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## Exploring supply-side network interactions in the visual art production process

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### ABSTRACT

This paper presents an analysis of the supply-side of the arts market with a focus on how the actors therein interact as a network in the art production process. Through the adoption of a qualitative semi-structured interview methodology, the paper provides insight into how professional and established visual artists (in conjunction with third-party support) conceptualise, produce and distribute their art works in the art market. Results indicate that the art product and the art production process is reliant on a range of mutually beneficial and reciprocal interactions that serve as bases for value creation in the art market. The paper concludes with a range of research opportunities for both academics and practitioners in the arts marketing context.

### 1. Introduction

Arts marketing emerged as an important sub-field of the marketing discipline in the 1990s (see Baker & Falkner, 1991; O'Reilly, 2011; O'Reilly & Kerrigan, 2010; Rentschler, 2002; Shin, Lee, & Lee, 2014). Despite a quarter of a century of empirical and conceptual work, the nature of the 'art as product' and the opaque nature of value creation in the art production process remain points of debate in the marketing literature (Fillis, 2006; Lehman, Wickham, & Fillis, 2016; Oberlin & Gieryn, 2015) and the art world generally (Robertson, 2016; Thompson, 2008; Thompson, 2014; Timms, 2004). The marketing literature does not present a detailed conceptualisation the art production process, nor any specific guidance as to how artwork generates its market value; in particular, it has difficulty addressing circumstances where product development is not directly linked to consumer demand (Kubacki & Croft, 2011; O'Reilly, 2005). Contrary to the traditional marketing paradigm, where producers seek to understand target consumer needs and produce goods/services to satisfy them accordingly, the opposite appears the case in the arts context; here an output is created to satisfy the artists' intrinsic needs, and then is subsequently presented to the art market for consumption (Shin et al., 2014). Similarly, the art world often rejects the materialistic association of the 'product' concept as applied to their creative output, and consumer demand does not generally represent the primary driving force behind art and other cultural-based production (Fillis, 2011; Kubacki & Croft, 2011; Lehman & Wickham, 2014).

Whilst there is considerable product-related research in the arts marketing field (e.g., Bradshaw, 2010; Brown, 2015; Muñiz, Norris & Fine, 2014; Rodner & Kerrigan, 2014), the theoretical debate around 'art as a product' and 'art production' has generally stalled – particularly with regard to the mechanisms around how actors on the supply-side interact as a network to create works considered valuable in the art market (see Bain, 2005; Charters, 2006; Crossland & Smith, 2002; Jyrama & Ayvari, 2010; Klammer & Petrova, 2007). Certainly, extant arts marketing research has explored art production and value creation processes from a whole-of-

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market perspective, but this has tended to focus on the identification of the various actors in the process and the sequential roles they perform in the art market (see [Botti, 2000](#), [Boorsma, 2006](#); [Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016](#); [Edelmann & Vaisey, 2014](#); [Preece & Kerrigan, 2015](#)). To advance our theoretical understanding of the ‘art product’, the ‘art production’ process (and their relationship to market value generation), therefore, this paper seeks to explore the manner in which the supply-side actors interact as a network in the art production process. In order to address this, we discuss the literature as it relates to the nature of the actors in the art production process as well as the (nominal) interactions that occur between them. In doing so, this paper seeks to respond to calls for more robust arts marketing theories (see [Fillis, 2011](#); [Lehman & Wickham, 2014](#)) and for more empirical research to inform marketing theory in terms of the components of the art market network that are the bases of art production and value creation in the sector ([Keuschnigg, 2015](#); [Lehman & Wickham, 2014](#); [Preece, Kerrigan, & O’Reilly, 2016](#)).

## 2. Literature review

The arts marketing literature generally identifies the art production process as a system of activities that concerns both the supply and consumption sides of the art market (see [Alexander & Bowler, 2014](#); [Giuffre, 2009](#); [Koppman, 2014](#); [Pouly, 2016](#); [Rodner & Thomson, 2013](#); [Velthuis, 2007](#)). [Jyrama and Ayvari \(2010\)](#), for example, proposed a view of the art and culture market as having a network structure, consisting of various networks of participating actors who share relationships with each other. Actors are classified as either ‘businesses’ (e.g., galleries, consumers) or ‘institutional’ (e.g., museums and art schools), with markets hierarchically structured by reputation and status ([Jyrama & Ayvari, 2010](#)). [Velthuis \(2007, p. 7\)](#) agreed, stating that: “The art market is characterised by a dense network of intimate, long-term relationships between artists, collectors, and their intermediaries”. [Rodner and Thomson \(2013\)](#) similarly conceptualised it as being a ‘mechanical network’ (or ‘art machine’), consisting of art professionals and institutions. Each component of the mechanical network plays an essential (and at times overlapping) role: arts managers use business tactics to bring artwork and audiences together; critics and aestheticians justify the artwork within its current cultural and social context; government, business and philanthropy provide essential funding and a platform for wider dissemination ([Rodner & Thomson, 2013](#)). The collaborative nature of the interrelationships indicates that the perceptions of quality (and the potential for artists to be considered ‘successful’) is collectively constructed by key stakeholders in the art world ([Martin, 2007](#)). Interrelationships are also significant in [Zorloni’s \(2005\)](#) ‘systems view of the art market’ which describes the pricing and value of works and involves the following criteria: the significance of the artist’s brand, technical aspects of the works, degree of international competition, level of domestic cultural infrastructure, and the relative power of the respective dealer. For [Curioni, Forti, and Leone \(2015, p. 56\)](#), the global art system (as they coined it) is a place where:

Economic/market potentials and critical/philosophic evaluations coexist as the customer’s ‘tastes’ interact with a moving, persuasive, hierarchical and complex regime enacted by commercial and non-commercial gatekeepers who legitimise the traded works as ‘art’ works.

[Rodner and Thomson’s \(2013\)](#) ‘art machine’ model presents the art market as consisting of components that purposely benefit from both the symbolic and financial value created by the mechanisms that tie the different elements together. In a study using Damien Hirst as a case, [Preece et al. \(2016\)](#) proposed a visual art value framework that included a value process and a range of value elements that results in the creation of value. They identified all the components of the art market and the process by which art products are legitimised and were critical of the emphasis on traditional marketing paradigms (e.g., the notion of target consumers, the satisfaction of consumer needs, etc.) as sources of value creation. The concentration on art production as a system, or a network, stems from a research paradigm that is focused on what constitutes ‘value creation’ and ‘value co-creation’, and the respective roles of art producers and consumers therein.

### 2.1. Identifying the supply-side art market actors

Despite the concentration on the systems/networks view of art production, a common theme evident in art and culture literature is the identification and aggregation of ‘groups of actors’ that operate cooperatively in the sector. [Hirschman \(1983\)](#), for example, identified three actors to which a creative producer may be oriented towards the ‘public at large’ (i.e., the primary orientation for commercialised producers), ‘peers and industry professionals’, and ‘the artist themselves’. [Hirschman \(1983\)](#) further considered the literature acknowledging the influence of network activities in the art production process; the role of a gallery owner, for example, is considered with respect to their interpretation and mediation of converting art into a product for consumption ([Hirschman, 1983](#)). [Solomon’s \(1988\)](#) interpretation of art production referred to the interrelated processes of creation, manufacture, marketing, distribution, exhibiting and consumption. [Solomon \(1988, p. 331\)](#) demarcated the production system into three distinct parts:

A creative subsystem responsible for generating new symbols/products...a managerial subsystem responsible for selecting, making tangible, mass producing and managing the distribution of new symbols/products and...a communications subsystem responsible for giving meaning to the new product and providing it with a set of attributes which are communicated to consumers.

These subsystems can be seen as groups of actors interacting in a production process. Similarly, [Botti \(2000\)](#) suggested that art and culture production activities can, and indeed, needs to be grouped together to make sense of how the sector operates. In her article, [Botti \(2000\)](#) identified four distinct groups of actors: ‘the artist’, ‘champions’, ‘experts’ and ‘consumers’, who in concert produce, legitimate, distribute and finally consume the art product. [Venkatesh and Meamber \(2006\)](#) also identified clusters of actors that actively participate as an art production system, namely: ‘producers’ (i.e., designers, artists, etc.), ‘cultural intermediaries’ (i.e.,

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