

# **Selling by Numbers: The Quantification and Marketization of the Swedish Art World for Contemporary Art**

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## **Abstract**

This article describes and analyzes the role of market practices and its impact on the organization of the Swedish Art world between 1981 and 2011. Drawing on a sprawling set of empirical data, we show how the Swedish Art world for contemporary art has had an increasing number of market places of different types, and how these are culturally infused with values and narratives. We propose that the re-organization of the Swedish Art world for contemporary art can be summarized in three new orders: 1) in a move towards the ideal type of a market, 2) in a turn towards quantification and commensuration, and 3) in the organization of new market places as a reaction to marketization.

**Keywords:** Art worlds, marketization, quantification, commensuration.

## **Selling by Numbers: The Quantification and Marketization of the Swedish Art World for Contemporary Art**

Art is more than meets the eye. As the founding father of the concept of the Art world, Arthur Danto (1964, p. 580), put it: "To see something as art requires something the eye cannot descry – an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an art world". Dickie (1974) and Becker (1982) developed the concept of the Art world by emphasizing "institutions" and "networks" instead of "a theory of art". In revised forms, Art worlds later received considerable attention through Pierre Bourdieu (1984, 1996) and groundbreaking other scholars such as Paul DiMaggio (1987, 1991) and Niklas Luhmann (2000). Despite many differences of the aforementioned scholars they share the view of an Art world (that is, a "field of cultural production" or an "art system") as an innate sociological concept. Thus, to understand art, we must not ask: "*what* is art?" but rather "*who* decides what art is?".

As an innate sociological concept it is not surprising that the organization of the Art world hence varies with time and space. The Art world of today looks quite different than from what it did when the central theories of the Art world were developed 30-50 years ago. The World Wide Web did not exist and did not function as a media to exhibit, value and exchange artworks; international art fairs had not yet gained momentum, and auction houses did not sell contemporary art. Today, for instance, an acclaimed performance artist such as Marina Abramovic can collaborate with the rapper Jay Z and pop phenomenon Lady Gaga in order to fund a long-duration performance art center in New York. The investment in question was crowdsourced through the website Kickstarter and the artists joint performances were distributed through online video outlets such as YouTube and Vimeo. (Gibson, 2013).

To some extent, the Art world is hence in constant flux. It has, however, always encompassed both commercial and non-commercial elements. As mentioned, the market channels for contemporary art today are quite different from how it was before the breakthrough of the World Wide Web in the 1990s. The technological development has likely given rise to new ways of organizing the markets, as information spreads faster and at lower cost than ever before. Today, contemporary art is sold on art fairs, on the Internet and on auctions. This was not the case just a few decades back.

How then can we understand an Art world's organization given the changes we have seen on how the art markets are organized?

To do this, we argue that the development of an Art world with special emphasis on its market organization must be studied.

The aim of this article is hence to study how changed market practices re-organize an Art world.

This article studies the Swedish Art world for contemporary art during the period 1981-2011. We have chosen to study this geographical setting and time period because it offers reasonably clear boundaries and is sufficiently demarcated to be reviewable. The Swedish Art world for contemporary art is furthermore concentrated to Stockholm, a relatively small city in a relatively small country, and the influential actors in this particular Art world are few and accessible, which makes this Art world conceivable to study.

If we reach our aim of this study, we hope to advance our understanding of the role of market practices when it comes to how Art worlds are organized.

## The art world revisited – a theoretical overview

### *The institutional logics of the art world*

The organizational field of the Swedish Art world is where artworks are exhibited, valued and exchanged. It contains oppositional spheres of cultural and commercial practices, which are governed by symbolic boundaries (Bourdieu, 1984; Lamont & Molnar, 2002), which in turn are reinforced through social sanctions for trespassers.

On the one hand, cultural practices in the Art world are imprinted with the idea of *art for art's sake*. This Western idea stemming from early nineteenth century positions art as a goal rather than a mean, and hence advocate for the incommensurability of art, stating that art is a symbolic good (Bourdieu, 1996) which cannot be commoditized (Kopytoff, 1986) and has a value greater than its material value (Hirsch, 1972). Value is hence essentially viewed as intrinsic. On the other hand, the Art world includes market places, which to various extents are imprinted by the commercial logic of the market. As Horowitz (2011) shows, contemporary artworks have experienced price booms in the secondary market and the works of contemporary artists are driven to unprecedented heights. He furthermore argues that contemporary artworks are increasingly looked upon as financial assets. This focus on the extrinsic value of art has been held by influential practitioners and scholars (e.g. Grampp 1989, Mei & Moses, 2002) alike, and co-exists with the intrinsic take of the value of art. Influential financial service firm J. P. Morgan states: "Art has long been considered an 'investment of passion' that not only offers aesthetic utility but the potential of economic benefit. Only recently, however, has art been viewed through the lens of modern portfolio theory and considered a potential alternative investment as part of a portfolio of assets." (Sommer, 2012) Although the Art world still is imprinted with oppositional logics of commercial and cultural practices, it hence seems as if financial theory and contemporary art has never been as closely aligned as in our day and time.

In short then, the Art world is thus an organizational field traditionally described as demarcated by strong symbolic boundaries, and encompassing oppositional logics of the arts vis-à-vis the commerce. However, recent developments have also increasingly questioned this disjunction and called the entanglements of these logics into attention.

### *The constructing processes of the art world*

Before an object is priced it needs to be defined and categorized as a piece of art. When Danto (1964), in his seminal article *The Art World* introduced the institutional definition of art, the mechanisms of how art becomes art were clarified. For an object to be classified as a work of art, some kind of consensus needs to be established in a loosely defined collective of actors such as art critics, journalists, academics, gallery owners, museum curators, and artists, i.e. in an "Art world". The process by which this happens is through the theory of art. This is to say that the classification occurs as a result of the object being understood within a theoretical framework.

Danto used the examples of Andy Warhol's Brillo boxes, i.e. ready-made soap pad boxes that Warhol put on display at exhibitions at galleries and museums. A Brillo box in the supermarket is not a work of art, but the same box being part of Warhol's exhibition in and gallery or museum made it a work of art because Andy Warhol is classified as an artist, and galleries and museums are places where art is shown.

Art is hence not a physical object *per se* but a product and construct of the surrounding Art world. The Art world is a cultural context and an atmosphere infused by art theory. Dickie (1971) introduced the concept of institution and stated that "A work of art in the classificatory sense is 1) an artifact 2) upon which some person or persons acting on behalf of a certain social institution (the artworld) has conferred the status of candidate

for appreciation" (p 101). The Art world is thus an institution in itself, and in Becker's (1982) words: "the network of people whose cooperative activity, organized via their joint knowledge of conventional means of doing things, produce(s) the kind of artworks that art world is noted for" (p x).

There is no monolithic Art world that spans the globe, and Thornton (2008) conceptualized it as a loose network of different but overlapping subcultures held together by a belief in art. In her definition, this belief is almost religious; it is a belief in art representing a particular value enabling individuals to exercise creativity, expressivity, social positioning, etc. Hence, art is a result of organization and organizing efforts where the social positioning of certain individuals and organizations determine the status of a certain object.

Just as art in itself is a result of construction processes, so is the value of art. The order on the market for contemporary art, just like at any other market, is a result of norms and action patterns that become taken for granted over time. The art market is an outcome of construction processes engaging several actors in the Art world. This is to say that actors in the Art world are organizers of the market and influence the functioning of the market. Hence, in order to understand and explain the value creation of artwork, explanations must be sought not only in the artworks themselves but also in their embedded institutional setting and in the Zeitgeist.

### *Pricing the priceless*

The pricing mechanisms at work in the art markets have been interpreted in many ways. Velthuis (2003) summarizes the different understandings of the pricing of art in at least three basic traditions within economics theories.

The first one hinges, among others, on Grampp (1989) who argues that the economic value of an artwork is the general form of all value and comprises subsets of investment, aesthetic, and other values. Competition and price mechanisms are believed to function no different from other markets. Actors are regarded rational and to act in self-interest to maximize utility. Contrary to the belief that art can be "priceless", the pricing of an artwork is perceived to be no more mystical than the pricing of any other commodity; there is "nothing but" economic value.

A second neoclassical micro-economic take on the pricing mechanism of the art markets – following the work of for example Spence (1974), Akerlof (1970) and Stiglitz (1987) – emphasizes that price signals certain levels of quality in markets where information is lacking or uncertain.

The third tradition is the diametrical opposite of the first tradition and claims the incommensurability of artistic and economic value. Velthuis (2003) presents two models within this tradition: the contamination model and the independent spheres model. The first one contends that prices contaminate the value of art. It is grounded in the Marxist conception of value and coherent with the belief of the *Frankfurter Schule* that commodification of art gives rise to alienation, protects the prevailing capitalistic system against critical voices and degrades art. The independent spheres model originates from the formalist tradition in art history arguing that art constitutes an autonomous sphere with an independent, irreducible value separated from the economic value. Velthuis continues by developing the sociologists' view on pricing in the arts markets and contends that prices, price changes and price differences "convey multiple meanings related to the reputation of the artists, the social status of dealers, and the quality of the artworks that are traded" (Velthuis, 2003, p 181).

Olav Velthuis' (2005) masterful and comprehensive mixed method studies on prices of contemporary art can be said to bridge the "hostile worlds" and "nothing but" by

demonstrating how prices themselves convey rich symbolic meanings, evident in for example the different ways pricing is talked about in the front space and back room of galleries.

The markets in this organizational field can be broadly understood as “status markets” (Aspers, 2009), which in contrast to “standard markets” do not have “a scale of value that is independent of its actors [buyers and sellers]” (p. 116). Instead, the rank orders (the interrelated status position of buyers and sellers) of the actors replace the standards of product and services. Aspers (2009) argues that this theoretical distinction of status hierarchies overcomes the information asymmetry problem raised by i.e. Akerlof (1970).

Despite deeply rooted differences in the view on pricing in economic and sociological traditions, recent studies (i.e. Aspers 2009, Velthuis 2005) in economic sociology have offered ways of understanding art markets in ways that previous studies have failed to do.

#### *Culturally infused prices*

One contribution of Velthuis’ study (2005) was to demonstrate how prices are not merely abstract numbers but convey rich meanings and narratives about the artworks and their buyers. Velthuis focuses on the primary market for contemporary art, and notes that prices are talked about differently in different settings, for example in galleries’ museum-like fronts and in their business-like back rooms. Gallery owners being reluctant to talk about prices in one setting can for instance talk openly about prices of artworks in their private collection as a way of telling a self-praising story of how they were initiated and insightful enough to buy the artworks before the artist was established on the market.

There are some notably differences in the business models of galleries and auction houses. Art galleries do not traditionally operate with explicit pricing. It takes a certain amount of effort to receive information of the price. The pricing model at auction houses is substantially more explicit. The price is called out and the rationale behind the model is that two or more potential buyers try to outbid one another.

That prices are culturally infused is however manifest also in the secondary market for art. There seems to be certain tricks of the trade when it comes to the value of art in the secondary market. To quote one passage from Thompson (2008, p 250):

There are general rules. A portrait of an attractive woman or a child will do better than that of an older woman or an unattractive man. An Andy Warhol Orange Marilyn brings twenty times the price of an equal-sized Richard Nixon.

Colors matter. Brett Gorvy, co-head of contemporary art at Christie’s International, claims the grading from most saleable to least is red, white, blue, yellow, green and black. When it comes to Andy Warhol, green moves up. Green is the color of money.

Bright colors do better than pale colors. Horizontal canvases do better than vertical ones. Nudity sells for more than modesty, and female nudes for much more than male. A Boucher female nude sells for ten times the price of a male nude. Figurative works do better than landscapes. A still life with flowers is worth more than one with fruit, and roses are worth more than chrysanthemums. Calm water adds value (think of Monet’s *Water Lilies*); rough water brings lower prices (think of maritime pictures). Shipwrecks bring even less.

Purebred dogs are worth more than mongrels, and racehorses more than cart horses. For paintings that include game birds, the more expensive it is

to hunt the bird, the more the bird adds to the value of the painting; a grouse is worth three times as much as a mallard. There is an even more specific rule, offered by New York dealer David Nash: paintings with cows never do well. Never.

This is but a few examples of how market places and prices in the Art world are infused with cultures, norms and narratives and that these are contextual and to some extent varies.

### **A note on methods**

It is argued that modern industrialized economies at large are better labeled organizational economies than market economies (Simon, 1991). This seems especially true when it comes to Art worlds. In conjunction with this thought of line, the methodology of this study has been to carry out in-depth interviews with not only buyers and sellers in the markets under study, but also intermediary actors such as art critics, private and public museums, curators, and artists. In addition, it has more recently been argued that organization analysis is strongly needed at the study of contemporary art (Vickery, 2006).

That the Art world as a whole is where quality is determined and pricing motivated was what Kharié & Wadhvani (2010) found when they studied the social construction in creating and institutionalizing modern Indian art as a new category on the art market: "key constructs in the discourse defining a new category were not shaped exclusively (or even primarily) by producers and customers. Rather, other actors and intermediaries – including art historians, auction houses, critics and museums – also played important roles in the process" (p 1296).

This article studies both the first and secondary market for contemporary art in Stockholm and its intermediary actors, and in particular the interplay between art galleries, art institutions and auction houses during three decades. As argued before, the first and secondary market cannot be studied in isolation in order to get a rich understanding of what constitutes and drives value and how this affects the organization of the Art world. The market under study in this article is confined to the Swedish market for contemporary art, or more precisely, the first and secondary markets for contemporary art geographically centered in Stockholm. We have, once again, chosen to study this geographical setting and time period because it offers reasonably clear boundaries and because it is conceivable to study such a relatively small Art world with relatively few actors.

This demarcation has been made for a manifold of reasons. First, we view the Swedish markets for contemporary arts as subsets of the Swedish contemporary Art world. As Thornton (2008) noted, Art worlds span the globe but they cluster geographically in cities like Paris, New York, London, Los Angeles, and Berlin. Such a definition has been found problematic since Art worlds are multiplicities; they are dispersed, scattered, in flux and operating in part independent of each other. Even though this is true, the Art world in a city like Stockholm is well informed of the developments in the Art world in New York but the relationship is not necessarily reciprocal, and the center-periphery dimension is still vivid. Nevertheless, developments in a city like Stockholm may be noticed by influential actors in the Art world in New York, and certain artists or curators may be dubbed important enough to be included in the "central" Art world in New York. So there is not *one* Art world, no particular geographical center, and Art worlds can exist locally, nationally, and regionally. They may be hidden in more or less obscure subcultures, take form around particular galleries, artist groups, ideological movements or around shared experiences among a collective.

The focus of this article is the contemporary art markets that are part of the Swedish Art world. This implies that the geographic cluster is that of Stockholm, the capital of Sweden. The Swedish national, state-owned museums are concentrated in Stockholm, as are the leading, high-end galleries, auction houses, and national media houses. Prominent auction houses and galleries with a primary geographical residence outside Stockholm (such as the auction house Uppsala Auktionskammare in Uppsala and the gallery Andersson/Sandström in Umeå) have subsidiaries in Stockholm, and the high end artwork sold at the auctions in Stockholm are collected from all over the country and sent to Stockholm, since this is the largest geographical market place in Sweden. Art buyers at these market places reside all over the country, and also abroad. It can hence be argued that a study of the arts markets in Stockholm are not solely representative to Stockholm, but also fairly representative to the Swedish contemporary arts markets at large.

The demarcation also enables us to get an overview of networks and couplings that would be hard to study if local galleries, local museums, local media, and so forth were to be studied all over the country. This demarcation can be said to miss out on local variations, but we are able to study fairly well defined markets for high-end contemporary arts that are part of the Swedish Art world for contemporary art.

The symbolic boundaries (Lamont and Molnár, 2002) of highbrow and lowbrow respectively high-end and low-end art works are generally relative, porous and fuzzy – especially in a small art world such as the Swedish one. In the study, we have therefore avoided any strict classification of different types of actors on these scales. However, our interview material is focused on the actors that are mostly regarded as the most influential and powerful. Once again, local variety among small-scale actors may consequently be overlooked in this study. The strength of this purposeful sampling is instead that we capture most of the major field level developments.

The empirics of this article build on 28 semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. The aim of the interviews was to distinguish market developments within this Art world. To reach this aim, the informants were asked 1) to give a background to the development of the Swedish Art world the latest decades, 2) to identify field-level conflicts in the Swedish Art world of today, and 3) to elaborate on the ideologies held by artists, and private and public financiers of the arts, respectively.

All interviews have been conducted in Swedish during November 2011 to November 2012, and have been taped and translated. In addition, we have attended and made participant observations at a number of symposiums arranged by artists, galleries and auction houses; visited an art repository and had informal talks with a large number of individuals with various roles in the Swedish Art world.

Retrospective oral interviews are of course totally reliant on informants recalling the past, and may suffer from retrospective bias. In order to try to counteract this, we have complemented our interviews with different types of published data from different times. In addition, White (1987) remarks that the way we write history changes with time. He argues that histories resemble literary tradition in so far as their narratives are infused with plots, social centers, moralities, allegories and aesthetics. We have broadly employed a narrative approach (Czarniawska, 1998) to collect, interpret, and put these narratives together.

Another possible bias of the interviewees of this study is that the sample may over-represent people with very long experience from the Swedish Art world, and under-represent actors with brief or developing experience. However, not all interviewees have had experience from all three decades under study, which on the other hand might bring another type of bias connected to the different frames of references each interviewee has when it comes to compare the time periods under study.

Yet, on a positive note, this somewhat sprawling collection of empirical data intends to give rich contrasting effects, and represent a large variety of actors, e.g. artists, auction houses, civil servants, curators, galleries and museums. Some actors are financed by public and some by private means; some operate with commercial interests and some do not. Some interviewees have several roles, for instance, one employee at an auction house can function as host for the Swedish edition of the Antiques Roadshow and a museum director can simultaneously work as a curator.

In addition to these interviews, this article also draws on empirical data from auction catalogues, secondary literature, websites, and mainstream as well as specialized media.

### **Three decades in the Swedish art world for contemporary art**

In the following, we will discuss the period under study decade by decade. Then, we will summarize and analyze the full time period and draw some overarching conclusions.

#### *1981-1990: Clear entities*

The 1980s have previously been described as a breaking point for a commercialization process of the Swedish Art world. Compared to the 1970s, rivalry and competition among auction houses grew, prices on the artworks they marketed rose, and the role of these auction houses became more separated from not-for-profit organizations in the Swedish Art world. In 1970, for example, Nationalmuseum (the Swedish National Museum of Fine Arts) arranged an exhibition to honor the auction house Bukowskis, which in turn had donated parts of its revenues to the museum from late 1910s to the 1950s. That Nationalmuseum would arrange such exhibition seemed "totally unthinkable" already in the 1980s. (Hellström & Petersén, 1992, 16).

In the 1980s, Swedish galleries and auction houses have been described as separate spheres, and galleries were the unendangered market place for contemporary artists, with little competition from the auction houses. The categorizations in the auction houses were few. Contemporary artists were infrequently represented in the secondary market, and if they were, the lead time from first to secondary market was substantial. Price estimates at auction houses were set based more on individual "gut-feel" than past price results. The division of labor was separated in the auction houses; the personnel working with the high-end art were not subjected to also work with the less valuable objects. This helped create situations where well-informed art dealers could probe the auction assortments of less valuable objects, make purchases of miss-categorized objects and directly sell them through the quality auctions with good profits.

A gallery owner who has previously had leading positions at an auction house in the 1980s and 1990s says that there was a different prevailing mentality in the 1980s. Art buyers often financed their artworks with loans, and high-end artworks were considered securities in another sense than today.

Legislation differed as well: Until 1991, profits made on artworks were tax exempt if the artwork had been owned for five years. If it had been owned for less than five years, tax reductions were granted with 25 percent of the profit per year it had been owned. Buyers were also granted bank loans to buy art, and artwork could be used as securities to other loans:

In the 80s, the arts markets boomed and people put a lot of pressure on one another. You could go to a gallery in central Stockholm, buy a painting for one million [SEK] and then go right across the square and borrow one

and a half million on the very same painting. It's exactly just how sick it was.<sup>1</sup>

The gallery owner that recalls these times holds a Master's degree in Economics and Business. He gives the impression that a naïve and underdeveloped take on the financial value of contemporary art prevailed in these times. Although being treated as a financial asset, art had not yet been viewed in the context of modern portfolio theory, in which the portfolio owner seeks to diversify his or her portfolio in order to maximize expected return given a certain risk, and takes assets' correlation into account to assess this risk. The value of art could be seen as optimistic guesstimates and were treated more uncritical and with fewer complexities than in the days to come.

One Museum Director, who in the 1980s was employed as an art critic, describes how media houses changed during this decade. He argues that editorial staff at the culture section of the newspapers were more interested in culture than in light-weight entertainment, and let the art critics publish fairly long and elaborate texts on the exhibitions they were to critic. This mentality and Zeitgeist let art critics be free to provoke different sorts of authorities in the Art world, and did not bring about other loyalties than to the reader and oneself.

From the 1980s onwards, he argues, art critics have been marginalized in the major newspapers at the same time as art critics are increasingly socializing and having personal relationships to the artists they are to review, which still in the 1980s was seen as highly inappropriate. This development can be said to have worked in tandem with another change in the communicative landscape. In the 1980s, a new sort of art journalism emerged: Journalists in mainstream and specialized media started reporting "price records" from the auction houses. Suddenly, newspapers started to closely follow the auction house results, and TV-broadcasted auctions in Stockholm caused hysteria, both for low-end craft pieces and high-end fine art. (Hellström & Petersén, 1992).

In 1988, the first season of *Antikrundan* (The Swedish edition of BBC's program format *The Antiques Roadshow*) was recorded, and subsequently broadcasted in 1989. The hosts of the show were recruited from different auction houses, and the dramaturgy of the show reaches its climax when the host attributes a price to a certain artwork. When the show celebrated its 25 year anniversary in 2012 its television audience figures for the program have amounted to up to 2 million Swedes, that is, about one fifth of the population, excluding a large number of viewers in Norway and abroad. (Antikwest, 2013).

In the 1980s, the art institutions in Stockholm were almost exclusively financed by public means, and there were considerably fewer art institutions than today. One museum director at a private art institution describes that the art institution filled an empty space in the Swedish Art world, and how contemporary art still had an unstable position in the Swedish Art world at large in the late 1980s. Another Museum Director says that there were more not-for-profit art associations and art societies which also had considerably more members in the 1980s than they have today; one association he himself is part of had five times more members at this time. The interviewee says that the Swedish contemporary Art world as a whole was smaller back then: there were not only fewer art institutions, museums, and art associations, but also fewer galleries, and a lot less fierce competition among auction houses. The interviewee furthermore says that attitudes changed during this decade. In short, the focus on money was a lot more accentuated in the end of the decade than in the beginning of it.

It used to be a cardinal sin for galleries to treat the objects they sold as commodities for sale. The deals were very discretely arranged, and people took pride in what they did. Today, everyone is aware that the artworks are

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Gallery Owner, 2011-12-14

for sale. It has accelerated. It's more business now. The whole idea of it being a business at all is more pronounced, and it has just escalated.<sup>2</sup>

In our interviews, two employees at two leading Swedish auction houses independently of each other talked in very similar ways on what affects prices in terms of colors and motifs. These can be taken as a token of how market actors try to construct "standards" even in a status market where such scales of value is profoundly absent. These tricks of the trade or general and believed to be stable rules of the art markets are expressed in the following manner:

I know from experience that certain colors reach higher prices than others. Red is such a color. It is also evident that pictures of happy people are more popular than pictures of sad people. Children are a lot more popular than pictures of old women. If you see a picture with a young girl under a red parasol, then you know it's a jackpot.<sup>3</sup>

The other person at the competing auction house said:

Cows sell at lower prices than elks. This is of course contextual with the fact that we have many hunters in our country. Bright colors sell better than dull ones. Certain motifs are always popular, such as a girl under a red parasol.<sup>4</sup>

One may note that these statements are highly consistent with the general rules of the auction world previously quoted by Thompson (2008). In addition, our interviewees describe that galleries primarily act according to a different pricing logic, in which prices are to be set independent of attributes such as color and motif. Instead prices for each artist are set according to size, in order to not convey that any picture of the artist would be of inconsistent quality. The logics and narratives hence seems intimately coupled to market practices in different market places, which might be interesting to note as we will later in this article discover how the Swedish market for contemporary art has had an increasing number of market places with different market practices.

#### *The period 1991-2000: Digitalization and information flows*

Two gallery owners, who started their operation in 1991, summed up the biggest changes in their first 20 years in business in an interview in 2011:

[The biggest changes are:] Digitalization, globalization and the fact that art, from having primarily been a matter of intellectual interest for a relatively small group of people has become a component of a glamorous lifestyle for ever more. [Our translation]. (Konsten, 2011)

Many informants in our study recall a sharp decline in art prices in the beginning of the 1990s. Artworks from two of the most respected contemporary artists from the 1980s were suddenly sold at fractions of the prices they sold for a couple of years ago.

A friend of one of these artists says that the price records at the secondary market were problematic. This particular artist was said to be afraid that the price increases would lead to a bubble, and started to paint smaller and smaller paintings to cool prices down. The decline in art prices in the first years of the 1990s has later been described as the end of a speculative bubble. Pawned artworks were brought to markets, and prices declined. Auction houses had to lay off personnel, one leading auction house was sold to new owners, and many galleries went bankrupt.

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<sup>2</sup> Interview with Museum Director, 2011-12-05

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Contemporary Art Expert in Auction House, 2011-11-30.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Contemporary Art Expert in Auction House, 2011-12-14.

During the 1990s, new technology laid the foundation for price databases and online auctions, which were to develop in the forthcoming decade. When Stockholms Auktionsverk, the oldest auction house in the world, launched its website in the 1990s, it was ridiculed at first. (Eriksson, 2004). Soon, however, the websites became standard practice. Also, the database Artnet Sverige was founded in 1996. Lauritz.com Sverige AB, an early online auction firm headquartered in Denmark, was established as early as in 1993. During the 1990s, price databases became more useful to the secondary market as they comprised more information and more auction houses than before. In terms of bids and end prices, the market became more transparent. What is not publicly transparent are the identities of the buyers and their incitements. One employee at an auction house describes the prices of auction houses as "real market prices", as opposed to the prices set in the galleries in the primary market.

Although, other interviewees describe how also these in theory perfectly discriminated prices can turn out very confusing and misleading. One gallery owner and former employee at an auction house says that hereditary disputes are sometimes settled through auction houses. Heirs being unable to divide the movables in a heritage can then outbid each other in an auction, resulting in what most people would regard as incomprehensible over-prices. Another example are so called auction rings, in which big and frequent art buyers co-operate in advance in order to avoid internal competition and keep price levels down. These rings are believed to have existed to different extents, in different times. One interviewee speculates that many price records might have been created by the owners of auction houses in order to boost the reputation of the auction house. He also speculates that gallery owners can buy their own artists, to keep prices up. Although putting different trust in the more open prices available through new technology used by auction houses and price databases, informants seem to agree that art prices attracted even more attention in the 1990s than in the previous decade.

In particular, many informants say that artworks were increasingly looked upon as "lifestyle products", that is, art buyers viewed art as commodities used for consumption in a larger extent than before. One informant even says that the end of the 1990s marked the end of an "era of collective involvement in a social democratic society", which was replaced by "cynical capitalism".

#### *The period 2001-2011: New market places and quantification*

One flagrant example might illustrate examples of changes in the first decade of the new millennium: In a three and a half minute long online video published on the website of the auction house once ridiculed for the launch of its website about 20 years earlier, the work "Sista skriket!/en vogue/Relikt" was presented by the artist Ulrik Samuelson, in his own voice backed by classical music and sweeping, moving pictures of the nine meters long and three meter high artwork consisting of framed reproductions from Vogue, a black rowing boat turned upside down and a centerpiece visualizing a vagina. In the online video, the artist discusses some themes and interpretations of the work, and alludes to and cites a phrase attributed to Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*: "The woman is giving birth over a grave." The estimated hammer price was set to 1 000 000 – 1 200 000 SEK. Two minutes into the video, the auction house's expert on modern and contemporary art and one of the hosts of the Swedish version of The Antiques Roadshow, appears and states:

Stockholms Auktionsverk has to this fall's contemporary auction been trusted to sell Ulrik Samuelson's masterpiece *Relikt*. It is rare to see work of such obvious museal quality. The work *Relikt* was first seen in another appearance at Moderna Museet in 1970, in connection with the exhibition *Svenskt alternativ, Alternative Suédoise*, where Ulrik was exhibited with several of the most important artist of this time: Dick Bengtsson, Ola

Billgren, John E Franzén, Olle Kåks, and others. The work had then another title: *Relikt/en vogue*. We had to wait until 1988 to see the work again, this time again at Moderna Museet, in Ulrik's big retrospective exhibition *Second Hand*. I had then the pleasure and honor to display the work in my dream room<sup>5</sup> in Liljevalchs, this summer. I look forward, with excitement, to see where we will see the work yet again. [Our translation]. (Stockholms Auktionsverk, 2011).

This example illustrates some overlapping and converging roles between artists, auction houses, media, and museums in the contemporary Swedish Art world. This particular example was however not considered uncontroversial by all. One journalist expressed himself in the following way:

... it turned out that what I this summer thought was a public museum had served as a shop front. I do not mean that the arts market is something ugly or untouchable. But I would rather see that the museums and auction houses were some sort of creative counterweights rather than walking arm-in-arm. [Our translation]. (Hirschfeldt, 2011).

In an interview, the museum director and curator of the particular exhibition said that he found the sale problematic:

I was not aware of these plans. Ulrik himself chose to sell it through Auktionsverket, and that I find dubious, or rather problematic. I can't take responsibility for what happens after the exhibition is over. But I don't like it, and I have told Andreas it didn't look good. One must understand that we are a public museum. We don't do business, we are doing something else. I also notice that when we have had exhibitions with Jolin or Hjärten<sup>6</sup> or whomever, that the paintings we have displayed here are sold at auctions. I don't like it and I don't think it's good, but at the same time, I don't see any solution to it, since we must borrow material to our exhibitions.<sup>7</sup>

When interviewed, the auction house expert on contemporary art also states that he was asked by the artist to put the artwork on auction at the end of the exhibition, and that he was not aware of such plans before that. Even though the example of the particular artwork may seem flagrant, criticized and uncommon, its occurrence makes sense in the light of the historical development as described by the interviewees.

In the first decade of the new millennium, interviewees have witnessed a surge of private art institutions in Stockholm, a dramatic increase in the number of contemporary artworks sold at auction houses, new market places in forms of art fairs, and an increasing entanglement between the first and secondary market. It has been perceived as a marketization of the Art world, and the two biggest art fairs in Stockholm are symptomatically named Market and Supermarket. In addition, a leading auction house now arranges so called primary sales in which they mainly sell contemporary artworks sold for the first time at fixed prices. These organized sales share revenues with artists and their galleries, and commission written commentaries from reputable Swedish curators and museum directors.

During this decade, Internet as a market channel and market place has become increasingly important. The leading auction houses have elaborated digital strategies, and e.g. established e-mail lists they regularly use. Lower-end sections of auction houses are not having auction room sales at all but instead perform all auctions online. Auction

<sup>5</sup> In the summer of 2011, the municipal *Kunsthalle* Liljevalchs let the tv hosts of the Swedish version of the Antiques Roadshow display work of their choice in an exhibition called *Drömrummet* (The Dream Room)

<sup>6</sup> Einar Jolin (1890-1976) and Sigrid Hjertén (1885-1948) are well known Swedish artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Museum Director, 2011-12-05

catalogues are today available for free online, including proveniences and high-resolution pictures. Previously, catalogues were primarily distributed in printed auction catalogues at sale for about 30 Euro per copy (in today's monetary value). In addition, high-end contemporary auctions are today sent live via video-link and bidding is increasingly made in real time online.

In 2008, the auction house Bukowskis bought 25 percent of a gallery in Stockholm which prompted the industry association of Swedish galleries (Galleriförbundet) to exclude the gallery as a member (Axelsson, 2008). The trend of auction houses buying galleries and engaging on the primary market is also said to be an international one. However, it evokes reactions. One visual artist and art critic commented the sale:

The paint cannot yet have dried when it is taken to an auction, a good sale gets more press than a good exhibition and auction houses display art that is not for sale. The boost for newer artworks contributed to a changeable art market where galleries and auction houses took each other's roles, formed alliances and developed antipathy. Now the cross-fertilization continues, but in a crasser way. [Our translation]. (Dziurlikowska, 2008).

In the same article, the gallery owner who sold one share of his company is quoted by saying: "There are plenty of hidden alliances between galleries and auction houses. The difference is that we display them publicly" [Our translation]. (Dziurlikowska, 2008).

Many interviewees describe an even increased emphasis on quantification in the decade under study. The previously established journalistic genre of reporting "price records" from auction houses in mainstream media developed into articles covering price indices comparing repeated sales on artworks with different financial assets. In particular, the Mei Moses Fine Art Index gained considerable media coverage in Swedish media. The original index presented in Jianping Mei and Michael Moses' article in *The American Economic Review* used repeated sales regression (RSR) and built on data from the high-end auction houses Christie's and Sotheby's in New York. (Mei & Moses, 2002).

Later, the scholars have commercialized their index in a company named Beautiful Asset Advisors®, LLC, and formed sub-indices comprising more data. On their website, price movements of different art categories are presented in the same way we are used to see stock exchange and news activity billboards. In February 2013, the following text moves from right to left over the screen: "2012 Year End Tracking Results For The New Mei Moses® Art Indexes: All Art-W: Down 3.28% Impressionist And Modern-W: Down 1.05% Old Master And 19th Century-W: Up 6.5% Post War and Contemporary-W: Down 0.01% Traditional Chinese Works Of Art-W: Down 2.4%" (Art as an asset, 2013).

Another type of quantification in Swedish media can be exemplified by an article in the daily newspaper Dagens Nyheter. The journalist interviews the museum director of Tensta Konsthall, the contemporary art expert of an auction house, and the museum director of Moderna Museet [Museum of Modern Art] about their views on who are the most successful contemporary Swedish artists. They each discuss the topic and name a few artists. Along with the interview, a ranking of the 10 most successful contemporary Swedish artists from the website Artfacts.net is presented. Daniel Birnbaum, the director of Moderna Museet says: "Klara Lidén is number one, even if it is a bit silly to rank it that way. Everyone wants her, in Sweden and perhaps even more out in the world. Nathalie Djurberg is also big and it will be very interesting to see what she will do next." [Our translation.] Maria Lind, the director of Tensta Konsthall instead says that the Art world is increasingly divided into one stream of mainstream art and one more explorative counterpart. Klara Lidén belongs to the first group, she argues: "Personally, I think she's like Ikea, a tenuous and marketable variant of what others do better. Talking about 'big artists' may not be relevant; but rather in which contexts different types work." [Our translation] (Leffler & Thorén Björling, 2011).

Most interviewees in this study point to that not only the Swedish journalism on the Art world but also Swedish cultural policies have changed. For example, in 2009 the Swedish government abandoned its earlier commitment to counteract "the negative effects of commercialism" (Report of the Swedish Committee of Inquiry on Cultural Policy, 2009). Interviewed artists have stated that they perceived public grants to be more generous in earlier years, and that competition for these grants has strengthened. One interviewee says that he feels that there is a mismatch about what the policies tries to encourage ideologically and what is encouraged by economic incentives:

What's problematic is that there previously was an ideal that artists should work within the organizational form of an association. Since the 1980s and onwards, people are instead encouraged to start profit-driven corporations. But the public seeding capital that ought to be given to profit-driven corporations are instead given to associations. It's all very dependent on the organizational form. (...) It puts a lot of pressure on the artists when they once had a *business-to-business* model and then have to switch to a *business-to-consumer* model. Corporations that sell directly to end-customers typically have huge marketing departments, whereas *business-to-business* companies have less. This is a great reorganization to many.<sup>8</sup>

## Discussion

How, then, can the developments over the three decades be summarized? Under the sub-headings below, we present three major developments coupled to market practices that have had impact on how the Swedish Art world for contemporary art is organized. These major developments are derived from the narratives of our informants and offer a way to analytically make sense of the sprawling empirical material in the study.

### *New order 1: A move towards the ideal type of a market*

Conventional economics assume that well-functioning markets require many sellers and buyers, transparency in information, and comparable products. The developments described by the interviewees in this study point to a move towards the ideal type of a market in regards to these characteristics. Today, there are clearly more market places for contemporary art than in the 1980s. Contemporary art has become a category on the auction houses' secondary market, and one auction house in Stockholm has in recent years arranged a few primary sales, where contemporary art is sold for the first time. Not only auction houses, but also galleries, have changed their practices in the period under study. For respectable galleries it has become expected to participate in art fairs, both local and international, sometimes several times a year.

The Internet has since the 1990s been used to spread information of art prices from auction houses. Art databases compile results from the auction houses. Newspapers report "price records" from auction houses and the movements of international art price indices. In addition, the vast majority of artists, galleries and auction houses have websites where they present and market themselves. To some extent, the art market under study has hence become more transparent in some aspects, especially through the establishment and diffusion of price databases. However, there are still ubiquitous limitations and biases on the available data from the art markets. For instance, the data almost entirely comes from the secondary market and excludes transaction costs. Estimates of returns are likely to suffer from several selection biases in the data. To calculate returns, only re-auctioned art works are included. Hence both high-end art works donated to museums and low-end art works that drastically have fallen in value do not typically re-appear in auctions. One could also assume that collectors are more likely to realize gains than losses when they

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with Civil Servant within Cultural Policies, 2012-11-06

decide which art works should be put in auctions. For a thorough review of the ubiquitous limitations and biases in the art market data, and how it has been reflected in several studies showing contrasting returns on art, see Ashenfelter & Graddy (2003).

As most artworks are unique objects that are not reproduced, art markets can at first sight be said to have a low degree of comparable goods. However, before artworks are to be compared, they need to be classified as artworks. Interviewees have referred to an extended concept of art prevailing in the Swedish contemporary art scene. Even if such categorization of contemporary art is inclusive when it comes to *what* is art, it seems more rigid when it comes to *who* decides what art is. Authorities such as museums, whose judgments are performative and whose exhibitions are clearly influential on artists' prices and reputation, hence play an important role in the value creation processes described in this article. During times when it has become harder to evaluate artistic quality, the importance of authorities and expert knowledge has increased. As Danto (1964) noted, art is tied to a theory of art. The interviewees claim that the teachers and professors at leading Swedish art schools of today have been formed by text-based, conceptual and later relational art prevailing in the 1980s. This has predominately formed the content of the Swedish contemporary art of today, and is likely to carry forth this prevailing orientation to the future. Intermediaries, such as curators and critics, must to a certain degree be of the same mind as buyers and sellers, in order to make the artwork accepted as such.

The category of Swedish contemporary art has been described in relation to the origin date of the artwork and the artist, as well as in relation to the style of the artwork. The borders and definition of this concept still seems in the making, although the notion of contemporary art has become a lot more established during the 30 years of study, especially in the secondary market.

Contemporary art has since the 1990s been sold in its own auctions, separated from classic and modern art. The classification of contemporary art has been described as vague and unclear. One museum director says that he himself can be confused by the use of the notions of modern and contemporary art. One way of looking at contemporary art would be to reason that in order for an artwork to be contemporary, the artist must be alive, active and still forming his or her artistry. Nevertheless, the concept of contemporary art is not limited to one definition and the border zones, especially between modern art and contemporary art, is described as blurred.

The classification of certain art as either being modern or contemporary can give rise to inconsistencies in the secondary market, where auction houses have different auctions for contemporary and modern art. An artwork can either be classified as contemporary under the principle that the artist is alive, or it can be classified as modern or contemporary due to its style. As a result, some living artists are not regarded as contemporary although they are alive and some are regarded contemporary although they are deceased. The principles of what determines these classifications also vary between auction houses.

It might not be common to present an artwork with such exhaustive provenience – with texts, online marketing videos and participations from the artist him- or herself – as in the case of the presentation of Ulrik Samuelson's work "Sista skriket!/en vogue/Relikt"; nevertheless proveniences are longer and more frequent in today's auction catalogues than thirty years ago.

One explanation of the increased importance of provenience for contemporary art might be found in the broad development of contemporary art becoming text-based, conceptual and relational; and that photography has become an accepted contemporary art form, at the expense of skilled painting. It could further be a token how the theory of art (Danto, 1964) has become more important over time as to distinguish not only art from non-art,

but also good art from bad art. Quality, and thereby higher price, is today to be found in the contextual and conceptual, and not in the clearly visible.

Hence, the categorization as artworks and the consecration of artists play a major role in the art markets. These processes are to large extent carried out between, rather than within, formal organizations. The process of making artists *members* of an A-list such as the lists published in *Dagens Nyheter*, the forming of *hierarchies* among artists, and the *monitoring* of other's activities in the Swedish Art world, can be seen as important *organizational elements* between formal organizations (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011). Individuals in this study actively seek to affect the market place they operate in, and the prevailing culture in these contexts.

Two contrasting narratives may serve as a fruitful point of departure to discuss the organizational elements of this Art world. The first market-centric narrative would state that managers manage their organization but neither the market place in which they operate nor the prevailing culture and its values and beliefs. The market place is instead governed by an invisible hand constituted by external market powers; and culture is looked upon exogenously. A second marketing-centric narrative is that managers can manage not only their formal organizations, but also expectations, norms, wants and desires in their surroundings. Perhaps surprisingly, we argue that a marketing-centric rather than a market-centric narrative have become better equipped to describe why individuals and organizations organize in a certain way within the Art world under study, even though the Art world has become progressively uniform with the ideal type of a market.

The turn to the ideal type of a market, works in tandem with a turn towards commensuration and quantification, which will be described in the following.

#### *New order 2: A turn to commensuration and quantification*

Markets are culture systems for generating and measuring value (Friedland & Alford, 1991) and lies as well as commensuration at heart of capitalism (Espeland & Stevens, 1998). This study indicates that the move towards the ideal type of a market likewise has brought a turn to commensuration and quantification.

Commensuration has been defined: "the transformation of different qualities into a common metric" (Espeland & Stevens, 1998, 314). Pricing might be the most obvious example of commensuration. Other examples of commensuration in this study are the emergence of artist rankings of artists and price indices. Also the article in *Dagens Nyheter* where three actors in the Art world list the most important Swedish contemporary artists builds on a framework of commensuration; the complex, nearly impossible, task of deciding who are the most important Swedish contemporary artists are reduced to a mechanical exercise. Even if the two museum directors in the article make some critical remarks on this procedure, they nevertheless list a couple of names to be quoted along the ranking from Artfacts.net.

Most quantification can be understood as commensuration; although commensuration is different to quantification in the sense that commensuration creates relations between things perceived as fundamentally different (e.g. "priceless" art), whereas quantification deals with things which are perceived as alike. Commensuration simplifies disparate information and eases complex decision-making by discarding information and organizing the remains into new forms. The act of commensuration is not solely a technical or neutral one; since it constructs relations of authority it is social, biased and political. (Espeland & Stevens, 1998).

The process of simplification is apparent in a brief review of the Swedish mainstream journalistic articles mentioning the Mei Moses Fine Art Index. The majority of articles do

not mention anything about the method of the index, if it includes transaction costs, from which countries and from which auction houses the data has been collected. One article mentions that the method is based on repeated sales, another single article mentions that transaction costs are not included, and yet another single article mentions that the data has been collected from London and New York. No article mentions from which auction houses the data has been collected from, and just two articles mentions that the data only has been collected from the secondary market.<sup>9</sup>

In this context, it may be worth to point out that only a minority of artworks sold at galleries presumably end up at auction houses. Although the index computes values based on double-sales on two of the world's most high-end auction houses, and compares it to American stock market index, such as the Standard & Poor's 500, the articles often give the impression to convey a more general truth. In itself, it might not be all surprising that journalistic articles and features have to summarize and simplify complex information. However, it can exemplify the quantification and commensuration processes in the Swedish Art world during the last decade.

In the commensuration of the Mei Moses Fine Art Index, artworks are not only compared with other artworks, they are also put in relation to financial assets, clearly indicating the view of art as a financial investment. Art is then considered a means rather than an end; and price becomes the most important metric of value.

Among many others, Grampp (1989) views the value of art to be comprised of subsets of investment, aesthetic and other values. This breakdown and separation of economic and artistic value is useful to understand and interpret the different perspectives of interviewees. Aesthetic and economic value is on the whole often described to be interconnected. However, when these values are described to not correspond to each other, it evokes strong feelings. Informants talk about this mismatch as a source of potential legitimacy crisis for several actors in the Art world, including artists, buyers, sellers, and critics involved. But the separation of an artwork's aesthetic value also enables individuals to make judgments on both over-rated and under-rated art. These judgments can function as an identity marker, and a signal of group belonging.

Several interviewees differ between genuinely interested art buyers, and a non-genuine life-style segment of rich and less knowledgeable art buyers, who might even outsource the art purchase to an art advisor. It has also been said that the latter has been more and more common during the time period under study. Following Spence (1974), Akerlof (1970) and Stiglitz (1987), one could assume that these art buyers are not discouraged by high prices on objects they know very *little* about, but contrary see it as signaling good quality. The separation of artistic and economic value could also be useful as to understand the incentives of the art buyers; one could for example want to signal that one is knowledgeable about aesthetic quality, that one is economically wealthy, or both.

### *New order 3: Organization of new market places as a reaction to marketization*

In a seminal article, Coase (1937) asks why firms emerge and under what conditions they are likely to grow. The dominant view of economists was hitherto that markets due to price mechanisms were more efficient than firms, which brought Coase to ask why firms then emerge at all. He introduced transaction costs and argued that these costs counterbalance the use of the market; the optimal equilibrium between the use of the firm and the use of the market thus explains the size of firms in industries.

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<sup>9</sup> See Appendix for details. A search in the database Affärsdata, covering mainstream journalistic articles from the 1980s onwards, was performed 2013-09-03 and generated 93 hits. Excluded from review were non-Swedish articles, articles published after 2011-12-31 and articles being published in more than one newspaper. By doing so, ten unique articles were identified (published between 2005-03-01 and 2011-03-12). If articles published in several newspapers would be included, the ratio of articles providing any piece of information about the method or data collection of the index would be significantly lower.

If the organization of Western modernized art markets were primarily determined by transaction costs, and if we assume that transaction costs are generally higher in art galleries than in auction houses, some but not all characteristics of the first and secondary contemporary art markets in modern societies seem odd. Although the theory seems well equipped to explain for example why auction houses tend to be bigger than galleries, it does not explain why artists cooperate with galleries and not auction houses. Why do artists ally themselves with art galleries and not auction houses, when the former are said to have substantially higher transaction costs than the latter? Why have auction houses bought shares in galleries, with higher transaction costs, and not the other way around? And besides, why are artists in the first place expected to produce, but not sell, art?

This study views markets themselves – along with Friedland and Alford (1991) – as cultural systems for generating and measuring value, in which different market places are infused with certain institutional logics. During the period under study, new categories of market places for contemporary art have emerged. In the last decade, the Swedish contemporary Art world saw their first primary sales arranged by an auction house. These primary sales are curated exhibitions in the auction house where all the art works are for sale for fixed prices, and where a considerable part of the art works have been contemporary pieces sold for the first time. An actor traditionally operating in the secondary market hence closes in on the primary market. In addition, galleries operating in the primary market also organize new market places when they devote substantial time to organize art fairs. These trends follow an international pattern, in which galleries have been said to counteract the emerging competition from auction houses on the primary markets by organizing art fairs. Previously, Thompson (2008, 2011) has likened this to David combating Goliath, and noted that these market places work as a medium to add provenance to the artworks sold there.

Hence, the move towards the ideal type of a market of the Swedish Contemporary Art world has not only brought an increased emphasis on commensuration and quantification, but has also been followed by the organization of new market places. These developments partly question the dominant narrative that organizations emerge from markets, and not the other way around.

## **Conclusion**

We set out to study how changed market practices re-organize an Art world, and have showed that the organization of the Swedish Art world has moved towards the ideal type of a market during the period 1981-2011, in conjunction with the development of the market practices on the primary and secondary market. We did this by analyzing the retrospective narratives of field actors and found support for the principal narrative of the move towards the ideal type of a market. The number of sellers and buyers has increased, information has in some aspects become more available although it still suffers from ubiquitous limitations and biases, and artworks are increasingly perceived as comparable goods – despite the deeply rooted take on artworks as “unique” and “incommensurable” in the cultural sphere of the Art world.

The re-organization fueled by changed market practices in the Art world has brought a turn to quantification and commensuration. The quantification and commensuration processes at work are apparent in several ways: through an increased emphasis on price as a signal of quality, in price indices comparing artworks to financial assets and in artist rankings. The increased usage of pricing databases among auction houses shows how decision-making on estimate prices have moved from organizations within the market to a meta-organizational (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005) level. The database usage also indicates how the arts markets in question, facilitated by information technology, have become increasingly isomorphic. The quantification and commensuration processes of the Art

world is very much part of the principal narrative of a move towards the ideal type of a market.

We have sought to advance our understanding of the role of market practices when it comes to how Art worlds are organized, and conclude that market practices and its entanglements on the market places of the primary and secondary market seem intimately related to how the Swedish Art world for contemporary art has developed during 1981-2011. Markets are cultural systems (Friedland & Alford, 1991), and prices, market practices and market places carry culturally infused narratives with bearing on what we perceive as art, what we perceive it to be worth and how we look upon and justify these values. As market practices have turned more to the ideal type of a market, these stories tend to be told more with numbers than with words. Following Espeland & Stevens (1998) we persist that these numbers and commensuration processes are social, biased and political as they construct relations of authority in the Art world. As showed in this case of the Swedish Art world for contemporary art certain market actors organize themselves (i.e. auction houses enter the primary market and galleries organize art fairs) in order to enforce one market practice and logic over another, and these aspirations can be described as social, biased and political. Needless to say, these in essence cultural and ideological narratives cannot be told in mere abstract numbers but call for rich, qualitative description and analysis.

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## Appendix

Title	Source	Published	Does the article on the Mei Moses Fine Art Index's answer any of the questions below?			
			Q1: Method	Q2: Method	Q3: Data	Q4: Data
Äggen som knäcker räntorna	DI.se	2005-03-01	No	Yes	No	Not from <i>which</i> auction houses
Björn Borg bästa investeringen	TT	2006-12-26	No	No	No	No
Ohållbara priser på rekorddyr samtidskonst	DI.se	2007-05-11	No	No	No	No
Konstvärlden håller andan	Affarsvärlden.se	2007-11-13	No	No	No	No
Spekulera i konst lockar finansvärlden	Realtid.se	2008-10-09	No	No	No	No
En bättre investering än aktier?	SvD	2008-12-19	Yes	No	No	No
Konstpriser rasar med 35 procent	Realtid.se	2009-04-07	No	No	No	No
Priserna på samtidskonst rasar	Kulturnytt	2009-04-07	No	No	Yes	No
Ögonfröjd med hävstång	Dagens Industri	2010-09-04	No	No	No	No
Hobbyn kan bli lönsam affär	Dagens Industri	2011-03-12	No	No	No	Not from <i>which</i> auction houses

Table 1: Swedish mainstream media articles mentioning the Mei Moses Fine Art Index.

Q1: Does the article refer to the method of the index (repeated sales)?

Q2: Does the article refer to whether or not the index includes transaction costs?

Q3: Does the article refer to from which countries the data has been collected?

Q4: Does the article refer to which auction houses the data has been collected?

## Interviews

Interview with Museum Director, 2011-11-28

Interview with Contemporary Art Expert in Auction House, 2011-11-30

Interview with Museum Director, 2011-12-05

Interview with Contemporary Art Expert in Auction House, 2011-12-14  
Interview with Gallery Owner, 2011-12-14  
Interview with Gallery Owner and Lobbyist, 2012-01-10  
Interview with Museum Director, 2012-02-16.  
Interview with Museum Director, 2012-02-22.  
Interview with Museum Director and Curator, 2012-03-09.  
Interview with Curator 2012-02-16.  
Interview with Museum Director and Curator, 2011-12-05.  
Interview with Patron of the Arts, 2012-02-22.  
Interview with Artist, 2012-01-04  
Interview with Artist, 2012-01-04  
Interview with Civil Servant within Cultural Policies, 2012-10-29  
Interview with Artist, 2012-10-29  
Interview with Artist, 2012-10-29  
Interview with Civil Servant within Cultural Policies, 2012-10-29  
Interview with Civil Servant within Cultural Policies, 2012-10-29  
Interview with Civil Servant within Cultural Policies, 2012-10-29  
Interview with Artist-Craftsman, 2012-10-29  
Interview with Artist, 2012-11-02  
Interview with Artist, 2012-11-06  
Interview with Civil Servant within Cultural Policies, 2012-11-06  
Interview with Entrepreneur involved in an Artistic Collaboration, 2012-11-07  
Interview with Artist, 2012-11-07  
Interview with Art Teacher, 2012-11-07  
Interview with Art Teacher, 2012-11-15

### **About the Author(s)**

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