

Page 20

A Safe Haven for Shopkeepers

Wars and crises are good for the art market. So long as they’re happening elsewhere.

BY NICOLAI STRØM-OLSEN
TRANSLATED FROM NORWEGIAN
BY DAVID ALMNES

In 1759, James Christie started running auctions. In 1788, John Sotheby became a partner at Baker and Leigh auction house, forerunner of today’s Sotheby’s. Today, Christie’s and Sotheby’s have grown to be the most important auction houses in the world, and London is the centre of the world’s art market. “This history – that is to say, how the British art market grew and rose to ascendancy – has been a relatively neglected topic with art historical research. And that is a little strange, as there are a number of studies on the art market in the Netherlands and in France, as well as of the emergence of the gallery network in Europe in the 19th century.” Explains the senior research curator in the history of collecting at the National Gallery London, Dr. Susanna Avery-Quash. For a number of years, Avery-Quash has worked at unearthing that history. And she is not alone. James Goodwin, head of Christie’s’ Education Art Business course, has also wondered how London came to be at the centre of the European art market. Both agree that the movement of people and wealth is important to the story, but naturally also, interest in art.

“The British upper class had, since the end of the 17th century, left England for a *Grand Tour* of the continent, an educational journey for young men. Through it, they garnered first-hand knowledge of Italian art, and would gradually begin collecting,” explains Goodwin.

At the same time, large numbers of immigrants – especially from the Netherlands – came to London. The city offered new business opportunities and was a safe haven during the 30 Years War (1618 – 1648), which led to a Dutch community there.

Goodwin adds, ‘A consequence of this was that Dutch art also made its entrance onto the British market, and the English began buying Rembrandt and Rubens.’

A burgeoning economy and growing cultural interest led to more people began trading art. One such person was the aforementioned James Christie, who began arranging art auctions as early as 1759. Three years later, he hired his own space in London,

and from 1766, he began making catalogues for his auctions.

‘I’ve gone over the art sales in London starting in 1766, when Christie began cataloguing his sales, and going by the lists I have, it seems that between 1766 and 1801, there were 2500 art sales in London. Furthermore, we can identify the names of 1200 sellers and many more buyers.’

Sellers of the time were largely from the aristocracy, who had collected art, books, and other luxury products. This led to the establishment of auction houses that specialised in many forms of collectables. Among other things, a market arose for old books; the leading name in book sales was Baker and Leigh, where John Sotheby was made partner in 1788.

“Turnover on the auctions market – ie. art, jewellery, and books – rose to such a degree that an auctioning law was passed in 1777, the purpose of which was to prevent embezzlement and to uphold better standards.’

Susanna Avery-Quash agrees with Goodwin’s description. She points to researcher Neil de Marchi, who has shown that already by the 1740s, London had become the centre of an international art market that included Amsterdam, Paris, and Brussels. Auction houses and galleries advertised in these cities, and art dealers regularly communicated and cooperated with their foreign counterparts.

That network would soon turn out to be rather useful.

THE FRENCH REVOLUTION AND THE BOOM

In 1789, the London art market entered a long boom as a result of the French Revolution. Large numbers of people were in a hurry to get themselves and their capital out of France. The losers of the French Revolution were the French aristocracy and the church. They had lost large parts of their wealth, and were often reduced to selling their possessions to survive.

‘Contemporary art historian and travel writer, Mrs Anna Jameson (1795 – 1860) writes that she recalled boatloads of Carraccis, Claudes, and Poussins arriving in London between 1795 and 1815,’ says Avery-Quash.

As soon, French aristocrats and clergymen were not the only ones eager to leave the continent. On the heels of the French Revolution came another European tragedy: the Napoleonic Wars.

Avery-Query quash notes, ‘Napoleon occupied Italy and Spain, which brought valuable art treasures from castles, cathedrals, and monasteries onto the market.’

For enterprising persons, this was potential goldmine. Starting in 1790, ever more people were getting involved in the British art market.

‘A number of them were artists living abroad. Alexander Day and William Young Ottley operated out of Italy. They found works of art and sent them to England. Art dealers Michael Bryan and William Buchanan worked in Holland and Belgium from 1798, while Buchanan and George Augustus Wallis started purchasing in Spain after 1807.’ There were also ever more foreign art dealers



Rudolph Ackermann, the auction room at Christie's, ca 1808. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

working in England. They were looking for potential buyers for pieces they could import from their home country.

‘What were the sizes of the collections that arrived in England at that time?’

“The most important collection that came from abroad was the Orleans Collection, which has been important for the creation the National Gallery’s collection.”

The collection in question had belonged to Philippe II of Orleans, who had ruled France from 1715 to 1723. It consisted of renowned pieces by Paulo Veronese, Tintoretto, Rembrandy, and Titian, among others.

“The French, Flemish, and Dutch part of the collection comprised 147 pieces, and was sold through a private contract sale in 1793, and the Italian part of the collection, a staggering 295 pieces, was sold in 1798.”

‘What do you mean by contract sale?’

“That was an innovation from around the same period as the French Revolution. The idea was that the pictures, often from more than one collection, were displayed with a fixed price over quite a long period of time. These were then sold to the first bidder, rather than in a public auction to the person offering the highest bid. The sale of the Orleans collection was a breakthrough for this type of sale.”

She pauses, before continuing. “The sale of the Orleans collection marks the movement of the centre of the art market from the continent to London.”

INDUSTIAL REVOLUTION AND NEW ART

Thus, London was the definitive centre of art trading by 1800, by virtue of being the only place in Europe not embroiled in war.

‘For many people, London was the only place you could walk the streets without fear-

ing for your life. Of course, that’s not enough to create a market for art,’ laughs Goodwin. ‘You need money, too. In so many words, a market for art presupposes a solid surplus.’

And in the 18th century, the British did indeed have a solid surplus. They had been pioneers of Industrial Revolution, which had led to massive changes among the British elite. Shrewd industrialists could end up richer than the nobles, despite a total lack of pedigree. The newly rich started buying luxury goods from Fortnum and Mason and children’s toys from Hamley’s. London banks, like Barclays and Lloyds, came to be known across Europe.

Goodwin notes, ‘Napoleon called the UK a nation of shopkeepers, and although they don’t like to admit it, commercial galleries are shops that tend to cluster. Pamela Fletcher and Anne Helmreich wrote a book, *The Rise of the Modern Art Market in London, 1850 – 1939*, in which they studying the distribution of galleries at the end of the 19th century. They found that there was heavy clustering down Bond Street and south of Picadilly, which is where Sotheby’s and Christie’s are now. Sotheby’s actually moved here in 1917, after they went from selling books to selling art. Fletcher and Helmreich note that it is advantageous for galleries to be in the vicinity of luxury boutiques, exhibition rooms, and especially the Royal Academy.’

For the growing industrial bourgeoisie has also started buying British art, explains Bernard Vere at Sotheby’s.

‘I think it’s clear that new money entered the art world, right from the start of the Industrial Revolution. Artists like Joseph Wright of Derby made a mint on it, and the

Pre-Raphaelites became quite popular among the industrial bourgeoisie.’

He adds that this point in time saw a marked increase in local pride in industrial cities like Glasgow, Birmingham, Manchester, and Liverpool.

‘Collections like that of William Hesketh Lever and Burell’s in Glasgow were built by rich industrialists. The cities of Birmingham, Manchester, and Liverpool also assembled brilliant collections of art, starting in the 19th century. Especially, Liverpool’s Walker Art Gallery seems to have had a very advanced acquisitions strategy – for example, they have the only Giovanni Seganti in a publicly owned British collection,’ he explains.

Vere is unsure whether this caused stronger growth in the British art market during the 1800s than was seen in Germany and France. But the art market certainly began clustering in London.

‘I’m not that familiar with the market in Germany and France, but I have the impression that there are large private collections there, too.’

Goodwin takes a different view.

‘When analysing the art market it is important to begin with an economic view then to look further to cultural developments. From the early nineteenth century Britain was miles ahead of Germany and France in terms of economic growth and GDP per capita. This meant that Britain was in a unique economic position to develop a robust art market,’ he explains.

Nevertheless, he points out that although a country may have strong economic growth, that does not mean that domestic art will be well regarded by critics and popular generally.

‘One of the highest recorded prices paid for a contemporary work of art in the nineteenth century was for William Holman Hunt’s *Shadow of Death* (1870 – 1873), which bought including copyright from the artist for £10,500 in 1873. And that’s not a world famous painting today.

‘If you think of the big names in the art world just from that time, there were a great number of French artists. That last few years the Pre-Raphaelites have gained a bit more attention, but Paris became the centre of the art world from the time.’

Vere underscores the fact that a number of French artists were often to be found in England, noting, ‘It’s ironic that the first time Camille Pissarro and Claude Money met, it was at the home of gallery owner Durand-Ruel in London – at this point, they had all left France because of the Franco-Prussian War in 1870 – 1871. So that makes Impressionism an English invention!’

He feels that one must nonetheless differentiate between contemporary artists and old masters, pointing out, ‘The English market was successful because “Old Masters galleries” could sell to America, and because older artists like Lord Leighton, John Everett Millais, and Lawrence Alma-Tadema commanded very steep prices. Paris had a number of similar characters, like Puvis de Chavannes, but the artist’s abode makes it clear that Paris was more of a magnet for aspiring artists.’

Vere emphasises that British artists did

go to Paris, studying at the Academie Julien or living there.

‘Paris was something artists felt they had to experience, London was not. So a successful art market is not the same as a successful art scene,’ he says.

IMPRESSIONISM INVENTED IN ENGLAND?

So, London was to remain the heart of the art market. Goodwin agrees with Vere that it was not a given that London would remain the dominant art market in the 20th century. France, Germany and other western European economies plus the USA saw strong economic growth from the late nineteenth century.

‘World War I broke the art markets in mainland Europe. London and New York have dominated most of the time since,’ claims Goodwin

Vere disagrees. He asserts, ‘No, it was World War II. That’s when a lot of intellectuals had to flee Germany and France. They went to England and the US. A consequence of WWII was New York become the dominant city in contemporary art.’

Whether one focusses on the First or Second World War, as these conflicts ravaged the continent, Brits lived under the motto ‘Stay calm and carry on.’ After the war, London was a safe distance from the Soviet Union, there were no serious uprisings in 1968, and when large parts of Europe embarked on the Euro-experiment, the British stuck with the pound. Even today, London is a safe haven for shopkeepers in Europe going from one crisis to another.

1 <http://www.bowdoin.edu/books/the-rise-of-the-modern-art-market-in-london-1850-1939/index.shtml>

Page 30

Art as Living

Kunst som levebrød [Art as Living] was created at Kulturinkubatoren [tr. the Culture Incubator] at Ipark, Stavanger in 2011. Their purpose is to give participants a look at business tools that can be used to develop their operation. Director Gry Isabel Sannes-Knutsen gives details on the programme.

BY MONICA HOLMEN
TRANSLATED FROM NORWEGIAN
BY DAVID ALMNES

What is Kunst som levebrød [KSL]?

‘The programme consists of get-togethers, talks, and guidance, and is meant to provide knowledge of fundamental business tools and the day-to-day language of today’s business world. It’s up to the individual artists to adapt

the information and see how it can aid their work. There are some who have thought that KSL is about commercialising intellectual property, but what we do is showcase a set of tools and provide insight into the various processes in the art field.’

‘Growing your business, ‘targeting the sector’, ‘risk capital’, ‘industry’ – these are relatively alien terms among artists. What use is there in adopting these terms?’

‘Cultural industry is a comparatively new term, and exactly what it means is it still in flux. It’s important to point out that the world of art produces single pieces of intellectual property where the relationship between “product” and “producer” has a different nature – the IP has another set of values than those we apply to goods that are traditionally bought and sold on a market.

‘The way I see it, the aforementioned terms cannot currently be used any other way than to provide insight into the language and a set of tools that there – as of yet – is no culture of using among Norwegian artists. A new culture has to be created that stems from the artists themselves; you can’t force it onto them.’

‘The government wants increased private funding and sponsorship in arts and culture, but there’s a ways left to go. Is it that the arts don’t want private support, or is there just no tradition of sponsoring arts and culture in the private sector?’

‘Sponsorship is a term people have little experience with in the Norwegian art world. In sports, for instance, sponsorship is a trade between two parties. Trial and error are required to translate this to the arts. One of the big challenges is clarifying what values the artists represent and thus finding out what the “trade” between the parties will comprise.

‘Private means are governed by a different set of rules than public funds, and in Norway, there isn’t much tradition of patronage and embracing the arts. It’s not part of our shared tradition, identity, our day-to-day. If artists in Norway are to be financed by private capital, the art scene itself must give rise to that tradition.’

‘What might a trade between an artist and a sponsor entail? Art is often preoccupied with being 100% free, which public money seems to facilitate. To what degree can this be achieved with private means?’

‘The expectations of both parties have to be made clear, that will make it easier to consider working together. It could mean something as simple as trading art or experiences for sponsor funds. I feel that “sponsorship” is old-fashioned and has a negative connotation, and I think it is crucial that people imbue this kind of partnership with their own ideas, ones the artists can get behind. «Cooperation» is a better word, as it implies give and take.’

‘Suppose an artist makes work that isn’t saleable, and is thus unable to make a living of their art. Who foots the bill?’

‘That is a challenging question in Norway and the source of considerable debate. We have public subsidy schemes not found in other places around the world. Then again, artists around the world still produce “typi-

cally unsaleable” objects. There’s no simple answer to this.’

‘What do you feel is the ideal way to finance art?’

‘The art scene has to operate such that we have a good supply at relevant, quality art. The art market is one of the world’s biggest, and like in other markets, there is supply and demand. In New York, London, and Berlin, there are strong art scenes without subsidy schemes like ours, so that’s somewhere we might find relevant knowledge of how a build a stronger community without public money. How any such experience might be transferred to a Norwegian setting has to be seen in relation to the real economy in Norway, given our strong economy and high wages, prices, and standard of living.’

Page 31

Platform London

Platform London is an organization operating somewhere between visual art production, activism, and research. Their main concern these days is with oil company sponsorships in the cultural sector and their consequences. KUNSTforum spoke to Anna Galinka, who works at Platform London.

BY MONICA HOLMEN

‘On your webpage, you write that “[...] Platform is different. We combine art, activism, education and research [...]” and “[...] unique projects driven by the need for social ecological justice”. Could you please elaborate on this?’

‘Platform started as an art collective and grew into an organisation that works in the crossover between the art world, campaigning, education, and research. Our projects at the moment are highly focused on what we call the “Carbon Web”: the set of relationships between finance, government, and culture that keeps big oil companies in business and keeps them pushing the world over the brink of climate crisis. Our projects map, challenge, and aim to break these links in a variety of ways. We might take audiences on immersive tours around the City of London, mapping its entanglement in fossil fuel finance webs and environmental devastation. Or we might reveal and analyse secret oil contracts like we did in Iraq and Uganda, helping civil society challenge them. Or we might bring artists, activists, and academics together for talks on what a positive future beyond oil might look like.’

‘What are your thoughts on sponsorships, both private and state?’

‘Over the past 20 years, during which we’ve focused on oil in our work, we’ve realised that cultural sponsorship is absolutely crucial to keeping oil corporations in business. What’s BP to do when its name is increasingly associated with destroyed Gulf of Mexico shores, murdered trade unionists in Colombia, and climate chaos? Their PR strategy is focused on gaining “social licence to operate” (PR professionals’ term) from “special publics”, i.e. civil servants, journalists, NGOs, artistic elites. And sponsoring prestigious art spaces like London’s Tate Gallery is a crucial part of how oil companies gain this “social licence”. That’s why we’re part of a growing movement against oil sponsorship of the arts.

‘Every arts organisation and artist has to face difficult questions about how to finance their work – and everyone we’ve talked to draws these lines differently – but we believe that public investment in art is a great and necessary thing.’

‘Platform London has shed light on the relationship between the oil industry and the arts. In Norway, the art world receives heavy public funding, with institutions being mainly state- or artist-run. Private (and commercial) galleries are few and the art market almost non-existent. There have been protests against funding from oil companies such as Statoil; funding from the Department of Culture, however, is accepted, even though this in reality is also “oil-money”, albeit in a sense white-washed through a socio-democratic system of government grants. What are your thoughts on this? Can this situation ever be avoided, and if so, how?’

‘You might say, “What difference does it make, if state funding for the arts may also come from questionable corporations?” The difference is that state funding does not produce legitimacy for a climate-wrecking business model. State funding can be more democratic and accountable, and support art that is more diverse and challenging than the prestige high-value stuff corporations favour. In the UK, state arts funding has been ruthlessly cut by a conservative government over the past five years, and this has really threatened the survival of the more experimental, community-based, minority ethnic art projects. Art needs public funding!’

‘And further to that, if an artist makes art that isn’t saleable and thus can’t live off her work, who should then pay the bill?’

‘So much of the most important art is not saleable; this is partly why public funding of art is so important. But also, with things like crowd funding and Patreon, there’s lots of new ways for communities to support art that’s important to them. To me, the crucial thing is that artists consider both what their art and what their art’s *funding* are doing to the wider world!’

‘In your opinion, what is the ideal way to finance the art world?’

‘There’s no one-size-fits-all solution, but see my other answers.’

‘Finally, how is Platform London funded?’

‘Our funding is a mix of [donations from]

charitable foundations, research grants, individual donations and EU grants.’

Page 32

Creative Capital

The arts organization Creative Capital was established in 1999 to provide financial support and advisory services to innovative artists in all artistic disciplines. Their integrated approach is adapted from the way that venture capitalists work with fledgling businesses.

By MONICA HOLMEN

‘On your web page, it says that Creative Capital are “investing in artists who shape the future”. Based on your approach you seem to have a clear idea on how to do this best. Can you elaborate on this?’

‘We have a four-part approach to working with an artist: support the project idea financially; support the person beyond the project, to help them build skills and relationships that will stay with them long after we are out of the picture; build and nurture the community of artists so that they can be resources to each other throughout their creative lives, and also help other artists connect with professionals working in their fields; and engage the public through extensive promotion of the artists and projects, mostly online.

‘Many artists have told us that this approach has helped them to think bigger about their work and really consider its impact.’

‘According to the site, Creative Capital also provides funding at strategic moments and helps direct the project to its most successful completion.’ How much do you intervene in a project?’

‘We don’t; we don’t see that as our job. Some things work, some don’t. We say we’re a provider of “risk capital” to the arts and culture. If you are committed to taking risks, not everything will succeed. We do allow artists to change their projects, but that is initiated by them, not us.’

‘From what little I know, the American art world seems much more dependent on the commercial aspect of art and private collectors, which in turn may be restrictive for an artist working with art that doesn’t easily sell. How do you see Creative Capital’s role in this context?’

‘We fund work that is for the most part emphatically non-commercial, although it is important to acknowledge that many of our artists have had significant commercial success. In general, our artists exhibit their work through the non-profit cultural infrastructure as represented by regional theatres and exhibition societies, at university galleries

and non-profit art spaces, through public art commissions, et cetera. Many of our artists are succeeding across all these platforms. Our role is to help artists articulate the success they hope to have, and then to strategize with them what a path to that success might look like.’

‘In contrast to the American art world, Norway’s art scene is heavily funded by the state, one consequence of which is a virtually insignificant art market. In your experience, what would be the ideal way to finance the art world?’

‘To me, the ideal way to finance artistic endeavours would involve a rich mix of government grant support at the local, state, and national level. It would include grassroots support through crowd funding sites like Kickstarter. It would include grants from private sector foundations, large and small, or other NGO’s, if appropriate to the issues in a particular project, and it would also include direct donations from larger individual donors. These sources would be in balance so that there’d be no fear of censorship from the government or intrusion from any individual’s particular point of view.

‘Once work is completed, we also need a robust community of exhibitors of all sizes and in communities large and small, and we need a community of patrons and collectors.

So, basically, we need a broad base of diversified support!’

‘Can you give some examples of artists that have had particular success after being supported by Creative Capital?’

‘There are several blog posts to be found online with testimonials of how artists have used our support, among others Nick Slie, part of the performance group Mondo Bizarro, who said in an interview:

“Creative Capital was a game-changer for many reasons that weren’t primarily financial to us; the collaboration with the staff, the idea that people really had our backs and wanted to see this work live and flourish in the world. Then of course, it’s awesome to have a healthy amount of financial resources behind the project. This idea that the granting organization is a partner in your project is progressive and amazing.”

‘How is Creative Capital it self-funded?’

‘We have a number of major foundation and individual donors, including our board of directors. In addition, we are always doing grassroots campaigns to attract smaller donors.’

Page 33

ArtLeaks

ArtLeaks was founded by an international group of artists, curators, and art historians and critics in 2011. Their aim is to speak out against the appropriation of

politically engaged culture, and to expose instances of abuse, censorship, and wrongdoing and submit them to public inquiry. KUNSTforum spoke to one of their members, Corina Apostol.

By MONICA HOLMEN

‘On your web page you write that Art Leaks works “in response to the abuse of their professional integrity and the open infraction of their labour rights.” Can you give some examples?’

‘There are different kinds of abuse that we refer to: censorship, blackmail, cooptation, bullying. – are almost commonplace nowadays in the neoliberal art world. We have kept an archive of all the cases of abuse that we have covered over the years on our web page. There, you can find the outcome of each case. In some instances, the cases have been resolved, in others; there was no concrete outcome.

‘One example is from 2011, when we reported on the case of Jerusalem-born artist Larissa Sansour, who had submitted an competition entry for the prestigious Lacoste Elysée Prize for photography. She was one of eight finalists for this prize, which was organized by the Musée de l’Elysée in Switzerland. Each shortlisted artist received a stipend of 4000 euros to produce a portfolio. Three photographs from Sansour’s series, *Nation Estate* – inspired by the Palestinian bid for UN membership – were selected by the jury. At the same time, someone from the Lacoste management demanded that Sansour be removed from the list of nominees, explaining that her images were too pro-Palestine. Her name was subsequently deleted from the website that listed the other nominees and her work was erased from an issue of *ArtReview* that focused on the nominees. The museum then had the audacity to ask Sansour to approve a press release stating that she withdrew from the shortlist “in order to pursue other opportunities”. She refused and leaked the information to ArtLeaks and the international press. After much negative publicity Lacoste withdrew their sponsorship and the prize was eventually suspended. The museum offered Sansour the opportunity of a solo-exhibition, which she declined.’

‘As a web page, pamphlet and perhaps a kind of whistleblower, where do you see yourself in the art world?’

‘ArtLeaks not only functions as an online resource and publication, we also organize get-togethers, workshops, and on the ground investigations in different contexts around the world. Also, we collaborate with international groups with related concerns such as W.A.G.E., Arts&Labor, Occupy Museums, Haben und Brauchen, PWB, Critical Practice, and the Art & Economics Group. We emphasize that only an internationally coordinated front of solidarity will be able to expose and denounce exploitation and censorship in contemporary culture, and collectively imagine new types of organizational constellations that can respond to the needs and desires of political subjects that

arise where the current economic, politic and cultural transformations intersect.

‘The art world is notorious in having people work for free, artists and others alike. What are your thoughts on this situation and the underlying structures that seem to facilitate the acceptance of artists and others often working for free, and why are they so difficult to get rid of?’

‘ArtLeaks takes into account the fact that a sort of domino effect of exploitation happens down the line. If we just secure artists’ position and fail to address the condition of many others who perform unpaid labour, and yet may endure even more abuse and humiliation, then we’re merely scratching the surface of the inequalities in the contemporary art world. It is not just about these exclusive, one-sided contracts, but also non-contractual practices which directly affect various cultural workers. It is important to also consider the role of those who work in a nearly feudal relationship to blue-chip (or superstar) artists or their overlords. As we know, the art market is not made up of just galleries and artists, but also of people who guard or move the work, clean the floors, do all sorts of unpaid or poorly paid work within cultural institutions. This landscape of exploitation runs the gamut from unpaid translations to front-desk volunteers. ArtLeaks strives to change this culture of exploitation by discussing the specifics of how and where this happens, and sharing different strategies to prevent people being forced into these precarious situations.’

‘If an artist makes art that isn’t a conventional saleable object, and is thus in practice working for free, who should then pick up the bill and pay for the artist’s work (and others)?’

‘Creativity is not something that you can easily quantify, although there are NGOs like W.A.G.E. who have formulated a practice-model on how artists in the United States should be remunerated.

‘We are more interested in how artists and cultural workers in general enter the art economy how they are treated by private and public institutions, from political governments to auction houses to museums, and – more importantly – how to organize ourselves into associations that promote improved working conditions.’

‘In your point of view, what would be the ideal way to finance the art world?’

‘There is no ideal way to finance the art world, as art and culture do not exist in a sphere that is disconnected from the rest of society, which is governed by the neo-capitalist economy. One of our ideas, though, is to formulate demands through a union for at-risk workers. We believe that a Cultural Workers and Artists Union of vulnerable workers can formulate relevant standards and exert international pressure. This strategy may help both when dealing with local contexts and in linking these struggles across geopolitical and economic dimensions.’

In *The Trainee* (2008), Pilvi Takala pretended to work as an intern at Deloitte’s marketing department for a month, and documented her colleagues’ reactions when she failed to understand the social rules of the workplace. One day was spent sitting at an empty desk just thinking, causing severe confusion and consternation amongst her co-workers. When asked, she simply explained that she was doing some brainwork, and that she from time to time tries to ‘manage everything without a computer’. Nobody confronted her about her unusual behaviour, but in an email, another employee concluded that she had a mental problem, saying, ‘people spent a senseless amount of time speculating on this issue.’



Kajsa Dahlberg, *Reach, Grasp, Move, Position, Apply Force*, 2014–15, Video still. ©Kajsa Dahlberg

Page 34

A Constant Visitor

Through performance and video, Pilvi Takala investigates and disturbs the social structures that surround us, revealing them as more fragile and less natural than one might think. Even though her interventions are subtle and perfectly harmless, they seem to jolt people ever so slightly out of their comfort zone and into a grey area where the unwritten rules of social conduct have yet to be established.

By ESPEN JOHANSEN

In *The Trainee* (2008), Pilvi Takala pretended to work as an intern at Deloitte’s marketing department for a month, and documented her colleagues’ reactions when she failed to understand the social rules of the workplace. One day was spent sitting at an empty desk just thinking, causing severe confusion and consternation amongst her co-workers. When asked, she simply explained that she was doing some brainwork, and that she from time to time tries to ‘manage everything without a computer’. Nobody confronted her about her unusual behaviour, but in an email, another employee concluded that she had a mental problem, saying, ‘people spent a senseless amount of time speculating on this issue.’

The project was shown as a series of videos and a PowerPoint presentation at the Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art.

In 2009, in Paris, Takala documented her attempt to enter Disneyland dressed as Snow White, only to be rejected on the grounds that she was not *The Real Snow White*. None of the children who flocked around her for autographs seemed to question whether she was real or not, but a security officer quickly appeared on the scene and explained to her that she was being denied entrance because she would ‘be confused with the real character working here.’

In *The Committee* (2014), she gave 7000 pounds of her Emdash Award prize money to a group of children, asking only that they decide collectively on how to spend the money. With the premise that there was no right or wrong answer, the kids went through a thorough decision-making process, finding a solution as a group. After considering visiting theme parks, buying iPhones or art, they ended up investing in a huge bouncy house they could rent out or charge admission to and make a profit.

During our correspondence, I noticed that Takala’s email signature lists phone numbers to reach her in five different countries. The Finnish-born artist has been living here and there for such a long time that it was difficult to say with any certainty where she lived at any given time. However, she is now about to settle down in Berlin, after a six-month residency in New York.

EJ: Has the fact that you’ve been living in so many different places made you sharper at spotting these social structures that you investigate in your work?

PT: Displacement from the routine is very grounding to my art, but now that I don’t actually live anywhere, I can’t even say I am breaking my own routines by going to a new place. I am a constant visitor. Maybe it

is a mode of being? I always start new works by going to a new place and asking: ‘What’s going on here?’

EJ: Has this ‘visiting lifestyle’ affected your artistic method and the themes you explore, or have you always been fascinated by unwritten social rules?

PT: I have been interested in social behaviour, ever since I was a child, and especially in any kind of group situation – like camp or school – that are somewhat artificial. I loved school for several reasons, but what I remember the most is the social stuff that went on there. In Finland, different regions have winter holidays at different times, and as a kid, I would go with my cousin to her school when I had my holidays. It was awesome, because I did not *have* to do anything, and was free from being the new girl who had to make friends, since I automatically got the same social standing as my cousin. It’s not that I’m an expert at fitting in, it’s more that I lack the fear of not fitting in.

EJ: If you look hard enough, you will find puzzling social structures and unwritten rules everywhere. What is it about certain social environments that you find fascinating?

PT: I am always searching, but some things I just find more complex and mysterious than others. That’s when I try to see if I can do something with them, for example in my intervention-based work like *The Real Snow White*, where I chose an activity that clearly disrupts a situation.

In other pieces, I don’t really do anything except be there, and rather try to describe and document a situation that already exists. In my works that deal with closed communities, there is an inherent tension in the situation already, so just me being there is disruptive.

EJ: Could you elaborate on that? How do you work with these minimal interventions as opposed to more explicit interactions with the public? Your work relies on the response and

reactions of others, so I'm curious if you have a clear perception of the outcome of a performance, and how accurate your predictions of other people's reactions to your work are?

PT: When you do something explicit, it is much easier to guess the reactions you will get, and that is often less interesting. For me, it is more about looking at an existing situation and inventing various ways to react through minimal interventions. I try to choose the kind of action that does not carry one particular message, but rather leaves open as many ways to react as possible.

For example, if I decide to go to Disneyland dressed as Snow White, then the piece is almost done. My prediction is that they will not let me in, because the level of control is so high. But the way they treat me... will they give me a free hamburger for trying so hard, or quickly take me out of sight and bring me to Disney Guantanamo? I was unaware if other people dress up in costumes, but it makes total sense to dress up before going to Disneyland, so the staff there must have a routine for handling people coming in costumes, I just did not know what the routine was.

My plan was to pretend that I did not know about the *real* Snow White, and that I was just trying to be nice and live the dream. I was not going to be smart. So, when I had arrived at this plan it was just about recording as much as I could of what happened. Many conditions helped make it successful as a piece within that framework, but many things were also just pure luck.

EJ: Are there any projects where the outcome particularly surprised you?

PT: There is always excitement when things happen that one cannot anticipate.

The Trainee was a turning point for me, because of the duration and intensity of the performance in this intimate setting. It was physically challenging to withstand social pressure and not do what everyone wanted me to do. Everyone was like, 'Please, pick up your mobile phone.' If I had only just held my phone everyone would have been happy. Doing nothing is scary as hell, because it is the moment before you do something, and that something could be anything.

I am really good at dealing with embarrassment, and when I did *Snow White*, I did not feel embarrassed at all. But in *The Trainee*, the feeling of being an outcast in that kind of community was an actual feeling. I was feeling really bad about people thinking I was crazy and not wanting to be my friend, while at the same time deciding to continue doing whatever it was that made that happen. Since then, I have been working more in situations that are more intense, closed off and intimate, because there, the stakes are higher and the social ties are stronger and more complex. If you do something in the streets, people do not care; they just think you're a crazy person. But, if you're a crazy person at someone's work, it's so much more disturbing and interesting. So *The Trainee* was – maybe not surprising – but the most significant work in my practice.

EJ: In *The Trainee*, some of the people at Deloitte were in on the true nature of your stay, and thus you had a unique opportunity to gather information about how your colleagues

perceived you. What happened afterwards? How was the feedback from Deloitte?

PT: I would not have been able to get that job with my own skills, because becoming a trainee at Deloitte is a sought-after position. Also, given the hidden cameras, they would sue me to death if I hadn't gotten permission. So, we made a deal, a heavy legal document. The point was not to surveil anyone except me and the people who talked to me. After the internship, I spent three months editing the video material before I contacted all the people in the video, asking them for permission to show it, and by then it was already something they had resolved in their minds. No one was angry when they found out, but they were relieved to find out it was not real. Actually, it is something that they should embrace, since they are a company whose product is thoughts and ideas, and I later found out that they had been discussing acceptable ways of working after I left.

EJ: When you think of big corporations, cliché buzzwords like 'streamlining' come to mind, which just sound so dehumanizing. What you were doing during this project is, however, something I would describe as very human. Another interesting facet is that with art inside corporate headquarters, one normally thinks of paintings on the wall or sculptures in the lobby, which makes your project very different.

PT: Yes, it was an exchange that worked, and Deloitte embraced the whole thing. For them, I think, it was mainly about marketing. By letting me do whatever, they appear open-minded, flexible and cool. That is why

they did it. I have been criticized about being so useful to them, but I just think the deal was fair. I was able to do what I wanted and what I thought was interesting, and they got something that was useful for them. If this were somewhere where I wanted to be in opposition and do something destructive, I do not think that would have produced good results. If there's a fight between a huge corporation and an artist, the one who loses is usually the artist.

With my art, it is not about fighting big companies, but rather acknowledging that they exist and talking about how they function. It is always a messy mix of influence and benefits and this and that, but with *The Trainee*, the only way I could make it happen was to make a deal where they also got something out of it.

EJ: Through your performances, you make visible these structures we all follow blindly most of the time. Is the potential for change important to your art?

PT: You cannot change something if you do not know what it is. My work is about looking at the world, but I do not impose any opinion on how it should be changed. Maybe by showing it to people, they will make new connections, and that can trigger change.

I have my opinions, and nothing is neutral, but my art is not the place where I try to do propaganda or explore the things I already believe in. In those cases, I would rather sign a petition or vote for someone.

EJ: Yes, I think your work acts as a spanner in the works, where you – instead of proposing an explicit solution to a certain social

situation – challenge the public to re-evaluate their adherence to the unwritten rules that you make visible.

Generally, your work seems to deal with everyday social environments, but several of your pieces deal with capital as a catalyst in these social settings. Is there particular reason economy is a recurring theme for you?

PT: Money and exchange are so tied into our social reality that I do not know how to separate them out. Economy is part of how we live together; it is part of the whole arrangement. Also, the concept of money is fascinating, because it is so abstract that nobody can fully explain it. It is a unit that you can measure, but money is not the same for everyone. It is tangible and intangible at the same time.

In *The Committee*, many adults seemed to be afraid that the kids would fail and spend their money in a stupid way. I didn't think any way of spending the money would be stupid. They could have bought so much candy that they could have swum in it – and that would have been fine by me – but instead they started planning to invest it so they could get more money. They were eight years old, and they already know all about this stuff. So, they ended up succeeding in a disturbing way – in such a perfect way that every adult was happy.

FACTS

Pilvi Takala (b.1981) has an MFA from the Academy of Fine Arts in Helsinki, and work with performance and video in public or semi-public spaces, through which she investigates the sometimes absurd logic and structures of social groups, institutions, and communities. Through her art, she makes visible the unwritten rules that dictate normal social behaviour and forces her audience to react and find new ways to handle abnormal situations.

Page 40

Patricia Cronin and the Art of Bucking the “Buck”

BY SHANA BETH MASON

“The cult of the movie star, fostered by the money of the film industry, preserves not the unique aura of the person but the “spell of the personality,” the phony spell of a commodity.”



Patricia Cronin, *Memorial To A Marriage*, (detail) 2002. Carrara marble. Cronin-Kass plot, Woodlawn Cemetery, Bronx, NY. © Patricia Cronin,

—Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1936)

To break the “spell of the personality”, as Walter Benjamin described in his seminal essay, is to decisively break away from that which drives a singular personality into the hands of public: money. If an artist creates a work where neither the artist nor their work were reliant on the accumulation of capital, Benjamin would, presumably, consider this “Art” (with a capital “A”). An even bolder gesture would paint money as a caricature: numbers, figures, and assets piled together in one self-indulgent mass, a character in a perpetual tragicomedy. Andy Warhol, Hans Haacke, Barbara Kruger, and Tracey Emin have initiated this kind of capital critique before. None of these artists (and few outside of this listing) have transformed in the way of Brooklyn-based multidisciplinary artist Patricia Cronin. From paintings serving as a blistering commentary of money’s value and the values of money, her practice has arced into a project at this year’s Venice Biennale that focuses on almost every element that money cannot (and never will) express, inspire, or purchase.

Cronin’s capsule entitled *Luxury Real Estate Paintings* (2000 – 2001) appears harmless at first, almost elementary. What the works demand, however, is a harder look at how capital is at odds with, and inextricably linked to, an artist’s production. She gathered photographs sourced from Sotheby’s International

Realty, selected images of homes that could only be photographed from above (given the scale of the property and the elevated social status of their owners), and recreated the images in the guise of small-scale oil paintings. The title of each work contains the listed cost of the property and its general location: a sprawling estate in Connecticut is called “\$10,000,000 (Greenwich)”, and a private island in the lower Florida Keys is “\$2,300,000 (Emerald Isle on Money Key)”.

Added to the tongue-in-cheek humor that Cronin found in shifting these real commodities into aesthetic objects, composition and timeliness were key factors. “I made sure that there was no horizon line,” she says. “It was the most expensive source material. They [Sotheby’s] had to hire a plane or a helicopter, a photographer, and a pilot to get the image. The price tags listed for each work also locate them in time. What were they worth *then*?”

The series is brimming with double meanings. Just as the values of private property appreciate with time, so does the value of art; in this case, the value of the physical artwork, itself, is dwarfed by the thing it references. While the property prices in Cronin’s paintings seem large in our collective imagination, their grandeur is diminished both in the tiny slots allotted to them within an issue of *Travel + Leisure* or *Condé Nast Traveler* and in Cronin’s intimate squares of oil on linen. What’s more, the chance to personally visit these homes is afforded only to a select few. Cronin’s work unwittingly parses the class

politics and demographics of viewing art. Suggesting that critical observations of art are universally democratic is a dangerous path to tread; her *Luxury Real Estate Paintings* are stark reminders of an imposed isolationism within the fiscal and cultural elite.

Luxury Real Estate Paintings was executed at the same time that Cronin was developing a larger, public project called *Memorial To A Marriage* (begun in 2002). In the most traditional sculptural material (Carrara marble), in the most traditional of media (19th century American Ideal and Baroque Italian sculpture), Cronin’s body lies on a bed, tenderly intertwined with her real-life partner (artist Deborah Kass). The unapologetic intimacy between them could be made public only after their deaths, as a “living” legal union was (at the time of its inception) invalid. It does not immediately refer to currency exchange, but the work does recall the fiscal power that lobbyists and activists may wield to ensure that same-sex unions (in the United States) remain immoral and unconstitutional in the eyes of the public (the two terms are not mutually exclusive). A bronze version of *Memorial To A Marriage* was accessioned in 2012 to the permanent collection of the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum in Glasgow. It is publicly funded, thus free and open to the public. The current socio-political climate in the United States would be intolerant to public tax dollars being spent on an artwork where a nude, lesbian couple is depicted so candidly.



Pilvi Takala, *The Real Smow White*, 2009 © Pilvi Takala & Carlos/Ishikawa London.

Nevertheless, the sculpture retains its own unique immortality as an artist's handiwork as much as a funerary monument. Money, in this instance, may buy political influence, but it cannot buy it *everywhere*.

The circuit from commodity culture to commodity-proof culture closes with Cronin's installation at the Chiesa di San Gallo in Venice, *A Shrine For Girls*: a collateral exhibition within the 56th Venice Biennale. Three instances of grievous injustice to young women are highlighted at three altars within the chapel: the first alludes to 276 schoolgirls kidnapped by terrorist group Boko Haram in Nigeria; the second refers to three teenage girls gang-raped and lynched in India; and the third recalls the forced labor of vulnerable women inside the Magdalene Laundries (or asylums) in Ireland. Each instance is commemorated by a different garment, piled high onto each of the three altars: a hijab veil (for Nigeria), a sari (for India), and an apron (for Ireland), respectively. Cronin reinstates the entity of the young woman, and all that she might achieve in her lifetime, as something which cannot be broken, sold, or belittled. These women were not directly marginalized by or as a result of monetary "transactions" – rather, they point to the continued victimization of others because of political blindness, social deafness, and cultural muteness (all of which could, potentially, be reversed by donations to international human rights campaigns). The potency of *A Shrine For Girls* lies not in the harsh reality of human beings treated like soulless property (or even worse, nothing at all), but that grace is found in hopelessness. The work unquestionably resides in the arena of non-commodified art, so that its audience may possess little to no recollection of the heavy weight of money on the human conscience.

'People want to be moved. They want to be tested,' Cronin notes. 'There are a lot of people I'm running into...they think people that are distracted by big, shiny objects are just silly. Good, spend your money that way, but it doesn't really have any impact.'

Cronin is an artist whose creative skill and human empathy surpasses free market value and the values of the free market. Unfettered by "object-hood", Cronin's work transforms the act of viewing art (and the art, itself) into one of speechless, social awareness. Money may talk, but art has the power to, if only for a moment, quiet its roar.

Patricia Cronin was born in 1963 in Beverly, Massachusetts. She received her BFA from Rhode Island College in 1986 and her MFA from Brooklyn College in 1988. She has also studied at the Yale University Summer School of Music and Art, the Norfolk Fellowship Program, and the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. She is the recipient of the John Armstrong Chaloner/Jacob H. Lazarus Metropolitan Museum of Art Rome Prize Fellowship (2006), the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Grant, and a Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant. Selected solo exhibitions have been staged at The Brooklyn Museum, the American Academy in Rome Art Gallery, Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum (Glasgow, Scot-

land), and the 56th Venice Biennale. Her work is held in the permanent collections of the Pérez Art Museum Miami (PAMM), the National Gallery of Art (Washington, D.C.), the Gallery of Modern Art (GoMA) and the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, both in Glasgow, Scotland. She has lectured at the Victoria & Albert Museum (London), the Smithsonian Institution (Washington, D.C.), and the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA, New York). Cronin held the Leonard and Claire Tow Professorship in Art at the Brooklyn College of the City University of New York (CUNY) from 2013 to 2014, and has taught as a Professor of Art since 2003. She has also taught at Yale University (as a Visiting Critic from 2002 to 2003), the School of Visual Arts (New York), Columbia University, Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA), the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the Cooper Union (New York), and the Pratt Institute (New York). She lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

FACTS

Patricia Cronin (b. 1963) works and lives in Brooklyn, New York. She received her MFA from Brooklyn College in 1988. Selected solo exhibitions have been staged at The Brooklyn Museum, the American Academy in Rome Art Gallery, Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum (Glasgow, Scotland), and the 56th Venice Biennale. Her work is held in the permanent collections of the Pérez Art Museum Miami (PAMM), the National Gallery of Art (Washington, D.C.), the Gallery of Modern Art (GoMA) and the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, both in Glasgow, Scotland.

Page 44

Words on The Welfare State at M HKA, Antwerp

For whom and to what end does a so-called welfare state exist?

BY SHANA BETH MASON

The term 'welfare' signifies a broad concern with well-being, health, and general fiscal stability. The term 'state', on the other hand, can be read as: a 'state of mind', as in the current condition of one's psyche; a 'state of affairs', which refers to a larger set of circumstances or an individual's situation; or 'the state', i.e. a political body that, ostensibly, governs and protects its inhabitants. A new exhibition at the Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen (M HKA) [Museum of Modern Art] curated by Anders Kreuger aims to investigate an idea that has become



Anne-Mie Van Kerckhoven, *Atman wombman*, 1988. © Anne-Mie Van Kerckhoven and Zeno X Gallery.

a very complex, very class-oriented issue with specific manifestations across various global cultures.

The exhibition does not provide any suggestion of where or when the 'first' welfare state might have arisen, but it does offer a series of works that approach an interpretation of the term. The works generally reflect the respective backgrounds of the artists, who hail from both Western and Eastern Europe, South Africa, and South America. Highly interactive, spanning across multiple creative platforms, and arranged to coincide with a series of seminars hosted by the Herman Deleeck Centre for Social Policy (University of Antwerp), *The Welfare State* was imagined as much a series of public exercises in sociopolitical game theory as a calculated constellation of the specific visions of eight artists. A particularly striking performance from Donna Kukuma brings the home audience in Belgium face-to-face with its colonial past in Africa, and the artist, herself, back to her own beginnings. *What we caught we threw away, What we didn't catch we kept* (2015) has Kukuma sitting behind a standard office desk, telling and retelling a story laced with personal memories and references to a participant. She is polite, patient, and consistently sidesteps any direct questions from her visitor. It is, effectively, a re-enactment of photographs taken during the 1950s in the former Belgian Congo: of seemingly peaceful interactions between the indigenous people of the region and the white colonists manning local registries. These scenarios are both physically and metaphorically reversed in Kukuma's performance. She, a black woman, is now the authoritative figure: an extension of the museum as an institution, and acts as a public servant disguising 'assistance' to her visitors as 'stories'.

Another project, entitled *Fulltopia*, was set up by Colombian artist Francisco Camacho Herrera and Antwerp-based design firm Panache Studio. It takes the form of a highly-stylized, user-friendly website that could act as an exchange pool: users can swap services, time, and knowledge without using hard currency. A real-world version

of this project has already been realized at impossible.com, founded by model/actress Lily Cole, with advisors including Chelsea Clinton and Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales, among others. Ironically, the setup and maintenance of Herrera's project (and that of impossible.com) required some form of payment at the outset. Hard currency somehow finds its way into each and every transaction, thus becoming inextricable from commercial exchange. The ultimate goal of this project would be the launch of a hypothetical 'welfare state', where self-sufficiency and communal cooperation meet, but any real progress is difficult to measure – perhaps, (as in the aptly-titled website), impossible.

More concrete artworks in various mediums can be found in the exhibition as well, such as prototypes for temporary housing units (which double as sculptures) built by Róza El-Hassan, archival photographs of an installation/social experiment entitled *Meta Filter* (1973) by British sculptor and ground-breaking cyberneticist Stephen Willats, and mixed media collages brimming with erotic tensions between man and machine by Belgian painter and conceptual artist Anne-Mie Van Kerckhoven. Lithuanian artist Artūras Raila documented the rejection of and refusal to accept the consequences of a bureaucratic welfare state as personified by the Far Right and Neo-Fascist movements in Eastern Europe.

On paper, Kreuger's curatorial vision is ambitious, rich in historical and philosophical points that invite the public to question itself on the nature of concepts like altruism, community, exchange, labour, class, and power. Yet, even for a spacious and well-funded institution like the M HKA, the sheer scale of the words 'welfare state' can neither be fully contained nor explored within the confines of a single project. What's more, the selection of international artists appears homogenous; perspectives from artists living in developing nations, such as those in Latin America, India, and Sub-Saharan Africa, and first-world superpowers, such as the United States and China, are conspicuously absent. That said, the project could adopt more hybrid forms at other institutions worldwide, offering a more diverse discussion of the 'welfare state'. For now, *The Welfare State* appears to be an incubator for a potentially larger discussion on how human beings interact, exchange, and value objects and ideas.

The Welfare State opened at the Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen on 29 May and runs until 27 September 2015. The exhibition is curated by Anders Kreuger, and participating artists are Francisco Camacho Herrera (Colombia/Holland, 1979), Josef Dabernig (Austria, 1956), Kajsa Dahlberg (Sweden, 1973), Róza El-Hassan (Hungary/Syria, 1966), Donna Kukuma (South-Africa, 1981), Artout Raila (Lithuania, 1962), Anne-Mie Van Kerckhoven (Belgium, 1951) og Stephen Willats (England, 1943). For more information, see www.muhka.be