

Evaluation and Valuation of Art: An Artist's Dilemma

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Abstract

This paper is an interdisciplinary review of the intersection between the worlds of business and Art. There are many challenges for the self-employed Artist Entrepreneur. This language barrier includes the judgment of Art from the prospective of two historical philosophers who address different philosophies of business and art. Additional evidentiary support is provided by twentieth century artists and philosophers who have addressed the evaluation of art aesthetically and the valuation of art. This language barrier creates a dialectic disconnect preventing the business community from understanding art philosophy and the art community from understanding business philosophy. Evidence additionally includes the analysis of the museum catalog as addressed as critically important to the artist. The artist states that it is important because of the temporal nature of the artwork, yet any type of catalog is considered marketing material used as promotional material. The paper also provides a discussion of historical educational methodologies – long shuttered – that may offer insights to shifts needed in modern art education to better prepare the artist for a stronger alignment with industry.

Keywords: Art, Marketing, Philosophy, Business, Entrepreneurial, Education

Artist's most often discuss the 'need' to create art as a spiritual journey that stems from a need to glorify the external or to define their internal narrative using their own unique medium of expression. This outpouring of creativity takes the form of artistic endeavors, across many disciplines. But at the heart of Kantian and Marxist philosophy is Judgement. While the artist generates value from creating spiritually motivated art -when displayed - it is evaluated aesthetically and judged as pleasing or displeasing by others. Yet this judgement of art carries an under-current that is in opposition to the evaluation of art and that is –the valuation of art as a commodity.

This paper will make the case that the dialectic duality - between the evaluation and valuation of art- creates a hegemonic dissonance that negatively impacts the artist. That there is a relationship between the philosophical aesthetic evaluation of art, and the economic 'valuation' of art. The specter of this duality is found in the art world where social, cultural, and ideological influences mask the use value - that art presents for the artist - versus the economic benefits of exchange valuation for art patrons as buyers. Where historically, the church and state were the primary patrons of art, in modernity, these patrons are more likely powerful corporate CEOs and the wealthy elite.

It is the distinction between truth and appearance - as a sublime illusionary motif behind the ideology – that will be examined for both evaluation and valuation of art. For the aesthetic evaluation, I will review Immanuel Kant's *The Critique of Judgement* for how the rational sublime – as well as genius - impacts an individual's aesthetic critique of beauty. I will also show a dual perspective within the judgement of art as dialectically and philosophically paralleled in the writings of Karl Marx in *Das Capital*, where he discusses the mathematical economic valuation when judging a commodity.

From Art and Theory, there are several writers that also provide evidentiary support including: Walter Gropius in *The Theory and Organization of the Bauhaus* for his critique of art education and his recommendations; Max Weber's.

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Asceticism and the Spirit of Capitalism; and both Lukács, in *The Ideology of Modernism* and Mary Kelly in *Reviewing Modernist Criticism* for their exposition on the ideological drivers within the artist; as well as the importance Kelly places on the exhibition catalog.

I will argue that the dialectical duality between the value of creating art as absolute, and the need to commoditize art - are equally critical. Yet challenges exist for artists to monetize themselves -and their work – that is contrasted by the covert valuation tactics used within the capitalistic community. *Value, is at the heart of evaluation and valuation.* Value of the artwork aesthetically for the artist and the art community, as well as, the value of the artist's work as a commodity for its financial exchange value. Within a capitalistic economy, while there is a need to create art for expression, there is a greater need for an artist to increase their income potential by increasing the exchange value of their art work or their services as an artist.

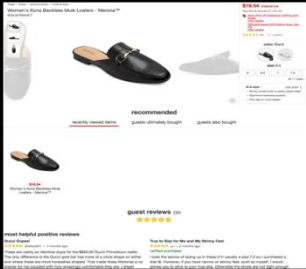
1. When examining Kant, we see that he begins with a desire to wrap universal communicability - the exemplary necessity - and an 'a priori' principle as a means of defining the subjectivity of aesthetic judgement - as common sense. He also discusses two factors for how we deduce taste. First, we are not always aware of our assumptions of judgement, because we automatically apply intuitive concepts. Second, we are drawn to our inability to define or process beauty - and its purpose with a concept - which creates a mental quandary given we use the same cognitive abilities every day. Kant discusses how we each have our own internal set of concepts and perceptions, and we divine beauty from different measuring sticks. "Thus he does not take it amiss if, when he says that Canary-wine is agreeable, another corrects the expression and reminds him that he ought to say: "It is agreeable to me."
2. Yet in the *Modality of Judgement on the Sublime in Nature*, Kant argues, that the modality of aesthetics is a moment of critical importance. And Kant is right, he defines sublime in order to contrast going beyond the temporary, incalculable aesthetic understanding of beauty into the realm of sublime quantifiable reasoning. This analytical nature of the sublime is the demarcation point, for where the aesthetic evaluation of art begins – and equally - the point where the judgement of art's valuation occurs as well.
 - 2.1. With his exposition of aesthetic judgements of the sublime, Kant actually highlights the differences in individual taste. The first point that can be deduced is that the ideology the artist has for their finished art work - as the object and as 'agreeable to me' - is different from the taste of another individual viewing an artist's work that may, or may not, be 'agreeable to them'. This should include both fine art and free arts, because while different, both are judged. We aesthetically evaluate - and monetarily value- not only the art we put on our walls but furniture and dish patterns used at the tables where we eat. We calculate an objects worth aesthetically - then as discussed in Marx- determine how much we are willing pay as an exchange. So it is this sublime subjectivity, when evaluating all forms of art, that is both personal to the artist and also personal to those judging the art.
 - 2.2. The second critical point is Kant's discourse on the rarity of genius. While Kant does not directly describe how genius and art are linked, he does address it as critical within the context of aesthetics for its rarity and the needs for other 'clever minds' to be schooled methodologically for rule-based instruction. So in discussing the aesthetics of art, it can be deduced that Kant is pointing directly to artistic genius. While Kant's thoughts on education, are also less defined, Walter Gropius shares his thoughts on genius, stating that a "few extraordinary gifted ones will suffer no limits to their activity." As vaguely exposed by Kant, Gropius clarifies art education as a practice for perfection for those with "clever minds" not defined by the rarity of genius.
 - 2.3. The subterfuge within the art community is the dissonance between value for the artist and value for the art industry collector. For it is the role of industry, that has taken greater prominence in modernity, given the decline of historically prominent art sponsors of church and state. Unlike many artists, most industry art patrons judge the value of art, less with aesthetic evaluation, and more with capitalistic valuation as highlighted by Marxist philosophy.
3. Marketers like myself would tell you, that the audience Karl Marx was primarily writing to in *Das Capital* were not the bourgeois, who would have understood fine art examples, but instead the language of the proletariat who would understand shoes and sugar. It can be argued that Marx's goal was to ideologically unmask, yet he unknowingly creates illusions between knowledge of truth and appearance by highlighting the craftsman and not the artisan. If the sublime is to the aesthetical judgment of art by reason, then so it can be said that Marx's scientific exploration of economic valuation and exploitation - is equally sublime. Hidden within Marx's work, and behind his precise mathematical exposition on the judgement of a commodity's valuation, lies unspoken, the commoditization of all forms of art. For example, shoes are both fine art and common free art, but have different aesthetic and economic value.

4. These McQueen Armadillo shoes, in Exhibit A, allowed Gucci to win a court case by being classified as fine art and sold at Christies for \$295,000; compared with Manolo Blahnik's at \$2,135 versus basic 'Gucci inspired' shoes purchased at Target for \$19.54. Critically importantly, regardless if in a capitalistic or communist state, wealthy corporate industry art collectors understands - more than artists—how to create value for artwork. They pay vast sums for art - as an investment in future value - to other art collectors and the rarified highly-valued artists.

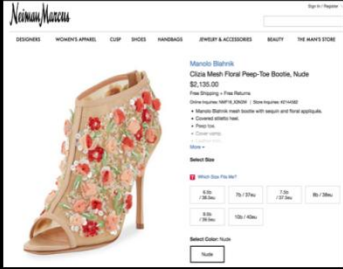
Exhibit

A


ECONOMIC VALUATION OF SHOES



Shoes at Target selling for **\$19.54** that consumer recommendations compare to Gucci at \$650



Manolo Blahnik shoes selling for **\$2,135.00** at Neiman Marcus



Three pairs of Alexander McQueen shoes sold at Christies for **\$295,000** in 2015. They were classified as Fine Art for legal purposes against counterfeiting lawsuit.

Photo Credit: Target.com, Neiman Marcus, Footware News

- 4.1. In its broadest form and to understand the basic tenant of economics Marx states, “A commodity is, in the first place, an object outside us, a thing that by its properties satisfies human wants of some sort or another.” The economics of art valuation can be seen every time you purchase a ticket to an exhibition or when you purchase an item from a museum gift shop. For those that don't believe that art is a valued commodity, then evidence the millions of artists trying sell their products (or art) and their artistic services (as commissions).
- 4.2. Yet the art collector sees art as a commodity. To collectors, Art is part of an investment portfolio in modernity by wealthy corporate art patrons. Yes, there are those that buy art for appreciation, but make no mistake, the greater illusion behind the sale is the exchange value and revenue gained from its current - and future - exchange value. They stealthily increase their wealth through loans against their collections, corporate tax shelters, write-offs for art donations or through their corporate on-profit foundations. This is in contrast to the artist's struggle to create valuation and increasing their sales opportunities.
- 4.3. To translate how the analytical nature of the sublime works for both the Kantian aesthetic evaluation and Marxist exchange valuation is to examine Exhibit B Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* with an Irving Penn photograph. Both are images of a woman, original works of art, aesthetically judged to be similar compositionally, and mathematically sublime. Da Vinci was a commissioned painter yet that was a fraction of his total body of work. Penn was commissioned for celebrities' portraits but also exhibited personal work as in this photograph of his wife. Also, oil paintings versus photographs have more value - as well as Da Vinci's status as a Master genius. In terms of market valuation, with Da Vinci's noted genius along with the scarcity of paintings, the historical nature and provenance - creates an incalculable exchange value as compared with Irving Penn's *Woman in a Moroccan Palace* that sold at Christie's for \$307,000.

Exhibit B

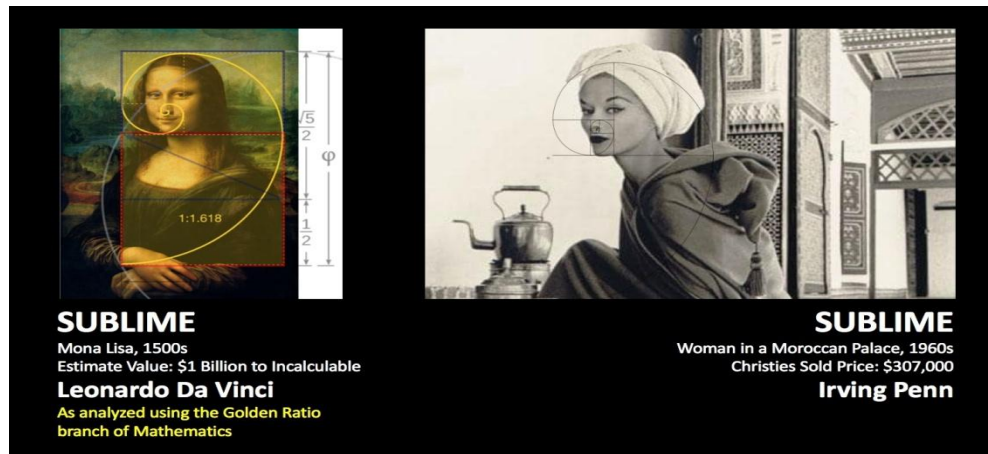


Photo Credit: Profitsrun.com and Christies.com

5. Yet Walter Gropius, in *The Theory and Organization of the Bauhaus*, was cognizant of the duality- between the aesthetic evaluation and the valuation of art - as to why artists struggle. He instituted the Bauhaus to be an environment for artists to work in tandem with industry sponsors to insure productive, and financially viable, outcomes. So it the artist's dilemma isto create art with the Kantian cognitive function of 'common sense of aesthetics', but equally to use 'business common sense' - yet that requires a completely different set of skills.
- 5.1.1. Gropius was also extremely critical of the artist who creates in isolation or in a vacuum. Meaning events that occur separately from expected connections –such as buyers in industry. He used innovative techniques to academically reshape the mind of artists so that – when they expressed themselves – they were synthesized with industry needs.
- 5.1.2. Like Kant, Gropius believed genius is rare and felt misleading artists was a fault. In a partial quote, Gropius stated, “For this art-proletariat, lulled into a dream of genius and enmeshed in artistic conceit, was being prepared for the ‘profession’...without being given the equipment of a real education...”And genius - in terms of valuation as evidence by the art epochs – if properly promoted can increase an artist's value. Evidence high valuation for the works of Masters such as VanGogh, Rothko, and Vermeer for their style innovations and techniques – or Da Vinci for his as well - but also for his broad body of work.
- 5.2. Art - in context with commerce, politics and religion - is evidenced in the writings of Max Weber's *Asceticism and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Weber lends evidentiary support as he examines the effects of the modern loss of religious ideology and the economic impacts. In Exhibit C, not only is Vatican City considered art through architecture – but as art patrons- they showcase historical but also modern artists – such as Dali and Matisse - whose works display religious ideology. While religious art has not faded in modernity, it doesn't enjoy the prominence and marketability for artists that it once held.

Exhibit C



Photo Credit: Amy Keely

- 5.2.1. Yet now, the power of capitalist corporate art sponsorship evidenced by the museums owned by fashion's elite such as the Prada Foundation and other fashion conglomerates such as LVMH's CEO, Bernard Arnault and CEO François Pinault of PPR. Pinault - one of France's richest men - owns the museum Punta della Dogana in Venice, mega fashion brands and ironically Christies Auction House. Most collectors purchase art for status as well as for the profitable increase in art valuation over time. They are used as assets on financial balance sheets. The ugly hidden specter - behind the modern corporate sponsor's generosity - is tax shelters and additional revenue sources by selling tickets to display artwork in their museums supported by their foundations. Further, many of the wealthy are employed on their own foundation boards - or have family members who are employed - where they receive hefty salaries and considerable influence.
- 5.3. So commoditizing art valuation as a product (similar to the Kantian 'object') requires creating use and exchange value based on a sublime reasoning, and rarity of genius. Yet another factor to consider is an artist's ideological view point as Lukács, touches upon it in "*The Ideology of Modernism*" and as does Mary Kelly, in *Reviewing Modernist Criticism*. Both highlight the artists need for individualistic output -but the risk is that the valuation can be negatively impacted should their work be misunderstood.
- 5.3.1. At the heart of Lukács ideology he states, "Philosophy distinguishes between abstract and concrete potentiality. Its content - or rather lack of content - derives from the fact that such a view of life cannot impart a sense of direction". It is this the term "direction" that is at the heart of what the artist - as entrepreneur - struggles with in a capitalistic economy. Gropius worked to overcome how to create direction for the artist's ideology that mirrors the needs of the buyer or industry. Also, Kelly stated, that 'the individual obsessed by the obligation to exhibit himself in order to be.'" So if the artist's narrative is too uniquely individual, it may or may not translate well to not only the viewer -as we learned in Kant's Judgement of Taste - but the buyer.
- 5.3.2. Valuation, viewed through this lens, can be compared with the irony in Duchamp's *Fountain*. It was not understood and rejected by the exhibition selection committee, so it had very little value both in aesthetic evaluation and economic valuation. Yet one could speculate on what the value Duchamp's original urinal would be today by comparison - if it was not lost. His work tumultuously ushered in the 'readymade' art form. So thanks to Duchamp's urinal -Robert Gober's very similar exhibit called "Three Urinals" sold at Christie's in 2014 for \$3.52 Million as shown in Exhibit D.

Exhibit D



Photo Credit: Tate Museum <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/duchamp-fountain-t07573> and Christies.com

- 5.3.3. With the vast number of artists trying to monetize their art into a career, the economic principles of supply and demand are in full force. Like shopping for collectables today, selling follows this economic rule: the lower the supply the greater the value, and the greater the supply the lower the value - with only a few exceptions. It is this delta between idealistic output and economic valuation that creates a large gap for artists. So artists may have the freedom of expression to create art that is viewed and understood - if they cannot make money - then they have

fulfilled one need to create, yet not fulfilled the basic subsistence level needs for food, water, shelter, and safety.

- 5.3.4. That art - in no uncertain terms - is a business is evidenced when Kelly states, “displayed in certain types of institutions (museums, galleries), within specific legal structures (contractual agreements, fees, insurance,) and perceived by definite material techniques in a number of ways (catalogs, art books, magazines).” Yet these are all business elements. Mary Kelly also inadvertently discusses the role of marketing that creates value for artist exhibits. It highlights the illusionary subtleties often overlooked by artist entrepreneurs when building a marketing brand to increase their valuation. Kelly states, “Artists generally maintain that the catalogue is more important than the exhibition itself. It gives permanence to temporary events, an authenticity in the form of historical testimony.” In fact, it doesn’t just give permanence to temporary exhibits - it adds value to the artist and their work. What the catalog truthfully represents is printed marketing promotional materials that ‘date stamps’ the time and place of the exhibit that the artist uses for validation as their own marketing materials in their portfolio of work. The greater number of places exhibited - and the more prestigious the places exhibited - the higher exchange value for the artist’s work. So in order to become economically robust - artists as entrepreneurs - must find ways to be ‘paid to create’, as well as to ‘create to be paid’.
6. The limits and challenges to this paper is that there may perhaps be individuals who don’t see art as a product or service - that can be commoditized - despite how broadly Marx describes commodities in use or exchange valuation. Time limits the ability to provide more examples of the mechanisms used to value art as defined by supply and demand economics. There may also be a delta between business and artistic concepts that would require further exposition of hidden business economics. Also, there may be artists who place more value on the need to express their ideology than the business of selling their work.
7. To restate, the dialectic duality of aesthetic evaluation and economic valuation of art as a commodity, shares many commonalities. It creates illusions that hide challenges for artists and create opportunities for art collectors. The loss of historically significant religious art patrons, and the millions of artists trying to sell their work, evokes capitalistic economic supply and demand challenges. It impacts the sale of their art - as products - or being awarded commissions - as a service. Gropius echoes Marxist and Kantian philosophies through his judgement that there is a critical delta between art education and the economic stability of artists through an alignment with industry. Plus the examination of Max Weber allows for a discussion on religious and corporate art patrons and Lukács and Mary Kelly confirm that many artists create - for spiritually idealistic importance. Kelly also raises the specter of a duality in the importance for the catalog given they are really used as marketing promotions in the corporate world. Even the language she uses to describe the art process are the exact same elements used by corporations when selling products and services.
8. In conclusion, there is an apocryphal story that art stands alone outside the word of economics. This is true in the sense that it can be artistic therapy, but untrue for the art entrepreneur if a potential buyer does not value the art work enough to purchase. It is through analytical sublime reasoning, that art is judged for both its aesthetic evaluation and economic valuation. My pragmatic business side would highlight reality - which is that most of the millions of artists in modern society will not create artwork recognized for its genius seminal distinction - but - they will create work that has value. Gropius provides hope that modern shifts in art education - as aligned with industry - can offer art entrepreneurs greater value. But at what value, and to whom becomes the critical component to the artist’s success equation. Artists have the freedom to create art they define as aesthetically agreeable in its composition or message - but if it cannot be sold - they will always struggle financially.

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