Paris, because Paris is booming. But let's try to make this clear, it truly started much earlier. And while there's still awesome perspectives for London, the problem is that if London really wants to react, because there's always been some kind of competition between Paris and London, which was partly illustrated by the rivalry between FIAC and Frieze taking place at the same time.

I think an option could be for London, as they are no longer part of the European market, just to choose one way, which is a quite radical one, but which could be a solution, which would be dumping. They are at the entry of the European market but also outside of it, so if they adopt new taxes which could be super aggressive, super low, they can maintain their positions or even develop them. But I'm quite sure they can't do it immediately, because Brexit was marketed to the British people as something like “make Britain great again”. This would be a solution, that is more the solution that is normally adopted by poor countries, it would be a bit tricky, a bit cynical, but I think it can be a solution for the British market.

F. N. Well, if you looked at the currency markets the other day, what happened to the pound, it was looking very much like an emerging market [laughs]. So, I'd like to open it up now. We are going to come back to my wonderful three speakers, however, we have a question from Paco Barragán in the back of the room.

Paco Barragán (P. B.) I'm a curator and a writer and I have a wonderful book about the history of art fairs and biennials that you should buy. I just wanted to tap in to the conversation because I think that what you said about money being naughty, French collectors not wanting to go public, that's a very European idea, it was that way in Spain for many years and in the Netherlands...

F. N. I think it might be a slightly Catholic kind of attitude.

P. B. Yes, but I think that the change was the Miami model. I think that totally changed the script and changed the rules. What do I mean with the Miami model? The collectors, De La Cruz, etc. All these collectors started to open their houses and show that you can be trendy and flashy, and at that point I saw that especially Spanish, French and other collectors were slowly getting used to the idea of exhibiting their own collections.

F. N. Can I ask you to ask a question if you have one?

P. B. No, I just wanted to tap in because when you said that there was a change, from my perspective, in Europe there is a general change because the U.S. market and U.S. collectors and their habits have been influencing them.

G. P. No, I don't agree with you at all.

P. B. Okay, that's fine.

G. P. If you come back to the French situation, have you heard about these very interesting exhibitions *Private Passions* in 1999 at Musée d'Art Moderne? It was the first time that some collectors showed their collections publicly. What happened was the French tax people came to see the exhibitions and then they did inquiries about these people, where the money was coming from, etc. So I don't think, when you're talking about Miami, I went many times as entertainment, but I don't think that you find this type of French collectors opening their houses to all the people. I've been working like 20 years for FIAC, Paris Photo, Art Paris, and we never had French collectors opening their houses for private VIP visits. So, I don't want you to bring the Miami context to Paris because it's not at all the situation.

F. N. Okay, we have another question here. Ilaria, did you have one?

Ilaria Bonacossa Hello, I'm Ilaria Bonacossa, I'm a curator and I ran Artissima fair for five years and now I'm working for the government to open the new National Museum of Digital Art in Milano. I think this idea of Paris being the new London and these new balances in Europe, I'm thinking of other cities in the action. For example, Milano is a very strange case of sudden economic boom, not yet so much in the art market even if most Italian galleries have opened a space in Milano. Even the galleries who are in Naples or in Rome, they have a small space in Milano as the place to be. I see the hype around Paris, we're all seeing it, but isn't Paris the new Paris and maybe Milano is the new London? [laughs]

**“PARIS WAS VERY OLD IN ITS WAY
OF THINKING. NOW, YOU CAN
FEEL A FRESH ENERGY COMING
TO PARIS.”**

F. N. Okay, let's have Giusy come in here. What are your thoughts about a great Italian city also being the new Mecca of art?

G. R. Something happened in Paris. I've been in Paris for 14 years and there's a strong energy that arrived, and I think it was interesting to hear about the digital world. We need to start to build something else in the real world, to make a new reflection of the real world, so maybe there isn't one city that will be the place to be, other cities will start to build something that's a community. I think that we chose Paris because we want to understand Paris like a territory, a territory in the French way, *territoire*, a place where there are very interesting social, political, economic things, and I think maybe it will be the case in Milano too. But Paris was very old in its way of thinking, and now 15 years have passed in this way and you can feel a fresh energy coming to Paris.

G. P. Maybe there are some people coming back because they wanted to escape from Paris, I know they're returning, and when we're talking about an ecosystem we also talk about going to Paris. There's a lot of development, as you know, we're going to have the Olympic Games in 2024. That's also triggering a lot of new projects. We just had this new space La Félicité open in Paris, it's going to be a kind of mixed space but it's also a very interesting place to go, and there will be a lot of new things that are going to be open for the Olympic Games in 2024.

I. B. When you said that you were going to London and Paris was bringing back things you had already seen, but as a curator I remember the opening of Palais de Tokyo as the one thing in Europe that swept us all of our feet and it was the centre of contemporary art. I mean, I'm just saying that it's not true that Paris always felt it was following. When that happened, Paris was more contemporary than London.

F. N. I totally agree with you. Alain, did point out that London was very much a desert and even Julia yesterday was saying that it was very much a desert before the YBAs came along, I'm not saying anything different. I'm just saying that in the last five or 10 years, there's been a lot of people looking at London, including New York, by the way. New York is looking a lot at what Tate does, Serpentine, anyway. I mean, if the gentlemen who are the founders of Palais de Tokyo want to comment on the resurgence of Paris, you're most welcome, but let's have a question.

Anja Obradovic Hi, I'm Anja Obradovic, the founder of Hestia gallery and residency in Belgrade. I also want to open up space in Paris just because I happened to move there. [laughs]-There are also other smaller fairs which are based in other geographies, as you were commenting. London had the Calvert 22 Foundation as an institution showcasing Eastern European art, for example, in Paris we have the Institut du Monde Arabe, but I just want to ask how much do you think Paris would be open to include even more geographies? For example, I'm working with a curator from Estonia and she's thinking about doing a Baltic Contemporary Art Centre.

G. P. I just went to Estonia last May so I know the situation quite well regarding Eastern European art, and it's very interesting because we have a lot of residency programmes in Paris such as Poush, in Aubervilliers, I don't know if you've been to Fiminco, in Romainville. These spaces welcome a lot of artists and curators from Eastern Europe, from Bulgaria, Estonia, etc., so it's very interesting to see these spaces, because they bring this diversity to Paris, and that's why it's becoming a very multicultural city.

F. N. It always has been, and I can actually speak from first-hand experience. I've written a book and it has a section on France in there and I talk about how France is seen from the outside world as xenophobic and racist. Of course there are these problems, but as someone who is from Iran and who moved there many moons ago, I have to say that the French embraced and continued to embrace people from all cultures very openly. There is an extraordinary cultural curiosity in France that I don't find in other places, and by the way I've

lived in Italy and I've lived all over, but I don't find the same cultural curiosity in other places. So I have to sing the praises of France and its openness, so it would absolutely be open to Estonia. Alain, can you confirm?

A. Q. If I can also add something when it comes to art fairs, Art Basel and the other fairs organised by MCH group, they're all supposed to be very global but most of the time you will always find American, British, German, Swiss, Italian galleries participating. If you have some space for a second art fair in France like Art Paris for instance, you can have more inclusivity, I think, in terms of the geographic origin of the galleries. Do you agree, Guillaume?

**“THERE'S A NEW GENERATION
OF FRENCH ARTISTS THAT
ARE MORE ENGAGED IN THE
LARGER WORLD IN TERMS OF
CREATING.”**

G. P. Yes, for example, because I'm travelling a lot I brought a gallery from Guatemala to Paris and nobody knew about Guatemalan contemporary art in France, it's been an instant success and we're glad, because it's a lot of money to come to Paris and it's a very expensive city, especially the Grand Palais, so that's a problem for us, but we can see all these geographies and it's interesting. The market in Paris is growing and I think it's getting stronger.

Sabrina Amrani Thank you so much, I'm Sabrina Amrani, gallerist and partner in crime of Materia. This is a very wonderful conversation. I'm a Parisian who left Paris quite some years ago and now based in Madrid. We are talking about amazing developments of private enterprises, private money and institutions, it looks very great, but does it affect contemporary or emerging creation? And can you already see the effect of these amazing developments on the most emerging strata of the art world?

G. R. Other possibilities are coming and factually, for example, there is a beautiful residence experience, Art Explora. It's a private structure, but it's a possibility for private and public institutions and enterprises. They bring artists in these cities, the possibility to have artists in the city, artists of international geographies, is important. At the moment we have Nikhil Chopra who's an artist from India, but we could never imagine having him because he lived with his wife, etc., but now he's in Paris with his wife and really living in Paris.

G. P. What strikes me when I visit Poush and other residencies is to see that there are French artists for once engaged and confronted with other artists from foreign countries, because maybe the problem with French artists was that they were not going out abroad enough, and I think it's when I see this dialogue now, the levels of conversation. It's getting really interesting and I feel that there's a new generation of French artists that I think are more engaged in the larger world in terms of creating.

S. A. Nikhil Chopra is indeed not an emerging artist but a very established artist of the South Asian scene. But more directly, is it still possible for a young artist to live and create in Paris? And what happens if young Parisian artists are not able to be in contact with their own city and nurture themselves from their own city?

G. R. For me it's important that Paris starts to meet the world. They find the space where people can meet, that's why I mention Nikhil Chopra coming to Art Explora and meeting other people. Like big galleries, Continua invites students of Fine Arts. We know what's happening in Fine Arts so we really enjoy and are not in a kind of separation of what young artists are doing, we need to be attentive to what happens. We opened a space in the gallery where we only make projects for young artists, and maybe it's a pop-up. We invited Paloma Vauthier with a performance, she's only 20 years old and she was near Anish Kapoor and met other artists of our gallery this way.

F. N. Sorry, I do want to play devil's advocate here, because having lived in both cities for a very long time, I can say that it's very, very difficult to do business in France. It remains difficult in spite of many years of Macron and other efforts have been made. There's a lot of paperwork, extraordinary amounts of paperwork if you want to set up a company in Paris. It's simpler than it used to be but as far as I understand, from the day one you have to start paying huge kinds of taxes and payroll taxes even before you've earned a single cent, whereas I have friends in London who set up companies in one morning. They set it up, they get the company document, they go to the bank, they open the account, they're in business, and they don't pay tax until the first year and if they didn't make enough money then they don't pay tax. So this is the big problem that France continues to have...

Q1. This is wrong, excuse me. I have many people around me who are opening their business in Paris right now. You can make it within a week and you don't pay any tax for the first year. Of course, like everyone you pay the second, it's very fast, one week to open your business. It took a long time before, it was an impossible road, but now it's easy.

F. N. Let's have Alain come in, who's an academic and a professor who looks at these issues. Can you tell us about the ease of business in Paris nowadays?

A. Q. Well, it's easier, yes, of course, and now people are more accustomed to integrating money into the art world. I think before it was some kind of cultural reluctance to develop business around art, and now I think it's much more accepted and it makes things even easier.

F. N. I'm interested in what Jérôme was saying about *autoentrepreneurs*.

A. Q. Yes, many young people adapt to this status because it's very flexible, but there is no age discrimination, everyone can adopt this status, and sometimes the status is a bit too developed, so sometimes some firms even push their employees to adopt the status, which is super flexible, not very protective, but this really helps people to develop their business.

F. N. Giusy, can you talk about the bureaucracy of opening up the autoentrepreneur status?

G. R. I was an autoentrepreneur. I want to say just one sentence about that, you can feel support, you need to do some paperwork but you can feel support.

F. N. Do we have more questions? It's a hot session, I knew it would be.

Q2. Hi, I'm an urban planner focused on culture and heritage between Beirut, Barcelona, Athens and Paris. Thank you very much for a great discussion. I'm curious at a city level what the mayor is doing to help Paris with this new infrastructure. While it's interesting to hear from a business level on the tax and setting up a business, I'm curious on the city level for these fairs, for these galleries, how is that improving?

F. N. I will let one of my speakers answer, but the mayor of Paris actually gave a 50-year lease to the Fondation Vuitton allowing them to open the Fondation because that piece of land belongs to the City of Paris, and she did the same with Pinault and the Bourse de Commerce, so at least at that level there's been help from the mayor of Paris.

A. Q. It's also the same for Pantin. When Thaddaeus Ropac decided to open this huge mega space in Pantin, the mayor told the owner of these former factories that he wanted these abandoned spaces to be turned into this mega gallery, and he was super helpful to make Pantin a city which really promotes culture and the arts. So you see, cities are very conscious of what is at stake

today with culture and the arts, and not only in Paris but also in the suburbs. So these cities really try to promote culture and the arts because of its economic impact.

G. P. Yes, they've learned a lesson from the failure of the *Île Seguin with Pinault*. It was a big blow for Paris.

F. N. Can you describe the story of *Île Seguin*?

G. P. Pinault was planning to do a huge museum designed by Tadao Ando on the *Île Seguin*. It's an island but it was the former factory for Renault, so it's a very important place of memory and also the city of Boulogne-Billancourt was not aware of the importance of the project and didn't do anything to save the project, and it was a lot of associations that battled against Pinault and he was so fed up that he decided to go to Venice, so "bye bye Paris", and it was a big blow for the city. So when Vuitton started, the City of Paris agreed that they were not going to let the same situation happen, and it was a true mobilisation to impeach the associations to destroy the project, and it also happened with the Grand Palais. As you know, the Olympic Games are in 2024...

“CITIES ARE VERY CONSCIOUS OF WHAT IS AT STAKE TODAY WITH CULTURE AND THE ARTS, AND NOT ONLY IN PARIS BUT ALSO IN THE SUBURBS.”

F. N. So just to explain, Grand Palais is now closed for refurbishment and there's a temporary one which has been parked outside the Eiffel Tower which is called Grand Palais Éphémère.

G. P. On the Champ de Marse, which belongs to the City of Paris, and the Grand Palais is run by the state, and this building is a luxury, it cost 40 million euros. It's not a tent, it's a temporary structure, but it's luxurious. There were problems with all the associations against this building on the Champ de Marse and it was a common decision between the state and the City of Paris and the private actors, all the people doing the fairs, to find the solutions to build this building, and I think it was great for Paris. It's great and we're very lucky to have this.

F. N. We have another question here.

Q3. Hello, my name is Carles Casals, I'm the owner of a small art gallery founded in 1991. I remember some years ago that Paris had about 600 art galleries. How are so many galleries supposed to find collectors? Do you think they can survive?

G. R. An art gallery is not only a relationship between the galleries and clients. Yes, we are commercial, but we need to think bigger than that. Our story is special, because we see a space, we go there and we work and make it. So we never think about how many clients can pass.

“YOU HAVE TO HAVE YOUR CLIENTS IN THE CITY BEFORE YOU OPEN THE SPACE.”

F. N. Well, you are a very major international gallery, a very famous one. Let me move on to Alain with the same question. All these galleries are opening in Paris right, left and centre, we hear from all of you and from the audience how many are opening, it's like a hornet's nest. How are these galleries all going to find collectors, all going to find clients? Because they need to make money.

A. Q. Well, but the thing is you do not open a gallery and think: "Now I'm going to find clients." You have to have your clients in the city before you open the space. If you arrive, you're not selling shoes, you're not going to put a sign and say: "I'm a real contemporary art gallery." People will not go inside just because they see a sign, you have to socialise with them, you have to be part of the art world. I remember some years ago a friend of mine suggested a friend of hers to come and meet me, because she was moving to Singapore and she thought it would be nice to open an art gallery. And I asked her if she knew any collectors in Singapore, she said no. I was so surprised she was so naive she would believe she would arrive, put a sign and clients would jump inside the gallery, which is not the way it works.

All these galleries opening now are opening the possibility to take part in art fairs, especially in Paris, and meet Parisian collectors, or in other European art fairs and they know there is a potential for them. This is why they are coming. If you believe you can arrive and create a space, it doesn't work like this, and I'm sure Giusy will tell us that they already knew most of collectors that they have and that buy regularly. Of course, they also found new collectors since they opened in Paris, but...

G. R. We need to be realistic. French people love French things [laughs]. But they are curious, and what started to be very good for us was that when we arrived in Paris and we started to work with more French artists, then the collectors became afraid and started to ask us: “But you present yourselves as an Italian gallery?”, and sure, we are, but the Paris gallery is something open. We are really international now and things are changing, so we need to be realistic, but we also need to dream also and take risks. We need to be a little bit naive.

F. N. Well, let’s get Guillaume to arbitrate between these two.

G. P. I just want to say that I can see a new generation of French people, like 30 years old, and they are totally international, they love African art and that’s why you have this boom of African art in Paris. When I arrived at FIAC it was in 2000 and it was difficult, it was really French-centric. These collectors would start with modern art and move to more contemporary things and maybe in the end they would hop into international.

“I’VE GOT BIG GALLERIES COMING IN MY FAIR NOW, BECAUSE THEY FIND THESE FRENCH COLLECTORS FROM REGIONAL FRANCE.”

Now they go direct. I can see interest in Latin American art in Paris, that’s why we have galleries from Latin America opening in Paris. I know two or three galleries specialised in Latin American art and we also have a lot of galleries specialised in Korea. I don’t know if it’s thanks to the Frieze Seoul art fair, but there’s a boom of Korean galleries applying to the fair, so I think if they’re coming to Paris, they’ll have buyers.

F. N. Yes, cross fertilisation. We have a last question.

Q4. I’m from Berlin. In Berlin galleries are living off of outsiders, over 90% of the sales are to external people from somewhere else, so it’s a city that attracts. Is it the same in Paris? Is it the tourist factor?

G. P. No, it’s not only tourists. For my fair I’ve got big galleries coming in my fair now, because they find these French collectors from regional France, they’re very wealthy collectors, and maybe they will buy 50 thousand or 60 thousand euro works. Not like Chinese or American collectors in amount, but they are

very interesting collectors and it’s interesting to see this kind of collectors within the region of France. We’re obsessed with Paris, but we’ve got also wealthy collectors in the region of France, it’s a big country and also we have a lot of interesting people in the regions of France.

A. Q. Yes, businessmen all over France, but the gallery offer is not always excellent, you have three or four very international galleries all over France, but very often these people who are business owners in what we call the *province* in France, they will come to Paris and buy regularly, so there is a real marketplace. It’s much more developed than it is in Berlin, for instance. Well, it’s not London but it’s something in between.

F. N. That’s a good note to end on, I think. It’s not London but it’s something in between, and it’s something extremely beautiful and gorgeous. I wanted to thank my incredibly wonderful three speakers. Thank you very much.

Carine Karam

is Vice President of Global Sales & Partnerships at Artsy. She is on a mission to help expand the art collecting market and support more galleries and artists worldwide. Since October 2020, Carine has led Artsy's global sales team based in New York, London, and Berlin, with additional team members in Seoul, Hong Kong, Tokyo, Los Angeles, and Chicago. Her team works with 4000+ art galleries and art fair partners worldwide to help them grow their business and expand their digital footprint in the global art market. Carine has worked in the luxury eCommerce space for over a decade, including as Managing Director of Partnerships for luxury resale site The RealReal, Inc (REAL) and as Director of Luxury at Veepee USA (formerly Vente-Privée). At Artsy, she is balancing the importance of legacy art world traditions with progressive digital commerce to help transform the art world and bring art collecting to a wider audience.

The Resilient Collector: Behaviors and Trends Shaping the Art Market in 2022

SPEAKER
Carine Karam

In collaboration with Artsy





The Resilient Collector: Behaviors and Trends Shaping the Art Market in 2022

Carine Karam (C. K.) Welcome everybody. I'm going to be talking about the resilient collector and the behaviours and trends that are shaping the art market in 2022. But first, for those of you who are less familiar, I want to talk a little bit about what Artsy is.

We are the largest and fastest growing marketplace in the art world for buying, discovering and selling fine art. We are on a mission to grow the art world to support more artists and more galleries globally. Today we partner with over 4,000 art galleries, art fairs, institutions and auction houses. We have over 1 million artworks on our platform by over 100,000 artists. We have over 2.7 million registered users globally and have almost five million followers across all of our social channels, making us the largest audience in the art world. At Artsy we are trying to expand the art collecting market so that more people are engaged with art and buying art at volumes that we haven't seen in the past, so we always want you to buy more art.

**“DURING THE PANDEMIC, WHAT WE SAW
IS THE INDUSTRY ACTUALLY CATCHING
UP TO THE WORLD AND BEING FORCED
TO RECOGNISE THE IMPORTANCE OF A
DIGITAL PRESENCE.”**

That is a brand video that we rolled out this year and it really is trying to get the word out there around art, make art cool and fun and interesting and bring it to an audience that maybe hasn't considered buying art in the past. What we do at Artsy is really important, because we are at the intersection of two rather different worlds. You've got the traditional art world on one side, which is based on experience and expertise, taste and curation, it's built on relationships, it's highly personal, it also has a lot of barriers to entry, and it can be secretive and opaque at times and sometimes unwelcoming. On the other side you've got the digital world that is built on speed and convenience, it's all

about data and algorithms, machine learning, it's built on discoverability, it's accessible to everyone, it's transactional and it's most definitely transparent. So we think about balancing those two worlds, bringing the art world forward but still respecting its values and traditions, but ensuring that it's also following in line with how the world is progressing and the direction every other industry has gone towards.

“ABOUT A THOUSAND DIFFERENT NEW COLLECTORS ARE BUYING AN ARTWORK EACH MONTH ON ARTSY.”

Now, it's no surprise COVID-19 reshaped the art market probably for good and drove collectors online in a way that we never saw before. According to the UBS Art Basel report, online sales doubled to 13.3 billion in 2021 and continued to grow after the pandemic. So of course the pandemic saw the largest growth period, the most dramatic for the industry, but I think what we saw is the industry actually catching up to the world and being forced to recognise the importance of a digital presence, and thinking about it in a way as a priority for a business's strategy and not as a secondary thing when you have time to do it. 56% of collectors spent over half their art budget online in 2021. Online is really important, it's here to stay and it's important that everyone in the art business recognises what it takes to be online and how to do it successfully. So, despite economic downturns and the real physical art world returning—thank God, I love going to art fairs—online sales have persevered.

What we saw in Artsy, just to give you an idea as we are the largest marketplace, this is really reflective of online activity. We saw 123% growth in e-commerce sales, transactions of artworks, we saw an increase of 33% on the average price of an artwork bought, site unseen, and we saw a 63% growth in new users to the platform. Of course, during the pandemic when galleries were closed and art fairs were cancelled for a year or so, the only place to buy art was actually online. We saw this massive influx of people, galleries, collectors, everybody coming onto the platform to be able to engage with buying our art online. A lot of that had some really great benefits for galleries and collectors who started engaging with online because more galleries started engaging with online. And this really was for many galleries a lifesaver for their business to be able to continue doing business throughout the pandemic when their doors were closed and to continue meeting new collectors globally.

Every month we have since continued seeing about 30,000 new users joining the platform and a thousand new collectors every month buying their first work on Artsy, not necessarily their first work in life but their first Artsy work, so about a thousand different new collectors are buying an artwork each month.

“EVERY COLLECTOR IS NOW AN ONLINE COLLECTOR.”

As you can see here from this article, we had an auction last year with artist Julie Mehretu and broke her all-time record selling the work for 6.5 million dollars. The reason I'm talking about this work is because again this is a testament to the increased trust that this new generation of collectors has in buying artworks of a high value without touching it or seeing it in person. That's a really important example here for the art world to think about and understand. I have lots of conversations with hundreds of galleries and I will often hear: “Well, you have to have a coffee with someone or they have to see it in person,” and yes, that is definitely a wonderful part of the art world and the two worlds should be complementing each other, but you cannot disregard the fact that there is a very large audience that doesn't need to have a coffee and will buy a high value work without touching it and without seeing it in person. And this is a market that you can be capturing or that you can be missing out on.

So every collector is now an online collector. 76% of collectors purchased art online in the past 12 months and more importantly, 90% of next generation collectors purchased art online and purchased more art than they did during the pandemic in 2021. So they are buying art online as a majority and they are buying more art online continuously as they are continuing to have exposure and access to artworks. That's really important, because to understand the resilient collector in 2022 we need to understand the next generation collector. If you want to have a resilient art business and protect yourself through a pandemic, through macroeconomic conditions, through a war, you have to be thinking about how to attract the next generation of collectors to your business and make sure that you're protecting your business.

Thinking about the trends and patterns of this next generation of collectors, the art industry is really facing an emerging audience that has different values and expectations than previous generations. What they view as an online experience is still sometimes at odds with what galleries view being online, and it's important that we think about bridging that gap so that you're seeing

the right kind of momentum online and not thinking that it doesn't work or online sales don't actually drive value. I was just speaking with someone today at lunch who is an art advisor and said that she has a friend who is now a big-time collector and built her entire collection through Artsy. This is one of many, many examples. We've seen double the rate of galleries give up their physical locations because of overhead costs and other reasons, and who have just now exclusively started selling through Artsy and having a home page there. This is not something I'm recommending, but it does represent an option that the art world is still thinking about in different ways, and it supports galleries that may not have the same resources as others to continue having success and to continue meeting collectors and selling artworks.

We work with almost 4,000 galleries and partners globally, we have millions of users, we're the largest art marketplace, and I'm not saying all of these things to give myself a pat on the back, although that's pretty great, but I'm saying this because that means we've got incredible data to help others in the art business think about how to build their online digital presence successfully. So because we've got access to all of this activity in the online space, unlike any other art business we can tell you what's working, what's not working, what the successful galleries are doing and what those are falling behind are not doing. And it's really important, because we really are at a transitional point in the art industry between this kind of convergence of the legacy art world going through a bit of an uncomfortable phase as they're adopting the modern digital space.

Top tips for attracting the next generation of collectors and future proofing your business

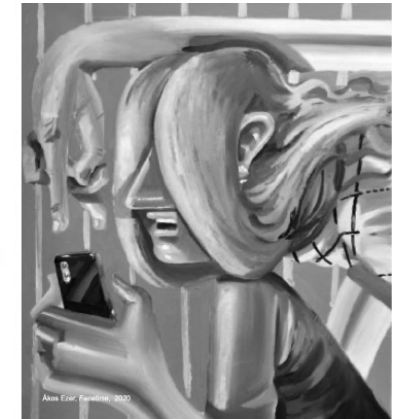
1

Meet collectors where they are—online!

Next-Gen Collectors are internet-first. They discover and search for artists online whose works they eventually buy:

- **66%** of collectors discover new artists via online marketplaces
- **58%** of collectors find new artists via social

Source: 2022 Art Collector Insights



“Meet collectors where they are.” Where are collectors? Where is this next generation doing everything? Online. This is an internet first generation, they grew up with iPads and phones in their hands, they do everything online. We never thought 10 years ago somebody would buy a diamond engagement ring on the internet without looking at it, or a car or a house or a three-million-dollar graphic of an ape, but here we are. Art should be no different, and what we're seeing is that 66% of collectors discover new artists via online marketplaces and 58% of collectors find new artists via social media.

None of this should be surprising information, I think all of us are probably on social media more than we would like and we're researching something from Google, from Instagram, from Artsy, from Artnet, from all these different platforms and kind of building our information pool. If you're not online as a gallery, you're basically just stepping out of the race altogether, and if you think you don't need to be online and you're just going to continue doing business the same way you have been doing for 30 to 40 years—I've heard this line many times on calls—then you can expect your business to stay 30 to 40 years in the past. The internet has changed the world dramatically, this has happened in just the last few years, the art industry probably being one of the last to adopt online. But the writing is on the wall, you're either going to get ahead of it or try to catch up.

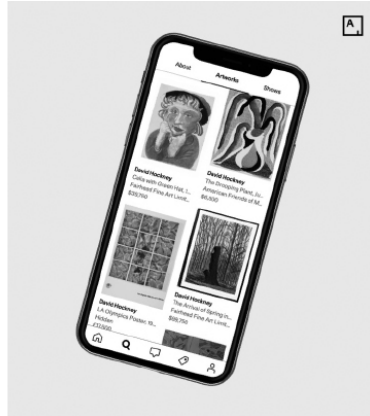
2

Make discovery & learning intuitive

Be proactive and deliberate with your online strategy. It's not enough to have a website.

Smart algorithms help users discover new artists and galleries they love through curated recommendations.

Are you adapting your business to online?
Are you listening to the new consumer?



“Make discovery and learning intuitive.” Be proactive and deliberate with your online strategy. It's not enough to have a website and it's not enough to just be online, you have to think about how you're showing up online. The same way, it's not enough to just open a gallery and not put any effort into it and think that that's enough. You have to think about online in a different way than you think about your physical gallery. It's not the same thing, it doesn't operate in the same way, people don't think the same way online as they might at a gallery. If you're not making it convenient and easy and smooth for that new generation of collectors, they are going to skip over you and go to the gallery that's speaking their language, things like smart algorithms.

We've been investing a lot in algorithm matchmaking at Artsy and why that matters is because there are thousands of artists, hundreds of thousands of artworks and not everybody is coming to the platform to search for a Warhol, a Banksy, a Basquiat or a Kiefer, as we've heard for the last two days, although you can buy an Anselm Kiefer today on Artsy that is listed in dynamic offer for up to nine hundred thousand pounds—whatever wants that piece, it's there. But not everybody is coming to Artsy with a very specific goal or artist. Many people are coming to discover new works, new galleries, they want to be delighted by something new in the art world, but how do they cut through the noise and find something that appeals to them?

Somebody mentioned if you go on Spotify without any purpose you're not going to think it's any good, because there's just everything and anything and it's not necessarily your taste. So what we've been investing in and thinking a lot about at Artsy that has really driven a lot of discovery for emerging artists

and younger galleries is this algorithm matchmaking, similar to actually how you would have on Spotify or even TikTok: the more somebody's on Artsy, using it, liking something, searching for something, following an artist or a gallery, the more we're able to develop really targeted recommendations for them, and then they will start receiving emails and notifications with similar artists or artworks that they might like but have never heard of that artist or the gallery. Now they're getting to discover new things that are really interesting for them.

We love this part of what we do because we're not just here to support the big galleries, we're here to kind of level the playing field for all gallery partners so that they can have access to the same benefits and advantages as somebody who has really deep pockets, by getting it through a kind of unified marketplace where we're investing in these things on behalf of galleries and we're able to also drive value for collectors as a two-sided marketplace. We want to make sure collectors have something interesting and engaging to do when they're on Artsy and we want to make sure that galleries have an opportunity to get discovered and really build up the careers of their emerging artists. So, you have to think about: are you adapting your business to online? Are you listening to the new consumer? And it doesn't matter what used to work or how things used to happen, we can't be looking backwards, we need to be looking forward and we need to do it as quickly as it's happening in front of us.

3

Build trust and transparency

Next generation collectors want to buy art with the same trust and transparency of other platforms:

- Visible pricing on artworks
- Safe and seamless transactions
- Access to artist analytics



“Build trust and transparency.” This is a really big one. As I mentioned in the beginning, the art world can sometimes be a little bit opaque and secretive. Even today, if I walk into a regular gallery, it's mostly a quiet white room. There is oftentimes no information on the artworks, there's no pricing, I sometimes

can't even see who the artist is. Then there's one person who is sitting at the desk who may or may not be interested in chatting with me, but I have to then make a really big effort, put my pride aside, see if I'm going to be received welcomingly or not, or they think I'm just somebody wasting their time, and then ask a basic question like: "How much does this work cost? I just want to know if it's in my budget. Is this a hundred thousand, is it twenty thousand? Just give me the basic information." And this is really a kind of legacy art world practice that is not translating online.

“NEXT GENERATION COLLECTORS WANT TO BUY ART WITH THE SAME TRUST AND TRANSPARENCY OF OTHER PLATFORMS AND OF EVERYTHING ELSE THEY DO ONLINE.”

Next generation collectors want to buy art with the same trust and transparency of other platforms and of everything else they do online. When they come to an art marketplace and see a whole mix of things happening, some artworks have pricing, some don't, some artworks are transactable, some aren't, this one is available, this one's not available, they want to know who you are, they want to place the work. I get all that, but what that ends up doing is just blocking out that user and keeping the art industry quite closed and limited to a small audience. Interesting fun fact: only 2% of luxury consumers today buy art, that means there is 98% of people with a lot of disposable income, luxury consumers who are spending lots of money on everything else, watches, jewellery, cars, luxury fashion, but not on art. I think that's been a product of how the industry has operated in large part and it's built to kind of keep people out, and if you're not an insider you really are an outsider.

We're always thinking about the resilient collector, how to track the new collector. The most resilient thing we can do for our art business is expanding the number of people who are collecting art altogether so we're not selling to the same people we're seeing at the same fairs every two months. Why don't we sell to many, many more people and make art collecting as ubiquitous as music, film, cinema, all the other art genres?

We saw interestingly on the NFT panel talk about how different the NFT art world is compared to what they were noticing in the art world, where people are kind of community based and collaborative. This is a really important aspect to growing the art market, but it'll only work if we do it together in

the art world. We need all the galleries to think in a slightly different way to progress the industry forward, so that we're cracking open that 2% of luxury consumers who are buying art and making it a much wider pool of people. Then we'll see a whole other resilience to the art market.

“WHY DON'T WE SELL TO MANY, MANY MORE PEOPLE AND MAKE ART COLLECTING AS UBIQUITOUS AS MUSIC, FILM, CINEMA, ALL THE OTHER ART GENRES?”

Number one requests we get from collectors on Artsy: safe and seamless transactions and access to artist analytics. They want to know what they're buying in many cases and if they're making a smart decision. And visible pricing. We do an annual survey of 1,200 collectors across Artsy globally and nearly 70% of next generation collectors say lack of visible pricing prevented them from buying online. But we're making progress: in 2022, about 75% of the works uploaded to the platform had visible pricing, that's a really great improvement from 2018, when only 33% of works were uploaded with visible pricing.

Visible pricing sends the trust signals that this next generation of collectors respect and value, and when you're hiding the prices you're already starting the perception from the wrong foot. They're used to everything being available, information, authenticity, transparency, and then they question why something would not have a visible price to them so that they can just make an informed decision. Similar to when you walk into a gallery and have no information, I'm sure a lot of people walk right out without having asked, and that could have been an artwork that was in their budget but they were too intimidated to ask because maybe it's not, and then they're just standing there with a really expensive price tag and go: "Oh, do you have this in polka dots? Okay, sorry, that's not what I was looking for. Maybe next time."

Thinking about building that trust, something else that's really important is seamless transactions. 85% of Artsy buyers make their first purchase through the e-commerce function when they can click and either make an offer or a purchase, and galleries see four to six times higher sales when artworks are e-commerce enabled versus "contact gallery". So here's a bit of a misconception: you'll see if you ever browse Artsy you can see the price of some works, you can click and make an offer, make a purchase, and the

gallery would still get to approve that, but then there are other artworks with no price and it just says “contact gallery”. What we’re seeing is that collectors are starting to skip over those works instead of what the gallery thinks is going to happen, which is forced engagement. So the gallery thinks if they have it as “contact gallery” that person will 100% reach out to them if they’re interested, but what’s actually happening is that person is moving on to something else, where they’ve got the information and they feel a lot more comfortable, and if they don’t want to they don’t have to engage in a three-day email conversation, which is not what somebody comes online to do.

**“IF YOU HAVE ‘CONTACT GALLERY’
ON ANY MARKETPLACE, ALL YOU’RE
DOING IS GOING ONLINE AND
TELLING SOMEONE TO GO TO THE
GALLERY, SO YOU’RE NOT REALLY
ONLINE AT ALL.”**

Somebody said a funny thing just this morning, it was actually Jérôme, which was if you have “contact gallery” on your Artsy page, on any marketplace, all you’re doing is going online and telling someone to go to the gallery so you’re not really online at all, you’re kind of just a little bit online, but you’re mostly still offline. That is not considered building your online business. What doesn’t work is taking the physical and traditional gallery experience and plopping it on the internet and thinking you’re going to get the same results.

It’s two very different initiatives and we need to be listening to the collector, otherwise we’re going to be missing the collectors right over our head and then they’ve moved on. Actually, works with visible pricing have six times higher sell through rate on Artsy. So what you think you’re losing by not forcing a conversation or shielding pricing, you’re actually losing six times more, which is conversion rates and transactions and engaging the next generation of collectors that are looking for those trust signals.

You know, especially if it’s somebody who’s not an experienced collector, it can be very daunting to go on a platform like Artsy and not know where to begin. We do try to create a lot of curated moments, and then of course the matchmaking and different viewing rooms so people can look at different groupings of works and programmings. But something that’s really important that we’ve rolled out is free market analytics. You can basically look up any artist and you can see what their most recent auction results are and if it’s going

up or down. That gives collectors an additional sense of comfort to be able to make an informed decision, certainly at higher value price points. So again, this kind of goes back to the same theme which is transparency, transactability, authenticity and trust. If you want to attract the next generation of collectors you need to be thinking of all of these things which can be completely contrary to how we’ve thought of these things in the past in the art world.

4

Connect with culture

- Next-Gen Collectors view their art as an expression of their personal tastes and beliefs. They share their collections on social media
- Tastes are often driven by cultural currents

The artists who saw the greatest leaps in demand on Artsy in 2021 were emerging artists of racially diverse backgrounds

Source: Artland magazine



“Connect with culture.” Next generation collectors view their art as an expression of their personal tastes, of their beliefs. Whereas before a collection would be private, now you’re seeing collectors sharing it online, they’re proud of their collections, they want to share it with their friends, it’s something that represents them. Tastes are often driven by cultural currents as well. Whatever is going on could really move the market. What’s been fantastic is artists that saw the greatest leaps in demand on Artsy in 2021 were emerging artists of racially diverse backgrounds, and that’s actually something that we think very seriously about as well in terms of equal representation. We’re always very conscious about who we’re surfacing, if we’re not prioritising the usual Western male artist, and we want to make sure that we’re giving equal visibility and exposure to artists from all over the world and from all kinds of backgrounds.

In terms of some interesting stats, these are artists that just joined Artsy in the last 12 months, so they’re the most followed newly joined artists to the platform. Seven out of ten of them are artists of colour, including the top three. So as somebody mentioned, we’ve seen a real increase in interest in African art and diaspora, that’s been a really exciting shift in the market. It’s something fresh, it’s exciting, and it’s always good to have different things going on.

We're also seeing another generation of collectors having different interests and different types of artists. That's a wonderful thing, thinking about how to help build artists careers and be able to support more art and artists globally.

“WHAT’S BEEN FANTASTIC IS ARTISTS THAT SAW THE GREATEST LEAPS IN DEMAND ON ARTSY IN 2021 WERE EMERGING ARTISTS OF RACIALLY DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS.”

For us, what really drives our mission and our vision as a platform and as a marketplace is the idea that if somebody wants to become an artist as a career, this should not mean that you are a starving artist or are going to have a very hard road ahead of you. We want it to be something that is a viable career, that can fuel your life and that can support your life financially, by attracting more people to art collecting, by giving a greater platform to artists of all types from all over the world and be able to help grow that art collecting market to support these artists. Something that we think about a lot in terms of culture and meeting the next generation of collectors, where they are and how they think. We have the Artsy Vanguard every year where we announce the 20 hot emerging artists of the year and kind of give them a lot of promotion and marketing, and a lot of these artists end up getting picked up by museums and major galleries following that Vanguard, so this is again another opportunity to elevate rising stars and help give a voice and a platform to different artists.

About social impact, I think we've seen a huge change in the last few years about corporate responsibility and this next generation of users and buyers in general, not just in the art world, thinking about the types of companies they buy from and if their values are aligned with their values. We've recently rolled out impact auctions at Artsy, which is basically we work with primary in-demand artists and galleries and centre a major spotlight auction around a benefit cause where we're able to drive a lot of exposure to good causes that the artists or the gallery are looking to support. We currently have a Stanley Whitney right now in auction through Gagosian and this is going to support Planned Parenthood and Art for Justice, causes that are dear to us as well as the gallery and the artist.

This is again thinking about how to use your voice and your platform. Every one of us has a voice and a platform, you don't have to be a big marketplace. We all have a lot of impact on the world and in the world that we're operating

in. We work with a lot of very wealthy people, high net worth individuals, and I know there's a lot of philanthropy in art which is fantastic and that's always something important to keep in mind in the art business and in thinking about that next generation of collectors.

“IT’S AN ALL-ENCOMPASSING EXPERIENCE FOR ART GALLERIES AND BUSINESSES TO THINK ABOUT THEIR ONLINE STRATEGY IN A REALLY SERIOUS WAY.”

It's a process and it's an all-encompassing experience for art galleries and businesses to think about their online strategy in a really serious way and build on that continuously. It's a long-term thing, it's not: "I tried it for two months and it didn't work." This is a forever thing, it's like saying: "I opened the gallery for two months and it didn't work." It takes time to build your business, it takes time to build your exposure and it's really important that you give yourself the fairest chance to succeed in order to be resilient in the face of whatever economy we might be facing coming up, to be able to continuously bring in that next generation of buyers into your business so that they're engaged with you. Whether they started out buying a print from you in their younger years and then grow with your gallery into a major collector, that is an important aspect of growing your business.

Artsy is the internet, right? So you're exposed to a vast audience, not everybody is an art historian or an art expert, and sometimes we need to coach galleries on being patient with some of the questions they get asked online or some of the offers they receive, and maybe that person wasn't familiar with a particular artist. Some galleries can sometimes get a little bit impatient and we have to tell them: "This is somebody who's ready to spend money and made you an offer. Take a minute or two to bring them in, educate them and then that is potentially a collector for life." We hear many galleries say that they've met some of their best collectors through Artsy. I see what the galleries that are succeeding are doing every day on the platform, and those that are falling behind that don't want to change the way things have been done, so then don't expect better results than the effort you're putting into it. It's a different business and it's really important we think about it that way and plan ahead for our business.

We're helping people meet collectors where they are, help them discover new art, build trust and transparency, connect with culture and overall grow the art collecting market so that we are resilient in the face of anything as an industry. Thank you.

Contributions and questions (c/q) from the audience

Q1. Thank you for this beautiful corporate presentation. You said in the presentation that 50% of collectors spent half of their budget online in 2021, right? I wanted to know if you have the data about these, the transaction that was made. Do you know if the works that were bought online are new discoveries or just a transaction happening after the collector saw it during a fair or in a gallery sometime before?

**“WHAT WE’RE SEEING A LOT IS
SOMEBODY DISCOVERING AN ARTIST
ON INSTAGRAM AND THEN CLICKING
THROUGH AND RESEARCHING THEM
MORE ON ARTSY.”**

C. K. That's a great question and actually that brings up an important point, which is that online and physical are not two separate businesses, they are actually meant to be highly complementary to each other. We view ourselves as the digital arm for the art galleries and the art world and not as a replacement for it at all. And to your point, what we're seeing a lot is somebody discovering an artist on Instagram and then clicking through and researching them more on Artsy.

If it's available there they might buy it on Artsy, or they see an artwork on Artsy and they'll go to the physical gallery and check out the work in person and maybe buy it in person, or they'll be at an art fair and they'll scan a QR code—which is something also that we're using more and more these days—and they like the work at the physical fair, they scan it, then they can transact easily and seamlessly right on an app that they use, where their payment is direct and safe and secure, they have shipping included and they don't have to think about it, instead of spending days wiring money and this clunky experience. So they are really complementary to each other and they are meant to support each other.

We don't even know what the real data is of people that saw something online and went and bought it the physical gallery, because the gallery is not tracking that, they wouldn't even know, but that's happening all the time. There's even a lot of unrealised gains from having a strong presence online that drives people to your fair, to your gallery, to whatever, and these things have become like a circular loop, building each other up. I don't have the exact data on what you want, but it's almost impossible to have it, because we need galleries to document that.

Q2. Maybe it's nice to share my experience. We know Artsy very well and we ask our collectors and the new collectors that we meet through Artsy, we ask them, and I have to say that most of the time it's not that they've seen the piece in our gallery or in the fair with us, but at some point the collector was in contact with an artwork from the artist or the practice of the artist and maybe sometimes three or four years pass before something happens, and then it can happen through Artsy or through another platform.

**“STATS SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES.
GALLERIES WITH VISIBLE PRICING
HAVE SIX TIMES HIGHER SALES.”**

This leads me to the key point, which is my struggle with transparency and pricing, and we've talked about it. The same way that I totally agree with you, with the next generation of collectors and the new habits in collecting, that transparency is opening the door and opening the windows of your house and it is the process of collecting, I do believe that we are, and let me know if you agree, we are still in a transition time and there are two speeds. And in my experience it still works better to have the collector who really wants the piece and engages with the piece, and the artist and the gallery to ask me about it, and I will answer the price. Then the conversation is open and maybe this piece is not available for their budget, but I do have a contact and the possibility to offer something else.

C. K. I obviously hear that point from other galleries and I think it really comes down to weighing the pros and cons, right? What I was saying before is there's a little bit of a misconception, which is: if I don't show the price—because this is why it's also done that way, galleries don't show you the price so you have to go, engage, talk and whatever—but what we think we're missing out on from those conversations that might not happen—because you don't have a hundred people asking you: “Hi, how much does this cost” as most of your

inquiries online—you're gaining much more, which is that the people who didn't come and ask you or didn't engage because there was no price are going somewhere else.

“WE’RE ALSO SEEING THIS HUGE INCREASE IN KOREAN COLLECTORS, EVEN INCREASING SEARCHES FOR KOREAN ARTISTS. WE’VE HAD OVER 230% INCREASE IN KOREAN USERS ON THE PLATFORM.”

And again, the stats speak for themselves. Galleries with visible pricing have six times higher sales or sell through rate. So we have the anecdotal aspect of things, but then we've got the data on what 3,700 galleries are doing and who is getting more and who is maximising on their platform or on their online experience, whether it's on Artsy or your own website. It's just a longer road to do it on your own, but it's an important trust signal if you actually care about bringing in the next generation. It's not a point that I'm here to debate, I can only represent what the collector audience continue... It's the number one frustration we hear in every single survey, we get emails about: "I don't want to send money to this gallery in another country. Why can't they just transact on the platform? I don't want to call a gallery, they keep telling me to call them or email. I don't want to do that, I'm online." If the gallery names are there, if they want to call and have that experience with that gallery they are absolutely free to do it, there's nothing that would stop them, but trying to force it is forcing them somewhere else. The data speaks for itself, but I hear your point. I know that there are some gains around getting that engagement, but you'll get a lot more qualified engagement if it's starting from an honest space.

Q3. Is geography relevant in terms of active buyers on Artsy? In the data you manage on your platform, your collectors geography, where can we expect Asian collectors to be more active? I mean, based in Asia or based in the US, etc.?

C. K. The collector trends on our marketplace are pretty representative of what we're seeing in the real art world, with the US being the top collecting market than the UK. We're also seeing this huge increase in Korean collectors, that's been really exciting, even increasing searches for Korean artists. We've had over 230% increase in Korean users on the platform and the second highest Android app downloads. And speaking of the Asian market, very digitally and tech oriented, may not be interested in having a conversation, might not be

native to English and that could be a deterrent as well. They're ahead of every other market probably in Asia in terms of digital, and if we're not giving them what they want in the right way in a quick way, in an easy way, then you're also going to be missing out on that market too. Thank you, good questions.

Q4. Hi, my name is Ricard, I work on social communication here in a gallery in Barcelona.-First, I do agree with what you said, that the engagement with the collector is important and sometimes with that purchase you're missing this. And it's important for galleries to build the relationship with a collector over the years because, as you said, somebody that starts with a little collection, over the years can end up having a good one. I just wanted to ask, because we've been discussing about NFTs during these two sessions and you talk about this next generation of collectors. Can you share some information on this? About all these percentages that you have, like what's going on with NFTs, because you have a space on Artsy for NFTs.

C. K. Yes, we actually had a couple of NFTs auctions on the platform last year. They did extremely well, we were also supporting a good cause, Girls Who Code, and I think we had a 95% sell through rate on that auction. This was before the market cooled down. I would say there is definitely still interest and it's still an area that we're thinking about, but because it has cooled down considerably from where it was last year, it's a little bit on the sidelines at this point and we're waiting to see, and we're always looking at. But yeah, you can search NFTs as one of the menu items at the top of our navigation bar. Galleries can post NFTs, but they have to do the transaction on their own through their own crypto wallets, so we don't support that yet transactionally. But you can certainly find some great NFTs and CryptoPunks on Artsy.

Q5. Hi, I'm a gallerist from Austria. I've talked with a lot of my colleagues about Artsy, because actually your recruitment is very active, you know, every second day I get a different person asking me if I want to join. So, what I heard from my colleagues is that it's more works for lower prices that are sold and then a lot of them quit again because they said the buyers are in the US and the shipment prices are higher than the actual work prices, so it's not worth for them, that's one thing. And the other experience that a lot of the colleagues told me, and that I experienced once after an art fair, was that you get a lot of requests once you enter, like on the occasion of an art fair, and then my colleagues said that they think it's fake requests, because they lead to nothing kind of. So it's kind of a generated request to force you to join and then once you buy it or chip in then your kind of...

C. K. I've heard three questions there, so let me break it down. One of them, that they think that you can only sell low price works. So is it just selling, because you'd have to ship to the US, you have to pay for shipping whatever that price is, whether it's on Artsy or not. The question is do you want to ship to US collectors, whether it's through Artsy or on your own, right? So that's maybe is like a secondary point related to the platform, it's a question of if a gallery is set up for that. Well, yeah, collectors can search galleries by city wherever they're located, they can even search artists by nationalities, there's a lot of search functions, a gallery can choose if they want to accept a sale or not. So if they don't think it's worth it to sell to somebody, although I imagine the shipping cost would be passed off to the buyer, and we also have Artsy shipping, so I'm not sure if your colleagues are using that but basically we calculate the shipping costs globally on behalf of galleries and that cost is passed off to the buyer. This is something to really help remove the workload from gallery partners' plates because this is a really complex process.

**“IF A GALLERY UPLOADS THREE
ARTWORKS IN THE WHOLE YEAR,
WHETHER IT'S ON INSTAGRAM OR
ARTSY OR ANYWHERE ELSE, THAT'S NOT
AN ONLINE STRATEGY.”**

We certainly don't have people that are sending inquiries at all but we do drive a lot of traffic around art fairs we partner with. What we do is when we have an art fair we basically recreate the fair on Artsy digitally so that anybody who, or even people who do go to it, but if you can't attend the physical art fair you can actually browse all the exhibitors and galleries and artworks on Artsy and for three weeks after the fair closes. And because we drive a lot of attention and promotion, and the art fairs also drive a lot of attention and promotion to the digital site, it actually has four times higher page views on art fair artworks, so that's probably why they're seeing a big influx of increase during those times.

But we do sell artworks of all values, obviously, like the entire world, it's easier to sell things at lower price points whether it's in the real world or in an online world, there's just more people able to buy things here and then as it goes up in the pyramid, your pool of collectors shrinks as you get to the million-dollar ranges. But we also sell works for hundreds of thousands of dollars and we have galleries making millions of dollars through the platform. It also depends how you use it. Two galleries can even have the same artworks and one of them can be doing really well and the other one not because they're not proactive

with how they're using it, and that's an important point. It's like joining a gym, if you join a platform you need to invest, you need to be proactive, you need to do it if you want to see results, and if you don't, you're not going to see anything and then you're going to say it doesn't work, but this is like a two-sided partnership.

So, if a gallery uploads three artworks in the whole year, whether it's on Instagram or Artsy or anywhere else, that's not an online strategy. And we know that galleries are oftentimes small teams, that have limited resources and have to choose what to prioritise, so that's the tricky thing. Do you prioritise something that you think is going to drive return on your investment, but you don't know yet because you haven't tried it, or the thing happening right now in the gallery? We do sometimes have tough talks with galleries that, again, you have to be deliberate if you truly care about succeeding online and growing your art collecting base. You have to be uploading continuously, you have to have good pictures, you should have multiple images—three images of an artwork have two and a half times sell through rate than one image of an artwork.

Think about anything you buy online. And thinking about online should not be thinking about art online, it's just thinking about how you as a user, like any other online experience outside of the art world, make that connection. They shouldn't be that different. Even if it is a very unique industry, you have to think of the user experience you would like to have on the platform and if you are delivering that experience to other users or if you're doing it in a way that doesn't make sense to an online user.

So, again, being very proactive and uploading good quality images. The more information you put, the more your artwork will surface in a search, because you can search by many different features on a platform like Artsy or even on Google. If a work is transactable or has visible pricing, it surfaces above works that do not. If you and another gallery represent the same artist, if that gallery is showing prices his works will show up before yours and yours could be on the third page, so you are again sending that user to your competitors or to another gallery who has understood what the online collector wants and is delivering it. They're seeing the results and it's a very clear distinction. But at the same time if you're a young gallery with emerging artists, it does take time to build your business in the same way it would take time to build your business in the physical world. It's not a magic bullet, this is a long-term consideration, this is marketing and exposure and it means you have to give people the opportunity to discover you, to find you, to run into your artists, in

the same way that you'd be doing it in the real world. You have to give it the same level of attention and commitment.

Q6. How many artworks do you sell each year on Artsy?

C. K. It's a lot, we don't disclose the exact number. But we have a thousand new people buying an artwork every month, and that's just a first artwork. Think about people who are repeat buyers buying continuously, sales that go off the platform that we can't even measure, there's a lot of that also, meeting a collector on Artsy and then taking the sale offline. So there's even lots of unrealised gains, but there's also a massive residual value of that collector that you've met on any online platform.

Anna Carreras

is a generative artist and creative coder focusing her work on the use of algorithms to create visuals that foster memories or evocate new ones. She codes her work from scratch to create images that cannot be achieved in any other medium. She is interested in complexity that emerges from small simple behaviors. She has exhibited at Feral File, Art Blocks Curated, and CVerso galleria. She has also developed and exhibited generative art and digital installations in renowned national and international institutions, museums, and festivals like MUTEK ES+AR, Sónar Festival, Eufònic Urbà Decentraland, Venice Art Biennale, Medialab Prado Madrid or Abandon Normal Devices Liverpool, among others.

Miguel Ángel Sánchez

founded ADN Galeria in Barcelona. In 2003 as a hybrid platform between commercial mediation and cultural contribution aiming at promoting current artistic ideas and trends. The program focuses on content-based productions that work as a semantic reflection of the contextual dynamics in which they emerge. Transcending the role in the market, the gallery commits to the artists to build international networks of appreciation and to make possible a strong backing for their careers, thanks to an active policy of media coverage, online communication, and participation at art fairs. In 2013 the gallery opened ADN platform, located in Sant Cugat, on the outskirts of Barcelona.

Llucià Homs

is a cultural consultant, curator, and art dealer. After being a gallerist for 18 years, he founded Talking Galleries in 2011 in Barcelona. From 2011 to 2015 he was Director for the Promotion of Cultural Affairs at the Barcelona City Council and Director of La Virreina Centre de la Imatge. He co-founded LOOP Barcelona Fair and Festival in 2003 and was Managing Partner of La Fàbrica Barcelona (2009-2011). In 2016 he took over as Director of Talking Galleries and he combines this role with others, such as co-Director of the cultural management company Hänsel* i Gretel* and his weekly column on the art market which is published by the Spanish newspaper *La Vanguardia*.

Do Artists Need Galleries to Sell their Work?

SPEAKERS

Anna Carreras & Miguel Ángel Sánchez

MODERATOR

Llucià Homs

Talking Galleries Barcelona Symposium



Do Artists Need Galleries to Sell their Work?

Llucà Homs (L. H.): We've reached the end of the programme, all that's left is Paco's session, who will recap everything that has taken place during these two intense days. One of the final questions we ask ourselves is whether artists need galleries to sell their work. I think that following the Artsy session, we've now got an idea of where things might go in relation to this question.

The panel's statement has to do with reflecting on how the global COVID-19 pandemic forced galleries to rethink the role of digital channels and, above all, with the way in which business has been put into question by the increase in information available on the internet and, especially, due to the opportunities offered by new communication technologies to sellers, artists and buyers. As the market moves online, more and more artists are contacting collectors directly to sell their work, often via social media, where Instagram is the key.

As this model of direct-to-consumer art sales gains traction, we wonder where traditional galleries are left, if we can even call them traditional, and if this trend is going to transform the traditional business model of galleries. These are two key issues that, in my opinion, are going to revolve around today's session. In response to the question "Do artists need galleries to sell their work?", the answer, for now, is yes, but there are other mixed models and approaches that we'll try to analyse during this talk.

Entering the panel and today's guests, we have Anna Carreras, artist, and Miguel Ángel Sánchez, director of ADN Galeria.

Anna Carreras is a creative programmer and digital artist, interested in experimenting with interactive communication, and has focused her work on the use of generative algorithms, creative coding and interactive technology as means of communication that generate experiences. She has presented interactive and digital installations at Cosmocaixa (Barcelona Science Museum), Llum Barcelona, Sónar Innovation Challenge 2016, MIRA Visual Arts Festival, Medialab Prado, Abandon Normal Devices Liverpool, among

others, and has exhibited her generative work at Feral File or Decentraland. Therefore, you can check out her work seeing as it's very well documented on the internet.

**“IN THE PHYSICAL MARKET
GALLERIES ARE IN THE CENTRE.
HOWEVER, IN THE DIGITAL MARKET,
THE CENTRE REVOLVES MORE IN LINE
WITH THE ARTIST.”**

On the other side, we have Miguel Ángel Sánchez, who studied Art History in New York. He has a master's in Museography and Management of Cultural Heritage (University of Barcelona) and a master's in Aesthetics and Art Theory (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona). In addition, and I think this is a key element, he has completed several Management programmes at business schools, which gives Miguel Ángel a distinguishing point in his training compared to other gallerists. His gallery, the ADN Galeria in Barcelona, “is a hybrid platform between commercial mediation and cultural contribution with the aim of promoting current artistic ideas and trends. The programme focuses on content-based productions that function as a semantic reflection of the contextual dynamics in which they emerge. Transcending the role of the market, the gallery commits to artists by building international networks of appreciation and enabling strong support for their careers.” I would like to point out that in 2013 you opened the ADN Platform space, located in Sant Cugat, on the outskirts of Barcelona. And if you look calmly through their website, there is a whole ADN network, which hints at the wealth of nuances and layers that your gallery is working on to serve both collectors and artists.

Digging into the background of the topic, and let me situate things a bit, for me the key to what we're going to deal with here is the issue of distribution. As we were discussing with Miguel Ángel these days, it's treated repeatedly in business schools and many cases are studied in which distribution is key.

A few weeks ago, in a talk that Talking Galleries was commissioned to give at The Armory Show in New York, in relation to the digital issue, the conclusion had to do with how in the physical market galleries are in the centre. The gallery is positioned in the centre of this distribution element. However, in the digital market, the centre revolves more in line with the artist. It's debatable, but it was one of the conclusions that was reached.

Therefore, this today is a disruption in the traditional art market. NFTs have come to impact this element we're discussing today, and I'd like to add that this isn't a new element. At Sotheby's, in 2008, Damien Hirst held a direct auction of new work, and it was a great success. But let's not forget that that same night, Lehman Brothers collapsed and we began to enter one of the most important recessions ever known in the history of the art market.

So, the element of sidestepping the gallery is not new. There are more and better examples, but what it leads us to understand is that there are basically two models: one, more physical, the traditional gallery, and the other, the digital one, where the artist takes on a new-found importance.

**“YOU'RE SELLING DIRECTLY TO
THE COLLECTOR, BUT IT'S ALSO
TRUE THAT YOU'RE DOING IT HAND
IN HAND WITH A RECOGNISED
PLATFORM.”**

Starting with Anna, what is your experience in selling work directly to collectors? Because you've sold a lot of work in the digital realm and you've done it all directly through your own channels. Tell us about your experience.

Anna Carreras (A. C.) In my case, the first time I sold directly to collectors was through an online platform called Feral File. It's curated and managed by a very well known contemporary artist from the United States [Casey Reas] and from the beginning people could buy art with their credit cards; it's not like Artsy, but you could use your card.

It's born from the curation of exhibitions, so there's always an exhibition that's curated with a lot of sense and criteria, and we, the artists, propose and hang pieces, which are then sold in series. My first sale was a series of 150 copies of the same piece. The price was 75 dollars a copy, and they sold out in two minutes, which is also very surprising, because if there are ten artists all selling 150 copies, then do the math... It's true that you're selling directly to the collector, but it's also true that you're doing it hand in hand with a recognised platform, with certain support and curatorial criteria for each exhibition.

My second direct sale to collectors was on another platform where there's also a curation board that selects and proposes projects. It's a much larger platform, which has more experience and a very large community of collectors

behind it, to whom they also try to offer this whole online experience. So artists have a direct channel with these collectors and can talk with them. This really meant a change. In my case, I had already exhibited elsewhere, but suddenly I find myself talking to collectors about my work, which, to start with, is surprising, and it's also very interesting to get their direct feedback, to know what they think, what they can say about your work, etc. In this second sale it was a bigger series made up of a thousand unique generative art pieces that are generated in real time.

“PROGRAMMES LIKE ADN’S DON’T HAVE THIS LEVEL OF SUCCESS THROUGH THE ONLINE SALES CHANNEL. NOT EVERYTHING CIRCULATES IN THE SAME WAY.”

L. H. That they sold very well, for good prices and, therefore, the set...

A. C. Yes, it's very favourable to the artist. Again, it was a sale linked to a platform, where someone has already done the work of appearing in the space and looking after things. Last week in Berlin, on the occasion of an exhibition I participated in [*IN TOUCH, Art in the Age of Post NFT-ism*] and during which the server crashed, I also sold a series of 25 pieces in 2 minutes. It was curated by Anika [Meier], who's here today, and Nicole from VerticalCrypto. In other words, it was also as part of an exhibition that provides a context to the art we make and sell.

L. H. The ideas you explain reinforce the views that sometimes reach us from certain artists we're in contact with. Above all, those who have many followers on Instagram, who make pieces designed to be sold online, who announce series of 50 to 75 pieces at any given moment and sell the entire series in a few minutes; that is, they create and supply work strictly based on reception. This is interesting and worth keeping in mind.

Miguel Ángel, we'd like to know what your experience has been on the digital market. Your gallery, if I may say so, is of an advanced type, dealing with a very specific type of art, being very aware of the business aspect and of how the market works. And, therefore, we'd like to know what difficulties you've encountered in relation to the digital market.

Miguel Ángel Sánchez (M. A. S.) First, I'd like to make a small footnote related to what Anna was saying. I think it's important to understand that digital

native work, almost organically, has to be channelled via digital mediums. Any channel presents its conductivities and resistances. Programmes like ADN's, or programmes like that of the *àngels barcelona* gallery here in Barcelona and many others, we really don't have this level of success through the online sales channel. This doesn't mean that we're not investing in it, that we're not backing it or understanding that a multi-channel approach is not only the future, but is basically the present. But not everything circulates in the same way.

L. H. What you're saying, is it related to the theme, the political perspective of your programme, or also to the formats of the work? If it's an installation, it tends to be more difficult to find a buyer...

“A HIGH PERCENTAGE OF THE WORK THAT’S MEDIATED AND MARKETED THROUGH DIGITAL CHANNELS IS FLAT AND DOESN’T REQUIRE A GRAND CONTEXT.”

M. A. S. Exactly, the formats. We were talking with Paco [Barragán] a few years ago and we wondered if the consolidation of the art fairs channel was going to have an impact on our work, on our practices, and obviously it has. The same is happening with screens. We are looking at certain work—I'm not fully knowledgeable regarding digital art and am not an expert, beyond the great interest I have in it—but it's true that a high percentage of the work that's mediated and marketed through digital channels is flat and doesn't require a grand context. I'm not making any value judgement, but it seems to me that these are its attributes.

Yes, we are seeing a standardisation, the revival of painting, which we've killed so many times and it keeps on reappearing. And now, when we watched Carine's video, we saw a high-speed sequence of painting after painting, after painting, after painting, after painting. I practically don't hang any paintings in our gallery. That said, it's good to be on this panel, but I'm not going to be able to give a successful vision of what online commerce is, apart from the fact that for ADN it's very clear that we have to invest in this medium, that we have to make ourselves known in the digital realm and that we have to have a presence.

L. H. In my opinion, there's a key issue: that the entire digital environment not only serves as a correct sales channel, but also to find or seek engagement

with a specific community, which is important in your case. That's why we're also interested in knowing what your experience is in how to achieve this community commitment in digital environments.

M. A. S. In that sense, yes, we're definitely generating leads and a certain community around our online communication platforms. The conversion rate isn't very high, but transactions do occur thanks to that community. But in our case at least, they're never immediate. In the end, we're going to meet somewhere. Sabrina [Amrani] also pointed out that we're going through a period of transition, of transience: not everything is digital, nor is everything brick and mortar. And I think it will continue to be this way for a long time.

“WE’RE GOING THROUGH A PERIOD OF TRANSITION: NOT EVERYTHING IS DIGITAL, NOR IS EVERYTHING BRICK AND MORTAR. AND IT WILL CONTINUE TO BE THIS WAY FOR A LONG TIME.”

Allow me to make a digression with an anecdote. The big NFTs earthquake hits huge numbers with a bunch of zeros and such. We all start to inform ourselves about it. I, at least, start getting quite worried and try to inform myself as much as I can. I wanted to understand the dynamics of that channel—to me, it seems more like another channel than a discipline—and then propose to the artists I work with if we want to get into that party. Damn! Huge frustration, because I spent six months studying, working, asking, consulting, and when I was finally able to answer questions from the artists I work with, none of them wanted to make NFTs.

I mean, it's not so obvious that there really isn't room for everyone or for other types of work. In business schools, where we love acronyms, we were all deep in a VUCA moment until a few years ago, which sounded very, very radical, right? Volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity. This has already gone out of fashion and now some environments called BANI appear, which are brittle, anxious, nonlinear and, above all, incomprehensible.

Data mining is undoubtedly important to everyone, and we all do it in some way or another. We all look at our numbers to understand where we're going, right? But be careful, because there's a very high fog index in all this. We think we'll be able to make correct decisions based on the data and the tests are showing

that this isn't the case. To begin with, since the data is open and communicable to everyone, it's no longer a differential factor. We quickly learn the mechanics of how to read it and, honestly, it's of no use to us. They're of no use to us, at least to those of us who work with practices that require an entire conceptual framework, to understand the geopolitical contexts in which they're created, among other things. All this, through an iPhone screen, doesn't flow that well. Or at least that's been my experience.

“DATA MINING IS NO USE TO US, WHO WORK WITH PRACTICES THAT REQUIRE AN ENTIRE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK TO UNDERSTAND THE GEOPOLITICAL CONTEXTS IN WHICH WORKS ARE CREATED.”

L. H. Miguel Ángel, what you point out is very interesting. It's like there are two channels that in many cases aren't going to meet, but are going to work in parallel, and each one has its meaning and purpose. Therefore, I'd like to go into the advantages and disadvantages that the two models have, in my view. I'm a great defender of the fact that galleries provide significant value. But also, in my opinion, in this model in which the artist can deal directly with the collector there's a different sensibility that gallery owners have to understand, and they have to provide very significant value to really take the artist's work into consideration. Anna, tell us a little about this from your perspective.

A. C. My idea is that us, artists, make art—I have no idea about the channels, cookies and the rest that you mentioned. I try to get my art out to whoever likes it and wants to buy it, and that channel has been there to reach them. I think galleries are a part of the ecosystem and are very useful. You have knowledge, you have practices and experience that can accompany many artists, but perhaps you need to look around, discover new formulas that perhaps aren't being applied in current practices.

This year I said yes to an exhibition in a gallery in Milan, because it was a collective exhibition I really wanted to be a part of, alongside Grazia Varisco and other generative artists. And that can only be offered to me by a gallery, I can't do it online. But it's about looking for a way to approach the idea of: “We have those online channels; as a gallery, what can we do, what can we do with the experience we have”. I think it's a win-win situation, it works well for both parties, because artists who have a direct relationship with collectors

will also bring them to that gallery and bring them closer to that exhibition, to meet other artists from the gallery or that are related to the context, and this will also bring sales. In the end, a situation like this, where everyone feels comfortable and wins, seems ideal to me.

“PERHAPS GALLERIES NEED TO LOOK AROUND, DISCOVER NEW FORMULAS THAT PERHAPS AREN’T BEING APPLIED IN CURRENT PRACTICES.”

M. A. S. It is not a question of all or nothing, obviously there are nuances. If you allow me, recovering the question “Do artists need galleries?”, well, it depends on who. It depends on what kind of work you do. Undoubtedly, the entire value chain or everything that we implement in our service catalogue for our artists, who are ultimately our true clients, the ones we’re closest to and must keep close—so, with all that range of work that galleries can deploy for artists, of course we’re going to continue being useful. For everyone? No, not necessarily.

A. C. I also agree that not everything has to be NFTs...

L. H. There’s a reflection I’d like to make about what you do and that is that it often seems like the traditional market, to call it that way so we know what we’re referring to—the traditional market concept no longer excites me, but I think it’s clear so we can understand each other—is running into some trouble while making the transition to digital. That’s to say: at the moment, art fairs have no intention of accepting digital galleries in their stands, and this is an element that, for me, is significant. This resistance to accepting galleries that are relevant in the market and with significant turnover, which could easily present a digital art stand. I think this is somehow generating a dissociation—I remember the news that “In Arco there were only two NFT pieces”—perhaps also because the galleries or platforms that are working with these formats are not allowed to take part... To scratch beneath the surface, I ask you, Anna: do artists also become community managers these days?

A. C. Well, look, we spend a lot of time networking and seeing what’s going on, talking to people and interacting with other artists, with collectors, with the entire ecosystem. I was surprised two weeks ago when I was invited to Palma for Gallery Night and I met someone who is dedicated to painting. They said: “Those of us who paint don’t have a community, we don’t talk

to each other.” I told him: “Yes, well, I didn’t know.” I think that those of us who come from something more digital or at least in generative art, which is my specialty, have had a history of helping each other for years. If we have doubts or questions we share them in forums, or wherever. We don’t meet up often, but we’ve created communities online that support each other a lot. In open source, everything’s free. We already had a history of communities, of support, of helping each other, and we’re somewhat in the same dynamic. The only thing is that our followers have multiplied by a hundred or a thousand. There are also artists who do it better and artists who do it worse. I’m terrible at the community manager thing...

“THOSE OF US WHO COME FROM SOMETHING MORE DIGITAL OR AT LEAST IN GENERATIVE ART, HAVE HAD A HISTORY OF HELPING EACH OTHER FOR YEARS. THERE’S A COMMUNITY.”

L. H. What are these key social media channels? Instagram is the biggest channel. From what I understand, you haven’t engaged much with these digital platforms...

A. C. The truth is I don’t know, I couldn’t say... I can tell you about my experience, which is generative art, a very specific type of digital art, and our context is on Twitter. We don’t use Instagram much and we don’t use Facebook at all. And that’s it. Are there any more? TikTok? I don’t know, I’ve never checked it... Twitter is the channel through which generative art has its conversations, collectors giving their opinions, collectors helping other new collectors who arrive there, artists showing the process of creating a piece and also sharing the mistakes and intricacies. So in my case, and in the world of generative art, I can say it’s Twitter.

M. A. S. This is very interesting, because it’s a fact that the confines of the so-called art markets are becoming bigger and more tailored. The image is like a balloon that swells, and it’s becoming more porous. This, when combined with cross-sectional technology, which is where we’re at, generates many different profiles. So, I think that instead of trying to cover everything, instead of trying to take on all the responsibilities—which we can’t, because with teams of five or six people, with limited resources, with balances sheets that make it difficult to manoeuvre, to invest, or liability structures that don’t allow you to

invest, you can't grow—without a doubt, one of the most obvious strategies for me is to make yourself significant in niches. In other words, develop a unique personality and exploit what you're good at. If you're going to try to carry out work in the physical realm and, on top of that, be on fire in the digital realm... Galleries that are born as digital native galleries, like Unit London and co., well, of course, that's where they surf well. For the rest of us, those of us who don't have the potential to grow—and I think there's a very high percentage of galleries that don't have the potential to become multi-site galleries—all we have left is our personality. That sounds old-fashioned.

**“TWITTER IS THE CHANNEL
THROUGH WHICH GENERATIVE
ART HAS ITS CONVERSATIONS,
COLLECTORS GIVING THEIR
OPINIONS, ARTISTS SHOWING THE
PROCESS OF CREATING...”**

A. C. I agree. This came up yesterday. Having your own line and approach, it's essential. Someone said that otherwise big galleries can steal your artists. Well, it's kind of that idea. I tell you, in the world of generative art we talk to each other a lot, with galleries that treat us well and care about understanding generative art and explaining it well... I'd be more willing to work with these galleries than with others who say: “We're getting into digital art because it's trendy now, as well as everything else that's trendy...”

M. A. S. It wouldn't work that way...

L. H. We've talked about new types of young collectors, new generations are appearing, millennials, Gen Z... And in the Artsy report that Carine presented, this highlighting of the new generations of collectors also appeared. However, we often don't know what they're like and we tend to idealise them: a young collector, highly engaged, with money, and who works via their mobile phone... But in your experience, for example, Anna, you talked about that direct communication you have with them. What are these collectors like? Enlighten us a bit.

A. C. Well, I have several. I can give you two examples. I have a collector with whom I've spoken a lot, who's from the United States, who had travelled to Spain for work, who likes paellas... All my pieces that evoke the Mediterranean a bit and attempt to bring that closer to him, he understood them immediately

and that's why he became a collector that's very interested in my work. There's also another one who's super, super young, and who smokes joints all day [laughs].

L. H. And in their professional behaviour, do you see any differences with other older collectors?

A. C. Well, the younger one, who spends all day exploring online, has cultivated a vast knowledge of the history and development of art in general from the 1960s until now, and has cultivated his own criteria that I find highly valuable. And then I joke and say that he's up to date just because he's young, but he's taken the trouble to look it up online, and he wants to know more and more and is interested in learning, because he's realised that it's a field that attracts him and he wants to get involved.

**“THOSE OF US WHO DON'T HAVE THE
POTENTIAL TO GROW, ALL WE HAVE
LEFT IS OUR PERSONALITY. THAT
SOUNDS OLD-FASHIONED.”**

L. H. These are elements we were discussing with Miguel Ángel these days, about the overload of information surrounding the art market, about prices, about artists. Young collectors today have a much higher capacity for processing information, for accessing information, than galleries 30 or 40 years ago, where the gallery owner had certain knowledge that made them stand out and this generated an inequality of knowledge about the artist. Miguel Ángel, what are the young collectors you deal with in the gallery like? Are there any traits that set them apart?

M. A. S. It's sort of like you said, what you pointed out, a certain mystification of concepts that are too general and, in the end, don't make anything explicit. For those of you who know our programme, it's almost obvious that those who are coming, regardless of their age, are going to want to spend time trying to learn or trying to figure out what we're trying to say and narrate in the gallery. That supposedly super affluent collector who clicks and spends €20,000, I don't have them, I don't know them. I'm not saying they don't exist. I know galleries, colleagues, even some that are very, very close to me in terms of personal treatment, and a very high part of their turnover is through clients who they don't know in real life. I can't shed light on what they're like because due to the type of work I do, I don't have access to them. But yes, that's obviously

happened to us over the course of 20 years, almost 4,000 pieces sold, you know, closing deals in three emails. Now, without enough information about their interests and how they behave, I can't give an informed answer.

“THAT SUPPOSEDLY SUPER AFFLUENT COLLECTOR WHO CLICKS AND SPENDS €20,000, I DON'T HAVE THEM, I DON'T KNOW THEM. BUT I'M NOT SAYING THEY DON'T EXIST.”

L. H. Miguel Ángel highlighted something that at some point we art market analysts will have to come to an agreement on. We're talking about online sales, which the auction houses have clarified a lot, with the “online only” auctions. Actually, in galleries today we know that a sale is usually hybrid, and therefore it often has a digital beginning, but it leads to emails, a call or the other way around. I think this is also an element to take into consideration. One last question that I want to ask you before opening to the public: do you think that galleries understand the world of technology?

A. C. Here we go! [laughs]... In my experience in digital art, no. It's hard for us to deal with the museums here. I understand that there's experience in knowing how to deal with visual art, sculpture, painting, photography and even video, but it's an uphill battle with interactive installations, robotics... I think that if digital art becomes more established as a format in galleries, well, there's learning to be done, and I think it will be done. I believe we artists should do our part. I've ran around spaces with a tape measure and my computer setting up exhibitions, because it seems to me that we should all collaborate, all pitch in, and the truth is that things end up going really well.

M. A. S. It's what we were saying before. I believe that the list of skills required to be a successful gallery owner today is practically impossible to achieve, so you really have to end up outsourcing a lot of services. I work with a digital marketing agency, basically because I don't have the time to really understand what steps I have to take to have better SEO positioning.

A. C. Well, as artists we can't be community managers either... We do our taxes, we also go to check the prints to verify that all the quality of the printing presses and what comes out is good, we talk to the framing people, and we're also community managers. So it seems we're in the same situation, although it's true that as digital artists we know a little more about technology. Someone

told me that in the last talk yesterday someone said that learning programming and code is useless... I'm going to pick up that thread and cast the first stone because I think that these days everyone should know something about programming, just as we know mathematics, just like we did Latin and it gave us a structural base, even if just to know how these technologies work from the inside, how they speak, and be able to be critical about what we encounter and use in our day to day.

L. H. Some of us started programming in BASIC, but the language became obsolete in four days!

A. C. Well, like those of us who studied Latin in secondary school [laughs].

Contributions and questions (c/q) from the audience

Q1. There's something I think hasn't been mentioned, which is also related to this: about how artists and galleries have found important sales channels on Instagram. In fact, many artists do without a gallery and sell through this channel and have access, for example, to the Asian market. But if we rethink this issue even better, I think we should ask ourselves how artists can establish their careers without galleries. Galleries aren't simply a sales channel, but are essential to creating careers, to building up artists' careers.

M. A. S. Yes, I completely agree. As Anna mentioned, we're not able to cover everything, but we can complicate everything a little more, right? And thanks to Arendt, Foucault and company it's already common knowledge that all relationships are based on power. So, how to manage that artist-gallery relationship if we're not on the same level?, which is usually the case. It makes everything much more complex. Without a doubt, the list of services that I can provide to some, not all, but to some of the artists I work for, won't be provided by Instagram. Then we also find various anecdotes: a collector from the local scene, who buys at ADN and other galleries, launches into NFTs and I ask him the question: “Are you buying artists that we all more or less know, from our sector?” “Yeah, yeah,” he says, “an artist who doesn't have a career in your sector, I'm not going to bet on them.” Having said that, all is said: I believe the ecosystem is big enough for us not to exclude each other and, in any case, we're improving day by day.

A. C. I have no idea about Instagram. But I do believe that the whole part of accompanying artists, training and trust with your collectors to accompany them in their decisions, this is something that can continue to be done and that even if we sell online, is super useful for many collectors, even if they're digital natives. Sometimes they also want an accompaniment to gain criteria, to learn. As I said before, there are many who are very interested in learning about the whole branch of generative art. Someone who is interested in robotic art will also be interested in trying to expand their knowledge. I think that there, too, galleries have many possibilities to be present and accompany others.

“I BELIEVE THE ECOSYSTEM IS BIG ENOUGH FOR US NOT TO EXCLUDE EACH OTHER.”

M. A. S. And be aware that the borders in terms of age aren't that clear. I was recently reviewing the list of new collectors we've connected with in the past three years, to find out how old the new collectors who've entered our fold are, and 80% of them (not that we have hundreds of figures) are under 35. I mean, total millennials, sitting in the gallery and talking about art for a while. In other words, both things are not mutually exclusive. I think we're going to have a very clear multi-channel approach.

Q2. My question is for Anna. Listening to you now, and having worked with a lot of digital artists, it seems like the burden on artists who work in that space is extreme. Compared to traditional contemporary artists, digital artists are often managing their own social media, dealing with taxes, trying to understand currencies and digital currencies and how that goes into and out of it, managing Discord, trying to identify different projects because quite often they are not represented by a single gallery. I wonder, is the gallery relationship for digital artists as important as like... In the future, do you think they'll be represented by an agent who helps you with all these things and understanding different opportunities? Is there a role for more agents in this space?

A. C. Good question. You're right, we're doing all these kinds of things, we're juggling, doing a lot of things all the time. I know some colleagues and good friends that are starting to establish good relations with some digital galleries and having representatives for them because things are going fast, and we have a lot to deal with. I might say that my vision is that some artists will be, not with an agent, maybe, or with a gallery, but maybe the medium-sized galleries

will have to collaborate. I think that in an environment and ecosystem, in our experience, where we're mixing and doing a lot of things or collaborating a lot, we're open for collaborations, I presume we'll be having one exhibition per year with one gallery and maybe going to a fair with another gallery. I don't know if this is contradictory to your way of working, but I'm seeing something more fluid and more heterogeneous that is currently working.

“THERE ARE COLLECTORS VERY INTERESTED IN LEARNING ABOUT THE WHOLE BRANCH OF GENERATIVE ART. I THINK GALLERIES HAVE MANY POSSIBILITIES TO BE PRESENT AND ACCOMPANY OTHERS.”

Q2. It seems that often the gallery plays that role for an artist, but in digital it seems to be going much more in terms of the artist working with many different platforms, different chains... So how do you do that, at a greater scale, without eventually having someone on your team? Do you build a team yourself?

A. C. I don't have a team, I run everything myself. If you want to grow and are on several platforms, yeah, you're right, that's difficult. Maybe that's the opportunity for galleries and for experts to help artists, because we have to manage several different things. Actually, what we want to do and focus on is making art. But we're used to this, being on several platforms, different currencies, different collaborations among artists. So, I guess that if digital art increases in numbers, you'll have a role there, for helping artists. But with this idea that you have to be open to collaborate or not be the only gallery working with an artist.

M. A. S. Commitment is a topic in itself. Commitment to each other, between galleries and artists, or between agents and artists is a topic in itself...

Q3: My question has more to do with the type of sales that affect the relationship between gallery and artist. Sales, especially with NFTs, on the platforms are very much based on auctions, they're very much based on one-off sales. This model is being used so much that there will be burnout from all that pressure of “now we sell, now it's auctioned, etc”. Wouldn't this be something that galleries can contribute with in this regard, to have more of the artist's work on offer, to follow up and be a point of reference for those who

seek the artist's work? And, also, another job that galleries do, which is placing the artist's work, not to sell it to the first person who comes to buy, but also to have that relationship with collectors in which you try to place the work in collections that are of interest.

“SOME COLLEAGUES ARE STARTING TO ESTABLISH GOOD RELATIONS WITH SOME DIGITAL GALLERIES AND HAVING REPRESENTATIVES FOR THEM BECAUSE THINGS ARE GOING FAST.”

M. A. S. It's true that all this gamification process around work, especially NFTs, has been exaggerated. We have the turnover indicator, how many pieces are sold. Then the variations or volatilities of the auctions themselves. And then, underlying it all, the digital currencies that also go up and down. It doesn't really surprise me that there's been a halt. So, when we talk about the profile of this type of buyer, obviously they're gamified, they're someone who likes to look at graphs and makes assumptions based on how cold or hot... I think it's difficult to escape that, because the demand is actually also generated through gamification. That is, first you have to risk it and have the feeling that it's for you. Honestly, I don't think us galleries will know how to tame that beast when we return to a certain normality.

Another of the personal frustrations that some gallery owners have is that when I was studying art history, in 1995, 1997 or 1998 in New York, I read everything by the entire *October* circle and couldn't quite understand that stubbornness against the dangers of art commodification. At the time, I didn't quite understand it, but 25 years later, of course I now agree with everyone. Today it seems that legitimisation has to do with the money you make, if it's an auction at ten in the morning on a digital platform, and that really legitimises an artist... it's like a gold rush! Some careers are being legitimised by the numbers involved in the auctions.

A. C. Excuse my ignorance, but hasn't this always been the case?

M. A. S. I don't think so, but we definitely do have a problem. Every time art is talked about they're talking about zeros, in newspapers and such. But hell, in 95% or 99% of the food chain, careers are built based on work, based on legitimisation, because third parties, experts or your own colleagues vouch for you because they consider the work is relevant. That takes time. That's not “I

arrive in the morning, a JPG or an NFT gets sent from the studio, it's auctioned via the computer from who knows where and the next day a pre-sale is made.” Now, that sure is new.

“IF DIGITAL ART INCREASES IN NUMBERS, GALLERIES WILL HAVE A ROLE THERE, FOR HELPING ARTISTS. BUT YOU HAVE TO BE OPEN TO COLLABORATE.”

L. H. What's happened here is that auction houses have been much more clever than galleries. They've done their homework on the digital issue and were far ahead of the gallery sector, and we saw this during the pandemic. During the pandemic, auction houses were very quick to open their “online only” and were very prepared. With galleries, we immediately saw that there was an avalanche of information overload with collectors. But above all, what we realised is that galleries' websites, for the most part, were neither efficient nor sophisticated enough to allow for the sale of works of art.

M. A. S. It's a matter of scale...

L. H. It was seen in the results. In Clare McAndrew's reports it was clear how sales went up, especially in the auction sector, which was very fast. This happened in galleries, it even happened in the OVRs [online viewing rooms] of art fairs and it happened on some platforms that didn't have this level of preparation. Today, it's all on the same level, but what has happened is that the legitimisation of artists, in the case of crypto and, above all, in digital environments, were backed by variables that weren't like those of the traditional market, such as followers on Instagram. Having a million followers gives a level of credibility but in the traditional market it's not a relevant element at all. Exhibiting at MoMA is, but not having a million followers on Instagram. At the same time, the prices were very marked by what they had done at auctions, as was the case with Beeple's piece, which sold for 69.3 million dollars...

M. A. S. Here I was referring more to NFTs platforms drops and the calls to specific auctions. It's clear that in the Beeple operation there were people interested in that being the case. I mean, maybe that's an expensive ad, but suddenly the whole globe was talking about this and I was studying to see what the hell it was all about, me and many other people. I wasn't referring so much to that milestone, but to the dynamics of the drop itself. The anxiety that

comes from having to get it now because otherwise you'll be late. And I think there's a certain perversion there, because you're playing with spontaneous desire. And of course, that's completely at odds with most of the things we do, which is to reflect on the world through the works.

“YOU USUALLY ARRIVE AT THOSE COLLECTORS RECOMMENDED BY OTHER ARTISTS IN THE SECTOR. AND AS WE SAID BEFORE, IN DIGITAL, COMMUNITY NETWORKS REALLY WORK.”

A. C. I wanted to return to Pau's question about collectors, that galleries worry about placing pieces in certain collections, and I find that super interesting. I just want to point out that it's also happening in the digital world. I don't know the top collectors in your ecosystem, but in digital there are some top digital collectors that it's also interesting for them to have one of your pieces. They become champions of your work, they'll lend them for exhibitions, such as in the ZKM Karlsruhe... I think that works quite well.

Q3. Who finds these collectors for you? Is it because of Twitter or is it fortuitous? How do you reach those collectors if there's no mediator?

A. C. Well, you usually arrive at those collectors recommended by other artists in the sector. And as we said before, in digital, community networks really work. I'm also an art collector. Since I began to have sales, I've also acquired and collected art from my friends as well as from people I don't know, but that I like and find interesting. How does it work? Well, if those collectors who follow you see who you collect, they'll also arrive through there... And among collectors, there are also Twitter groups where they talk to each other and discuss things.

L. H. There's a collector here in Spain with whom we at Talking Galleries have been in touch. His name is Pablo Rodríguez-Fraile and he's a great backer in the digital art and NFT environment. They create their communities themselves, they're in contact all the time, they interact, they pass each other information. Therefore, those networks are very active.

Q4. As an artist, how do you feel most valued? When you make a big sale, when a gallery comes and offers you something, or when an institution comes and shows your work?

A. C. When someone proposes a project that interests me or when another artist proposes a collaboration. That's a very good question.

L. H. It's a bit of a trick question, but it's a good one [laughs].

This talk was originally in Spanish. This is the English translation of the transcript of the original talk.

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Talking Galleries was launched in 2011 to provide art gallery professionals with a much-needed space where they could exchange ideas, share their expertise and assess the changes impacting their industry. Thanks to the generous support of many people and institutions, what began as an annual symposium in Barcelona has been steadily evolving into a multi-faceted international think tank.

This book collects the complete talks that made up the programme of the 2022 edition of the Barcelona Symposium. Celebrated on the 3rd and 4th of October 2022 at the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA), the ninth iteration marked the return of this flagship event to its hometown after a two-year disruption caused by the pandemic, gathering once more leading experts and a varied audience of art professionals in a specialised context for discussing the latest trends in gallery management and the wider art market.

While the market keeps adapting to global economic and geopolitical challenges, this publication packed with inspiring thoughts and relevant data aims at providing some keys to interpreting today's art gallery sector.

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