

Everything for Art

How to be a successful artist

The authors

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About this book

Artists such as Jeff Koons, Damien Hirst, and Banksy have completely seen through the art system and play with it like a virtuoso plays a piano. Although their work regularly stimulates the current art discourse, they do not share the secrets of their success with young – and sometimes perplexed or frustrated – artists. Isn't it astonishing that there is still no standard work for artists? Instead, there are a few how-to books that do a poor job of motivating artists to keep going. It's as if they're cheering on a group of soccer players who don't even know the rules of the game. The main thing is that the fans are yelling.

And this is where the book "Everything for Art" comes into play: The two authors got together with a world-famous artist and asked for some advice. From these conversations – supplemented with input from fellow artists, gallery owners, collectors, and curators, as well as their own rich experiences in the art world – this book was written.

It's not a conventional how-to manual, because it doesn't try to motivate as many people as possible and make them happy. But neither is it a classic textbook that regurgitates existing knowledge. Rather, it is a pioneering work, written from the active artist's perspective of an insider. It is written with the aim of providing the reader with an overview of the current art system that is as comprehensible, structured, and objective as possible. It tries to be helpful and practical without ignoring the fact that success eludes many artists not because of a lack of talent but because of a lack of compatibility with the current art system.

Preface

"I don't have time to read this book or contribute anything for the preface. I'm sure you two will manage without me.

Good luck,

N.N."

These sobering remarks come from an e-mail from our mentor. They are his or her very own words, as are all the italicized quotes in this book. Our mentor wants to remain anonymous. He or she is a great artist, world famous, and known by everyone, and so had no need to be our advisor for this book "Everything for Art." But how did it come about in the first place? We did, in fact, make a list of successful artists we respected and who we considered potential advisors for our book. And, with our first request, we reached for the stars and fate rewarded us. We still don't know why this artist accepted. We only met three times. We then had to compile and distill the contents of this book from our intense conversations and discussions, one of them over copious amounts of alcohol, but also from the few terse exchanges of correspondence and a few past interviews. The original language of this book is German, because it is our native language, but that does not mean that the artist also speaks German.

Our star artist gave us his or her blessing as well as words. Both are more than this person is willing to give most other people. But hold on, we did actually forget two things: First, we were

assured sole rights to the book and second, the artist's lawyer presented us with a non-disclosure agreement that would charge us a six-figure sum if we divulged the artist's name. That was the deal.

The idea for this book originally came from Tizian Baldinger, who has been an artist for over a decade and who is from Switzerland. Tizian loves art, but unlike many other artists, he is not addicted to it. That's why he was able to describe the art system so soberly here. Being an aspiring young artist, he is much closer to some of the problems of the art world that the successful artist has long forgotten or that may have been quite different in his or her youth in the last century. During his studies at the HFBK (Hamburg University of Fine Arts), he noticed that there was no textbook of any use to young artists who wanted to take a professional approach to their career. So he decided to write one. The only problem was: He's an artist, not an author. Tizian was able to gather a lot of experience, but this wasn't the same as writing a book.

This is where Timon R. Böse came into the picture, a Berlin author who had himself gained years of experience in the art industry as a curator and art historian. He is also highly familiar with the world of artists. He has worked with many international creative minds in the past. What's more, he and Tizian have known each other for what feels like an eternity.

And so, together with the successful artist, we two friends formed perhaps one of the strangest teams in the history of specialist literature. Three weirdos from the art world who collected their experiences in a book – and one of them only talked, without writing or even reading what had been written. This book was therefore written down exclusively by Tizian Baldinger and Timon R. Böse.

A word of warning: This book is hard work. It won't necessarily make you happy, because it doesn't sugarcoat anything. The book is also not meant to motivate you, but to accompany you on your own path and make you aware that you may have an idealized or poorly differentiated view of the art world. The art world is a complex system, but not a closed book, as some assume or claim. It is therefore less the case that secrets need to be disclosed and more the case that seemingly arbitrary processes and correlations in the art system need to be revealed. And finally: There are many different ways to become a successful artist and at least as many different definitions of successful.

Remember: Successful is not the same as happy.

This book focuses on the future internationally successful artist. The journey is tough, and it requires some sacrifices. Ultimately, you have to decide for yourself whether it is worth it – or not.

We would like to thank our anonymous mentor, and also our many friends and supporters from the art world – and from the other worlds, too. Everything for art!

Tizian Baldinger & Timon R. Böse, October 2020

“Art is a religion.”

“Some believe in it and others don’t.”

1. The basis

First, a few basic things need to be defined, so that we can then achieve a deeper understanding of the contemporary art world. The terms briefly defined in this chapter and at the beginning of the next are essential to understanding the later chapters of the book.

When art is referred to in this book, it means fine art, such as painting, sculpture, performance, and so on. Folk art, music, dance, theater, opera, and so on are not covered here.

1.1. Art

Every era has its art. However, the evaluation of art can also change retroactively. In rare cases, art may not have been recognized as such in its time, or may have remained undervalued and only become part of the artistic canon or more highly valued at a later point. The following applies: artistic canon = recognized art. The artistic canon can fluctuate.

If you want to be part of the current artistic canon, then you need to align yourself with it. That is, you first need to understand the canon. Consequently, you need to develop a deep understanding of art. You think you know what art is? This is not about your opinion, your view of art, but the view of the artistic canon. You need to understand the artistic canon. That doesn't mean you have to like it. But you have to understand it.

The easiest way to do this is to study art. Studying art is almost unavoidable today anyway, but more on that later.

You need to get an overview of contemporary art. You have to go to countless exhibitions to find out what exists in your present and what existed in the past.

And it is very important to note: If it says art on the outside, it doesn't necessarily mean there is art on the inside. The best metaphor to explain this is a package of sliced own-label sausage from your supermarket. The label may say "top quality" or "premium" but in reality, it's just compressed waste meat and everyone knows it.

If you are self-taught or studying at a less established art school, or if you're just starting out and don't have a very keen eye for art, it can be easy to make mistakes. Therefore, for the time being, orient yourself only to absolutely established museums. Only this is art. Ignore everything else. Once you have developed an understanding of art, you can include established galleries, and then add more and more.

It is amazing how many people, even some longtime players in the art world, have no idea about the artistic canon. So don't let yourself be misled.

1.2. The artist

Whether you call yourself an artist or not is up to you. "Artist" is not a protected professional title. Whether others perceive you as an artist depends largely on whether your output is classified as part of the artistic canon and is recognized as art by society.

Traditionally, artists are seen as the sum of their idea-generating creativity and their consummate handcraft. But if you look at Jeff Koons today, for example, he is really just an idea generator and workshop manager. But that's not to be underestimated, because running a workshop can be much more complex than doing handcraft on your own. In the workshop, work and sometimes creativity is distributed among a team. Many people think this is a new concept, forgetting Andy Warhol, who produced art in his "factories" like on an assembly line (and – what's more – defined an artist cult that is still influential today).

We can even go much further back: As early as the Renaissance or in the Baroque period, there were workshops and joint works, as for example with Rembrandt. The idea and the commission went through the master, while the work was often completed as a team. Here, it should be mentioned that at that time, almost all commissions came from the church, the state, or the elites.

The art world today is larger and more complex than ever. If you want to survive here, you need more than a little creativity and handcraft. Some people like to talk about talent. But what does talent entail? Does it also mean you have a strong will and great perseverance? Because both are definitely necessary if you want to exist as an independent artist in the art system.

Anyone who sees artistic work as a profession and approaches it accordingly in a professional manner has already taken a big step in the right direction.

1.3. Success

Basically, you define what success means to you, but in real life, the measures of a successful career as an artist are recognition and money. However, there are different definitions of success in the art world, too. For example, there is not only one league in which you can become a champion, but several.

Even if you are successful in some ways, that is no guarantee of satisfaction or self-fulfillment. This may be because you have been disappointed by reality, your interests have changed, or you have run out of energy or passion over the years. You have to figure that out for yourself.

"Success requires a lot of sacrifices. The biggest of these is time."

The conditions for an artist to be successful are better today than ever before: We are living in a golden age for artists. Never before in history have there been so many artists, art collectors, and institutions showing and promoting art. In 2019, the global art market revenue exceeded \$64 billion. In addition, several billion dollars in funding from private and public sources benefit artists directly and indirectly. It has probably never been easier to become successful.

2. The system

The art world is a bit like the soccer world. Before you can play, you have to know the game. What does the playing field look like? What are the basic rules of the game? What are the common rules of conduct? Besides the players on the field, are there other players such as coaches, referees, sponsors, and so on?

It is the same in art. If you want to play, you must first get to know the system and how it works. In the following chapter, an attempt is made to explain the art system. Not everything contained in this chapter is charming. However, much of it is considered common practice today, so it is therefore relevant and can be seen as a set of unwritten rules.

Don't get hung up on rules that you don't want to accept because they seem unfair or unappealing. But feel free to make a resolution to change them if you ever have the chance later.

2.1. Players and terms

Art is created by the artist, but it only manifests itself through the interaction of the individual players in the art system. In the following, an attempt is made to introduce the relevant players of the art system and clarify some terms. Of course, the boundaries are not always as clearly drawn as is presented here for ease of understanding.

“For a gallery, a work has to be sellable. For a museum, its content has to be exciting.”

First and foremost, we need to distinguish between two types of artist: One type is more market-oriented – let's call them **“market artists”** – and the other type tends to serve museums and major exhibitions, such as the biennales, so let's call them **“biennale artists”** here. Market artists are usually characterized by their production of art that is easier to interpret and more marketable, and attracts the interest of galleries early on. Their career plan is to live off the sales of their art production and, if possible, to continuously increase their prices. As for biennale artists: Their works often go beyond the constraints of a conventional gallery in terms of form and complexity alone. And in many cases, only the mediation of art, which is standard in a museum, makes it possible to grasp the work in its entirety. Here, the focus is more on the content of the work and less on the formal implementation. At the same time, works by biennale artists are more difficult to sell, because they can be large and bulky, are less likely to follow aesthetic rules, are conceptually based, and so on. Biennale artists survive, at least at the beginning of their careers, primarily thanks to private and government funding. Nowadays, it is a fact that biennale artists are strongly intertwined with the art market, although not everyone likes to hear that. Usually, of course, the boundaries blur as the artist becomes more successful. Nevertheless, this categorization and the questions that follow from it – which all artists must ask themselves – are very helpful in understanding the art system and making proper use of it.

Below is a list of key players and terms in the art system to aid your further understanding.

Art production

(The artist, the artist's employees, suppliers, and specialized art production companies)

Artists produce their art. They can do this independently, delegate it to employees in their studio, or have the manufacturing work outsourced to external service providers. Often, it is a mixture of all the above options. In recent years, art production companies have specialized in the complete realization of works of art. In extreme cases, the artist only supplies the idea. The realization and sometimes also the installation at the exhibition site is done entirely by the art production company.

Education

(Art schools, postgraduate programs)

Over the last hundred years, art schools have established themselves as optimal training centers for artists. They are completely integrated into today's art system and offer the best starting opportunities for a successful career as an artist. They can be organized privately or by the state. Their reputation precedes them in each case and it is easy to distinguish between good and bad art schools. However, much also depends on individual student preferences.

Postgraduate programs, as defined here, are programs offered by a few institutions. They are often a combination of residency and study and last several years. They are aimed at ambitious, aspiring artists (usually after their studies) and can sometimes be pioneering in nature (examples include the Rijksakademie and the Royal Academy). Often, academic titles are not awarded on such programs.

In addition, there are private organizations that offer courses in the field of art, often limiting themselves to teaching individual techniques. These are, however, mainly of value to amateur artists.

Funding for artists

(Art prizes/awards, grants, scholarships, fellowships, stipends, artist-in-residence programs (residencies), patrons)

Art prizes/awards give you money, but they also usually give you a platform via the associated exhibition. Work stipends, for example, cover your fixed costs for housing, food, and materials by paying a monthly amount for a certain period of time. Artist-in-residence programs are residencies that sometimes include work stipends and are often abroad. They allow you to work in a protected environment and to network and be inspired in new, exciting places. The awarded funding is an important form of validation and recognition of your art and thus paves the way for you to position yourself successfully as an artist. It is often the basis for further awards and recognition. Patrons buy works from you in the early stages, and support you financially and through their connections.

Bringing art to the public

(Galleries, museums, kunsthalls, collections, alternative spaces – that is, artist-run spaces, artists' cooperative galleries, project spaces – major exhibitions such as biennales, and so on)

Galleries are listed here only for the sake of completeness. They are explained under “dealing.”

The use of the terms “museum, kunsthalle, collection” varies as much from case to case as the institutions themselves and the terms can therefore not always be clearly separated. Together, they are among the most important institutions in the art system. Some of them have their own collection, some have a governing association or foundation, others have a supporters/friends association, some are organized by the state, others are private, and others still are private but receive additional state funding. If they are state-run, they usually have an educational function. If they have their own collection, the state, the foundation, or the supporters/friends association can provide annual funding, for example, to enhance the collection through targeted acquisitions or to have the local art scene represented as a basic principle. In addition to their own exhibits, they often manage and preserve permanent loans from private collections, comprising individual works or entire collections. The number of private institutions has grown enormously in recent years. All of these institutions are instrumental in building an artist’s reputation, such as through exhibitions, catalog publications, acquisitions for their own collections, and so on.

The term alternative spaces is used here to refer to all “small” exhibition spaces that are neither classic galleries nor any of the previously mentioned institutions. Often organized by artists themselves, they are frequently the first port of call for artists to gain an insight into the exhibition business – and sometimes they can become very influential. They range from non-commercial experimental spaces to established artists’ cooperative galleries that are financed through the sale of works.

Major exhibitions such as the Venice Biennale or the documenta in Kassel are the absolute yardsticks of the art world and are unparalleled shows. They are the antithesis of the art market, with which they are nevertheless intertwined. Regarding the name “biennale,” it should be noted that this is not a protected term, but it is simply the name given to an event that takes place every two years. The first art biennale was in Venice in 1895, and the second was the São Paulo Biennale in 1951. Biennales have mushroomed, especially in the last few decades. The seal of quality originally associated with the name “biennale” should therefore be treated with caution.

Positioning

(Curators, critics, art historians and academics, literature, trade press, the press, social media)

Curators select one or more artists and put the works together in an exhibition and a common context. They either work on a freelance basis or are affiliated with an institution.

Critics evaluate art and position it in the artistic canon. This is mainly done in the form of a text that is published in some way. If art critics express themselves about an artist, whether positively or negatively, this is nowadays always beneficial for the artist’s career due to the attention it attracts. Nevertheless, the influence of art criticism in general has, in fact, tended to diminish compared with the past.

Ideally, art historians and academics evaluate and position art primarily objectively. They are active wherever an academic view of art is required. Possible jobs are, for example, as a head

of a museum or in the conservational management of a collection or at an auction house, but jobs as curators or gallery employees are also common.

Literature includes books and catalogs. The mention of an artist in literature is important evidence of his or her relevance in the art world.

The trade press and the general press, both printed and digital, are the seismographs of the art world – and are accordingly relevant for an artist’s career.

Social media is no less relevant in the art system. Expert reception can also happen through social media. Sometimes, however, the dissemination of a posting is not in proportion to its relevance. A distorted picture can therefore emerge.

Dealing

(Galleries, art dealers, art fairs, art auctions, art advisors, art flippers)

Today, galleries are the most well-known places where art is sold. Exhibitions are organized on a gallery’s own premises. Often, they have a fixed circle of artists they represent and with whom they collaborate over several years. Galleries give artists attention and a certain validity, and can provide them with an income. Ideally, they both grow together.

Art dealers, unlike gallery owners, do not operate an exhibition space. They have no intrinsic attachment to artists. They are opportunists who broker individual paintings and groups of works between sellers and buyers. They travel a lot and are constantly on the phone.

Art fairs are the global hubs of the art trade; they usually last only a few days and have developed into a showcase for seeing and being seen in the art world. They have popped up everywhere in recent years. The five most important and largest fairs are currently (as at 2019) Art Basel (Basel, Miami, Hong Kong), The Armory Show (New York), FIAC (Paris), Art Cologne (Cologne), and Frieze (London, New York, Los Angeles).

Art auctions are arguably the most influential institutions in the secondary art market. “Secondary art market” means that the work has usually already been sold to a collector through a gallery before. The collector now offers it for sale again, hoping to get a higher price than when he or she bought it. The price increase achieved here is one of the most important drivers of an artist’s career in the market. Accordingly, a decline in the market prices achieved by an artist can be cataclysmic.

Art advisors, also known as art consultants, advise art buyers in making decisions about purchases of works. They see themselves as art experts. Their clients are primarily individuals and institutions, whom they assist in the long-term management of an art collection. Assignments commissioned by clients range from capital growth to building a thematic collection. Art advisors are either independent or part of an institution, such as a bank.

Art flippers and art flipping are terms that appeared only after the turn of the millennium. Art flippers buy one or more works and then resell them. Art dealers do the same thing and so it’s basically nothing new. Rather, the word stands for a trend, but also clearly sets new benchmarks. Some people insinuate that art flippers often have little – or very market-specific – knowledge of art. Art flippers’ clients are also mainly interested only in the increase in value

of the works. Ethical and moral principles in the art market are generally a matter of contention, but art flippers are accused of having the fewest principles of all and pursuing only financial goals. Buying and selling takes place in very short succession. The profits achieved are sometimes immense.

The works are selected solely on the basis of their marketability. The actual artists and their oeuvres are of minimal significance.

Art buyers

(Collectors)

Art buyers buy art for various reasons and with varying regularity. The motivations range from prestige and decoration to investment, tax optimization, and money laundering. Buyers can be individuals, companies, and public and private institutions. Anyone who intentionally and regularly buys art can be called a collector.

2.2. The different leagues of the art world

In which league do you want to play?

International artist

Premier league, the elite league: You are represented by at least one important international gallery or several important national galleries in different countries and in international museums with solo exhibitions.

National artist

You are represented at a major national gallery and in national museums with solo exhibitions. Here, it is important to distinguish whether your country is one of the global players in the arts or not. Depending on where you are an artist, proximity to the class of the international artist will vary.

Regional artist

You are locally known and respected, have regular exhibitions, and may even be featured in a group show at a nationally known institution.

Amateur artist

Amateur artists are probably the happiest artists of all those listed. You are passionate, interested, and work regularly. Here and there, you display your work at regional exhibitions.

Niche artist

And then there is the niche artist. In your field, you can be anything between regionally and internationally known, and your earnings can be between nothing and lots of money. Some see you as an artist, some see you as an amateur artist, and some see you as being outside

the art world. Examples include artists from the field of street art/urban art, erotic art, maritime painting, and so on.

Only the top class guarantees that you can earn money with art. It is also possible in other leagues to make a living from art, but it is not self-evident.

There are, in fact, also amateur artists who earn a lot of money with their art. They also see themselves as professional artists, but in the art world, unfortunately, they are completely insignificant. Just as a reminder: This book is oriented toward the general artistic canon and it pursues a path with the goal of getting into the premier league.

Let us make clear here: 80–90% of all artists are not suited to becoming successful in the premier league of art. The league you can play in depends on how successfully you can establish yourself in the art system. Not everyone is suitable for every league, and advancement through the leagues cannot be achieved through hard work alone.

Note that as a regional artist, for example, you are subject to different laws and rules than an international artist. Here, it is less important that you are internationally known, but rather that you are well connected in your region, that you – in some cases – satisfy the regional demands in terms of content and aesthetics, and that you are perhaps active in local institutions in order to develop and expand your reputation on the local art scene. Where you are rooted, you serve your clientele, most of whom are personally known and familiar to you.

2.3. Mechanisms in the art system

It is not easy to see through the mechanisms of the art system and it is always only a snapshot, because the system is constantly changing. This chapter is designed to sharpen your focus, so that you can independently seek out new and different mechanisms in the future.

The evaluation of art

“Art is what is in a museum.”

Apart from the often negligible material value, art has no real value. The artist, as part of the art system, creates the work along with its content and thus gives it value for the first time in the sense of it being art. The subsequent formation of value occurs in the context of the past and present of art and the art system. The work of art is then given additional value by further players in the system. To put it simply: The value of a work of art is the sum of all the layers of value from the individual players.

If artists are invited by a curator to exhibit at an established museum, their rating usually increases, and so does their work. If an art critic writes an article about the exhibition in an art magazine, the exhibition gains more attention. Accordingly, the status of the artist involved grows, and so does the value in most cases.

If a painting from a private collection is exhibited in a well-known museum, the value of the painting usually increases.

The art system is always connected to the society of the time. If its values change, this can also have an effect on the evaluation of art. Art of the past is therefore also constantly reinterpreted. Basically, you can only judge art if you know and take into account the underlying art system.

The dependencies of the players

You have already learned: The players collectively give a work of art or an artist value or recognition. However, several players are always necessary to create value; value creation cannot be achieved by one player alone. The various players in the art system are thus interdependent and their careers or successes closely interlinked. If an artist becomes successfully established, the entire value chain can benefit. All the players who have worked with that artist can then gain prestige and, in some cases, turn the artist's success to their advantage or capitalize on it – even if they are not directly responsible for the further success of the artist.

Art as a status symbol and an investment

Art has always been a status symbol, but in times of low interest rates and after the elimination of some tax havens, it has also become a common form of investment. This circumstance has had an enormous impact on the art system and the assessment of art. The changes this has triggered in the art system are much more far-reaching than you might think at first glance. The globalization of the art market and the unprecedented influx of capital with absurdly high auction prices that perplex the public are only the tip of an iceberg of effects.

Movements and the formation of terms

There are trends in art. And these trends can spring from many sources. They can arise organically from art, be socially induced, and sometimes be politically motivated. Trends can condense into movements. If they are substantial, last for a long time, and/or a lively discourse takes place, they can find their way into art history as terms.

The works or exhibitions related to these trends and currents are characterized by similar formal language and/or thought.

Examples of movements are: Impressionism, Dadaism, Pop Art, Arte Povera, and, from more recent times, Postcolonialism.

Discovery and exclusivity

In the art world, people like to boast about discoveries and exclusivity. Curators are often looking for artists who have never been shown in their region, or who have only been shown in less influential institutions than the host's, or haven't been shown for a long time. All curators want to be the first in their region to exhibit the great and emerging artist. But this is not only true in the exhibition business; collectors don't want to be the last to buy a work by an artist

who is currently in vogue, either. Trends in the art world often work similarly to new trends in the fashion/consumer world. Some things quickly become must-haves and you can make a name for yourself with them.

Résumé and career progression

Artists' résumés have become enormously important. Their career progression now depends greatly on their art school's reputation, residencies/awards, participation in exhibitions, and so on. Often one leads to the other. If an artist has been selected for a well-known residency, his or her chances of being invited to a major exhibition later are much higher. Juries have to look through a lot of applications in a short time, so they often pre-sort based on the résumé. Also, juries tend not to take risks and it is only logical for them to highly rate those who already have achievements.

Success attracts success

If an artist receives increased attention, be it through an art award or a magazine article, for example, then he or she automatically becomes interesting for those people (curators, gallery owners, and so on) who need "fresh talents," and who prepare them and then present them as their new discovery. It only seems understandable that they would jump on the bandwagon and help it gain speed through their engagement.

Quotas

Quotas (for example, the number of women/men) in exhibition participation, art prizes, and so on, are a fact of life today. Political correctness is becoming more and more established and various quotas (LGBTQ+, minority ethnic background, ethnicity, skin color, and so on) are now in place.

No one disputes that quotas can be justified. However, neither should we ignore the fact that they bring with them new problems. What you need to learn for yourself as an artist is to use quotas in your favor when and wherever you can.

Nepotism and "la famiglia"

"If you visit several art fairs and major exhibitions in one or two years, you'll find that it's often the same people you run into. The art world is surprisingly small. It's kind of a big family."

Nepotism is an integral and important part of the art system. The art system comprises many small circles that legitimize each other and maintain a close friendship. To put it simply: Most of it works through connections. A gallery exhibits you because someone recommended you, the gallery owner knows a curator who puts you in an exhibition, and so on.

But it goes even further than many think. A whole book could be written about it. You can call it "la famiglia" or simply see it as a win-win principle in the name of art. Here are two examples:

First, the Venice Biennale, an exhibition that takes place every two years and apparently focuses on current trends in global art, far removed from the art market. That's far from the

truth. Renowned galleries provide huge sums of money and as a “thank you,” their artists are shown at the Biennale. Sometimes, an artist’s portfolio is made fit for the Biennale in advance. Works can be purchased by interested parties similar to an art fair. An extensive hospitality program for the galleries’ regular customers rounds out their Venice visit.

It is not uncommon for public museums to receive works as gifts or on permanent loan. As a “thank you,” these works, as well as others, are included in exhibitions. The artworks themselves also have a kind of résumé, and their career progression is referred to as provenance. If a work enters a collection or is exhibited in a museum, an entry is made in the provenance register, usually followed by an increase in value.

2.4. Other influences

The art system does not exist in a vacuum and should never be considered in isolation. Many things influence it, sometimes more directly and sometimes more indirectly. Exploring all possible influences – such as technical progress, globalization, and so on – would go beyond the scope of the chapter, but we will look at two influential topics in brief.

The economy

The economic situation, globally but also in individual parts of the world, always has a decisive influence on the art system. Collectors, for example, earn their money mainly in the private sector and use it later to buy art. If collectors’ main source of income falls, they can buy less art. The budget for art and culture of states, institutional collections and their sponsors is always linked to the economic situation. Consequently, the art market is interconnected with other markets. And thus, during an economic crisis, there is generally much less buying on the art market and much less support of the arts.

Also, works may come onto the market unexpectedly from bankrupted collectors, and the market may not be able to absorb them. This may result in a drop in the price of individual artists.

It is not only artists or the other previously mentioned players who are dependent on the economic situation. The art system has become a huge global industry. The list is long. It starts with the stores for artists’ materials and also includes transport and insurance companies, exhibition builders, specialized companies, and so on. And it provides jobs for millions of people in galleries, museums and other art institutions, publishing houses, as assistants to artists, and so on.

Politics

In many countries, art is funded by the state. Accordingly, politics has an impact on, for example, museums and art academies. This can happen through money, but also through a more targeted type of influence. The state can exert influence even on private art institutions, if only through the tax rate on art sales, which can have a major impact on the local art system.

Art is mostly subject to freedom of expression. This does not mean that art that criticizes a system cannot polarize, but in rare cases it leads to punishment or imprisonment.

Nevertheless, in some countries, art is censored or only art that is loyal to the state receives funding. In such places, art critical of the state can have drastic consequences, up to and including the death penalty.

Depending on where you live, you may benefit from favorable cultural policies – or you may have to watch your back.

If you come from a repressive country, you can move to a country with freedom of speech and from there use your art to protest against the conditions in your home country. This may change little, but can sometimes go down well in the art system of your host country.