

Introduction

This issue interleaves academic essays with creative work in a number of forms, and presents work produced in several countries, including our first submission from Hungary. It covers both philosophical and practical implications of the theme of art and the market, with reflections on topics as diverse as the museum, film, television, and literature, and illustrates aesthetic practice in clay sculpture, poetry, architecture and photography.

One of the ironies of the English language is the divergence between the meaning of two terms which might have been near-synonyms, “worthless” and “priceless.” The polarisation of their meanings reflects the indeterminacy of the concept of value, on which so many of our social interactions nonetheless are predicated. It is inescapably a matter of subjectivity. In art, in particular, individual subjective evaluation is clearly the bottom line, even though collective evaluations may be culturally authoritative. A designation of “masterpiece” is powerless when faced with the individual’s firm “I just don’t like it.” However, the authority of the real commodity value which follows such a designation as masterpiece tends to temper individual taste. If experts agree that a newly discovered work is by a famous artist, its cash value soars. We may deplore it, but we live in a world where auction house records are headline news and in which pension fund managers invest in artworks as a supposedly safer alternative to the futures market.

While the fine art market may be a special case, the essentials of its operation are replicated in a range of aesthetic fields. Modernity has, perhaps, made less of a

difference than we might have expected. It is now seventy years since Walter Benjamin wrote his essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” which examined the implications of the move away from the traditional privileging of the unique artefact which new technologies afforded. He argued that “the instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice—politics.” However, we have come to see that ritual and politics are not mutually exclusive, and history shows that the new technologies have not much dented the value of authenticity. In his 1990 work *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* Terry Eagleton, discussing Lukács, reveals our ironic distance from Benjamin’s postulate: “In the absence of socialism, then, it will prove necessary to make do with art.”

In our time global capitalism has, despite the bursting of the dot-com bubble, been surprisingly successful in bending to the market the aesthetic potential of ever-new technologies. Since artists are usually involved in commodity production of some kind, the idea of value and the will to produce something saleable are hard to avoid. The slide (down, some might say) between the concept of value and that of monetary value is one which our culture tends to elide. Art is situated between use value and exchange value, like other commodities. Increasingly the power of monetary discourses subsumes the other possibilities residing within the notion of value. Yet the realm of art—understood broadly as a range of aesthetic practices from the “pure” to the “applied”—stubbornly resists, or at least complicates, the hegemony of money, while inescapably depending on the patron’s shilling: the imperative need for an income (at whatever point in the chain of production and consumption it can be secured) may be resented but it is hard to ignore.

Since art largely consists of artefacts, it is inevitably bound up with the social mediation of commodities. Nonetheless, although the prehistoric origins of art should be sought in functionalism of various kinds—connected with belief and survival, the cave painting representing a prayer for a successful hunt, for instance—in our time there persists an obstinate romanticism amongst artists of all kinds who cherish the commodification-resistant “art for art’s sake” attitude—*l’art pour l’art*—prevalent over a century ago. The artist who sculpts horses from the sand of a Cornish beach between tides or who carves ice into exotic forms in a tropical climate perhaps rests calm in the knowledge of the ephemeral. “Vanity of vanities” may be ultimately the only rejoinder to art, as to all human activity. For some, the single gazing eye or listening ear is enough. For others, not even that is necessary, as they create what they do for themselves alone, obeying some lonely internal compulsion. The engines of social power, however, find it hard to deal with artists who are aloof from the will to recognition.

One of the difficulties for art is its “dispensability” to all but its practitioners and devotees. To the economist it is never an essential feature of the world. It is so often reduced to pleading for recognition, for instance in the (now historic) calls for property developers to dedicate a mere one percentage point of the value of their projects to art—a small attempt, one might think, and easy enough to support, which would have a disproportionate impact on the aesthetic impact of both private spaces (often used by large numbers of people) and of the public realm, as well as on artists, who would pick up some lucrative commissions. There have been some famous successes. But there have also been some dismal failures. Now the marginalisation of art of all kinds has reached crisis proportions. It is ironic that although rich societies have never been richer, both

governments and NGOs are finding it increasingly difficult to annex funds to art—and that is how they tend to see it, annexing, or perhaps siphoning off. They argue that committing public resources to art does not enjoy popular support. The alternative patronage of unmediated market forces, however, often forces artists into self-editing, with the result that they compete in ever narrower circles of sterile mimicry.

The lack of monetary reward for art carries its own burden, as Jennifer Kehoe's poem poignantly asserts. The need to accept, effectively, unpaid work, can readily be seen as part of an unacceptable pattern of exploitation—a situation from which this journal is not exempt, in its inability to offer its contributors payment. Academics in particular are prone to the abuses of a system which requires publication for professional advancement, enabling even some major book publishers to make a business out of offering publication *gratis*. Artists are even more at the mercy of such a dynamic. The prominence that can flow from the social cachet of having work hung in a prestigious gallery, or performed in a well-known venue, is held to carry its own indirect cash value, but what happens is that the competition for exposure and the attention to the (carefully constructed and market oriented) public taste which inevitably follow can be very bad for artists and for their work.

At bottom lie some profound questions of philosophy. The issue opens with Liam Dee's essay on what he calls creative accountancy in the relationship between art (he chooses to capitalise it as Art) and commodification. Drawing on Adorno and Bourdieu, among others, and sketching in the history of aesthetics, he takes the central issues head on and develops a testing argument that the very ontology of art is one of commodification. His conclusion is that since the “irrational” use value of art is always

less than the rationality of exchange value, the illusion of the “cosy marriage of human subjectivity and market objectivity” should be uncovered, but the paradoxical crux is that “as long as Art remains an uncontested cipher for such subjectivity it will never be exposed.”

Jean-Paul Martinon in a review essay takes up the issues raised in Paul Werner’s short book, *Museum Inc.: Inside the Global Art World*, in which, drawing on his experience at the Guggenheim Museum, Werner bewails the increasingly corporate power structures in which the museums of today are embedded. Martinon rails at Werner, however, for his failure to suggest a constructive alternative. With a clear-eyed look at the realities of globalisation today he poses the tough question, “what political gesture can one propose in a situation where there is no longer an ideal in the future?” and calls for a micropolitics to take on the macropolitics: that each has the potential for a change of attitude, and that a raised perception of “the performativity of ideality” is of itself creative and transformative. It is a call for “a *common* gesture that *relays* to the museum not the sphere of an end in itself, but rather the sphere of a pure and endless mediality” in which the interrogative stance delivers continuous “invention.”

The work of Warmi (Suzie Goulder’s professional name means “woman” in Quechua) is a reminder of the complex hybridities of art. She is both a potter who makes usable pots and a sculptor in clay forms, the two being one and the same. The photographs here give a glimpse of her work. Inspired by the Andean aesthetic traditions of her culture, she regards her project as a celebration of those traditions and of the unsung individuals who created it over countless generations, particularly the women. The West may be familiar with Gauguin’s inclusion in his paintings of Andean cups in

the shape of human heads, but it is the figure of Pachamama, earth-mother in Quechua, which recurs in Warmi's anthropomorphic pots. The feminine is central and sensual: to caress the skin of these pots is a pleasure. But she refers us also to the awareness in her culture that new life begins in the dark. As she says, the interior of a vessel is as important as its outside. Some of her works have a skin-smooth, unglazed exterior surface, but a glazed inner surface. The point is both artistic and practical: the glaze lends strength. The two-handled pot based on traditional waterpots is a reminder of the strength of people who would carry such pots on their backs long distances, full of water. The knob to hold the ropes, the lip at the base to lift it from, are both functional and beautiful. Talking to Warmi produces a lively sense of the inherent ambiguities in the work, as in the human experience from which it springs. She names her work, incising the names near the base of the pots, so language, the Quechua tongue, is an inherent part of her art. In the composite mother-and-child figure, made up of five pots slotted together, each of which is a useful vessel on its own, the name introduces a tension between the mother and the child, thus engaging with the dynamic of generations, history, and responsibility, for while the pot representing the head of the child held on its mother's back is still, the name of the piece "animates" it: it translates as Earth-Mother with Naughty Child. The name of another pot includes the term *unquq* which means "pregnant" in Quechua, as well as "fed up" and "fat." Warmi has recently begun to work also in textiles, dyeing and making knotted wool *quipus*, the traditional Andean system of using knots and colours to record numerical data. She is particularly interested in experimenting with the use of *quipus* as a semiology not just for number but for language. Research is the essential starting point to her work, as she studies the traditions in all their philosophical and

technical complexity, but while she begins from traditional ideas she takes these forward into an art of great beauty and originality. Many of today's crude and superficial approximations of Andean art forms anger her, as a betrayal both of the fineness and intelligence of past work, whether defined as art or craft, and of the creative responsibilities of the artist now. The challenge represented by the relationship of traditional cultures to present production is brought forcefully into focus by what Warmi makes and believes. An exhibition of her work opens in London in March 2006, reminding us of the inescapable mediation of exhibiting, the bridge between the creator and her public, including potential patrons.

The womanist aesthetics of Warmi are followed by the distinctively masculinist ones of Robert Mapplethorpe. Dorothy Barescott's essay is illustrated by some of Mapplethorpe's photographs and by other images from the social contexts which they negotiate, as they are represented through the docudrama *Dirty Pictures*, dramatising the history of the 1990 Mapplethorpe exhibition in Cincinnati, *The Perfect Moment*, and the subsequent obscenity trial. The controversial airing of this film on cable television in 2000 is the essay's starting point, from which it arcs back over the complex cultural history to which Mapplethorpe's art has been subjected. Questions of censorship and taboo to do with sexuality and representation are discussed in other contexts too. Examining the new topographies of power, Barescott concludes that there are increasingly permeable borders between art and economic interests, and calls for exhibition directors to create spaces where "one can look beyond the strictly formal and sensational to confront, head on, the social and political."

Marc Schuster's essay on Don DeLillo's first novel, *Americana*, reads it as exploring "the viability of life outside the grip of consumer culture and, by extension, beyond the logic of value that regulates the language of that culture." In the novel, Schuster argues, "David's interests in Zen philosophy and consumer culture combine to form an amalgam that is remarkably similar to Baudrillard's critique of the sign," for in a conflicted, schizoid culture, the terms of difference collapse into versions of the same. Ultimately the opposition the novel portrays is not "between art and commerce, DeLillo and Baudrillard, or even ideology and its opposite. It is between David and David, America and America."

Jennifer Kehoe's short poem "Beige Paper" is a wry comment on the predicament of the writer as a producer whose monetary value has collapsed. Where the "not for sale" label is deployed to exclude the artist from her just deserts, something is wrong. That non-monetary exchange values can function as unfairly as their commercial counterparts is a thought-provoking proposition.

A related concern preoccupies Julian Haladyn in his essay about Canadian television programming. As an artist and practitioner in the world of film-making, he deplores the failure of schedules to give airtime to art. Although there is a requirement that programming be not less than 60% Canadian, this quota is filled predominantly with news and sport rather than other sorts of Canadian-made programmes. Indeed, he argues, "the bulk of the Canadian cultural community" is ignored. Citing his own experience, and lectures by Bourdieu on French television, Haladyn argues that the commercial emphasis typical of the schedules functions to produce political apathy. He deplores "the levelling of intellectual content to the lowest common denominator, a process which negates the

possibility of programming that is challenging in any way to the dominant views of the society or world,” and calls for a more open approach to what is represented, in order to stimulate the public into a more active and challenging political stance, the essence of democracy. The Inuit, he points out, have shown it can be done, by refusing what was fed to them and taking control of television production for their own community: television should be “a forum for presenting alternative cultural perspectives or points of view.” The questions raised apply, of course, not just to the Canadian case, but across the world, for while the situation of those nations with culturally influential geographical neighbours may be distinctive, the phenomenon of American cultural hegemony is now, in varying degrees, a global reality, and all of our national governments need to reflect on how, in the face of rampant commercialism, the minorities within our communities, whether such cultural groups as the Inuit or the diverse community of artists, can be represented.

The issue concludes with a taste of another exhibition, on European market halls, staged in Budapest, and curated by Allan Siegel. The multimedia exhibition is represented here by images of the architecture of principally nineteenth-century market halls in a range of cities spanning eastern and western Europe, though there are a couple of modern examples for comparison. The final photographs in the sequence humanise these architectural images with glimpses of a few of the people who work in the Budapest market. The covered market is, of course, of ancient origin and began on a relatively small scale, but the market halls illustrated here cover significant floorspace and project imposing landmark personas in the heart of the urban townscape. They are precursors of the gargantuan indoor shopping mall which is central to the international approach to retailing today, but their tradition is one of housing the small trader, marketing mainly

perishable items, and in this lies their appeal—of *parvum in magno*, rather than the reverse. Not only their front elevations but much of the architectural detailing of these buildings is of a high quality, as the photographs illustrate. The civic pride which went into the construction of their high, imposing roof spaces is more solidly grounded in art and craft than most of what passes for architectural retail design today. We are forced to wonder how it was that late nineteenth-century urban communities were able, from a revenue-base drawn from a largely impoverished populace, to build with such panache and to such a high quality. It is fortuitous that, as Allan Siegel reminds us, many of these structures escaped destruction in the two world wars, as they bear daily witness, as we buy our groceries, to the quality that can be achieved in public architecture if the will is there.

Any interrogation of the relationship between art and the market implies a questioning of the role of the public sphere. So many of us live in communities where, a century or so ago, our forebears found ways to build not only handsome market halls, but eye-catching baths and libraries, fire stations and town halls, all with an ethos which expressed civic pride and provided not only an interesting streetscape but also sometimes palatial interiors. Today, when such buildings are demolished for roads, or put to new uses to make way for more “profitable” town-centre developments, the replacement facility is typically housed in a cheap, functionalist, minimal structure unworthy of the name of architecture. With few exceptions, it is happening all over the world. We should ask ourselves why, in these more affluent times for many, we cannot do better.

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